

SOCIAL MEDIA

Guidance for Agencies and Staff



Government of
South Australia





About this guide

Information technology has changed forever the way in which people communicate and share information. While the wide range of technologies commonly referred to as 'social media' are fundamentally no different to other forms of communication, they are disruptive and potentially revolutionary because they can connect large numbers of people with relative ease.

Ask Just Once is the South Australian Government's Information Communication Technology [ICT] strategy. One of the aims of this strategy is to put citizens firmly at the centre of government service delivery and information distribution. Social media technologies can support this aim because they are intrinsically about dialogue and engagement within and between individuals and communities.

The purpose of this guide is to create awareness of some of the opportunities that social media presents for government, as well as making agencies and staff aware of how to manage the risks associated with the use of this kind of technology.

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CAUTION WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA...

***"If it is online - it can be found.
If you delete it - it can still be found.
Even if you secure it - it can still be accessed."***

Tim Scully - Head of Cyber Security Operations Centre
Department of Defence
Commonwealth of Australia





What is social media?

Social media (sometimes referred to as *social networking* or *Web 2.0 technologies*) are online services and tools used for publishing, sharing and discussing information. They can include forums, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, and any other websites that allow individual users to upload and share content.

Social media services and tools can involve a combination of technology, telecommunications and social interaction. They can use a variety of different formats, for example text, pictures, video and audio.

Social media can provide unique opportunities for users to communicate and share information, and to build networks locally, nationally, and internationally.

SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLES

Blogs – A blog is a “web log”. Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. Usually, viewers can comment, ask questions, share information and subscribe. A typical blog combines text, images, and links.

Forums / boards – An internet forum, or message board, is an online discussion site. Users can post messages and comment on other messages. Other types of social media often incorporate forums, sometimes with their own social conventions and etiquette (or ‘netiquette’).

Micro-blogs – A micro-blog has a similar purpose to a blog, except that entries are smaller - usually limited to a certain number of characters (e.g. 140). A popular example is **Twitter™**. It allows users to ‘follow’ one another so that they are notified when a new update is posted. Users can connect quickly and through many different tools such as their mobile phone.

Photo sharing sites – A photo sharing site, such as **Flickr®**, allows users to upload images and is useful for categorising and organising pictures. They allow other users to comment on them, or re-use them with permission.

Social bookmarking – Social bookmarking is used for saving the address of a website or item of content and adding a tag to allow other users to easily find your research. It is useful for organising and sharing links, and for keeping track of links recommended by others. **Delicious™**, **Digg™**, and **Reddit** are popular examples.

Social networking websites – Social networking websites focus on building online communities of people who share interests. Popular examples include **MySpace™**, **Facebook®** and **LinkedIn®**. Users can build their own profile page, join groups, share photos and videos, post messages, and run other applications.

Video sharing sites – A video sharing site allows users to upload video clips to be stored on the server, allowing other users to view them. **YouTube™** is a popular example.

Virtual worlds – Virtual worlds such as **Second Life®** are online places where users can create representations of themselves (avatars) and socialise with other residents.

Wikis – A wiki is a website using ‘wiki software’ that allows web pages to be created, interlinked, and edited by any user. The most well known wiki is **Wikipedia®** – an online encyclopaedia.



Opportunities for government

Social media presents government with a number of opportunities to engage with citizens using familiar and widely available technologies. This two-way form of communication enables government to be more active in relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders - increasing the frequency and speed of public engagement.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAN:

- increase citizens' access to government
- increase government's access to audiences and improve the accessibility of government communication
- enable government to be more active in its relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders
- offer greater scope to adjust or refocus communications quickly, where necessary
- increase the level of trust in government
- provide additional communication channels in times of emergency
- reach specific audiences on specific issues.

MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS

In addition to the opportunities identified above, social media also provides particular opportunities for marketing and promotion of government activities and services. It is recommended that advice and guidance be obtained from the Strategic Communication Unit in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, prior to using social media in this way. They have developed specific guidelines that cover the use of social media for external communications and marketing activities. They can be contacted via stratcomms@saugov.sa.gov.au or (08) 8204 9178.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS:

- Gain insights into your audience, identifying them and the channels they use.
- Engage creatively with user-led online communities in order to inform users, generate insight or use these communities as regular forums for campaign planning.
- Monitor social media for discussion about your organisation, its proposals, campaigns or the services it delivers.
- Track influential brands or voices that may compete for your audience time.
- Set up groups on social media channels or start discussion threads in communities.
- Create video, audio or data content that can be published simultaneously across diverse channels.
- Create useful tools and applications that users can incorporate into their sites.

EXAMPLES

Currently, government agencies are actively exploring the use of social media. Success in agencies is related to the level of support and the suitability of the approach to meet their business needs.

SA GOVERNMENT EXAMPLES

Arts SA – use both MySpace™ and Facebook® sites to communicate with artists about their grants program.

DEH – invites visitors of the Botanic Gardens to post photos on Flickr™.

Office for Youth – have their own Facebook® site which complements their community engagement strategy.

State Library – use social networking sites to collaborate with other libraries (particularly overseas), and to bring people to the library virtually.

TAFE – use social networking sites as teaching tools, delivering courses to students who cannot physically visit a campus, providing flexible learning styles.

Tourism SA – use social networking sites extensively in their marketing, and have developed their own policy and best practice guidelines.

Managing the risks

Just like any other technology, the use of social media technologies carries some risk. One way to avoid these risks is to prohibit their use. Prohibitions typically only slow down activities – they rarely stop them outright, and it is likely that agencies and staff will find legitimate needs for adopting social media technologies. By taking an approach in which the risks associated with social media are managed rather than just avoided, agencies and staff can effectively and safely pursue these technologies to engage with citizens. The following table highlights some of the risks associated with the use of social media and provides some guidance on their management.

| RISK | MANAGEMENT |
|--|--|
| <p>Security High traffic sites may pose a greater risk for 'malware' and 'spyware'.</p> | Agencies can implement security measures to mitigate these risks, just as they do for other high traffic sites such as Google™ and Yahoo!®. |
| <p>Time Wasting Staff may waste time.</p> | The same risk exists in the use of telephones and email. Time wasting should be addressed by managers as a management issue , not a technology issue. |
| <p>Bandwidth Some social media requires higher levels of bandwidth.</p> | Agencies need to budget for this as they do for other infrastructure needs. A genuine assessment of the likely costs (with a real understanding of the benefits) should be undertaken rather than a blanket ban. |
| <p>Advertising Advertising on social media sites used by agencies may give the appearance that the SA Government endorses the content.</p> | Wherever possible, agencies should issue a disclaimer stating that the SA Government does not endorse any particular service or website, or the use of any associated advertisements. |
| <p>Terms of Service Some of the terms of service that must be accepted are heavily in favour of the service provider.</p> | Any terms of service should be read and understood before they are agreed to. Negotiations with the service provider may resolve any issues. The Crown Solicitor's Office should be consulted before entering into a legally binding agreement. |
| <p>Privacy There is no guarantee that social media users' privacy will be protected to a sufficient degree.</p> | Wherever possible, agencies should issue a disclaimer alerting users when they are no longer on a government site and that the site's own privacy policy applies. |
| <p>Accessibility Some multimedia sites do not currently provide content in accessible formats - for example, transcripts and subtitles.</p> | Agencies should maintain official copies of materials in accessible formats on their own websites . |



General guidance

There are some principles that can be applied across all forms of social media. Knowing these basic 'Principles of Engagement' will help you whether you are fully responsible for establishing and hosting an online community or if you are just a contributor in an existing community. Further guidance on the use of social media by government agencies and staff can be found under the headings following.

PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

- **Be credible.** Be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent.
- **Be respectful.** Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Be cordial, honest and professional at all times.
- **Listen before you talk.** Before entering any conversation, understand the context. Who are you speaking to? Is there a good reason for you to join the conversation?
- **Write what you know.** Know your facts and cite your sources.
- **If you make a mistake, admit it.** Be upfront and be quick with your correction.
- **Be responsive.** When you gain insight, share it where appropriate.



Guidance for agencies

Social media can't replace other forms of communication, but it can be useful as part of broader efforts to engage with citizens. In addition to facilitating citizen communication and consultation on policy initiatives, social media can be used to support recruitment, as well as for marketing and promotional initiatives.

It is very important to choose the most appropriate social media tool. Simply picking and using a website because it is popular can be counterproductive if it is not suitable for the intended purpose. Planning to use social media should be done as part of a wider effort to determine an agency's engagement strategy. Once an agency understands its engagement strategy, it can then determine which social media tools will best meet its needs.

In January 2009, the Department for Environment and Heritage piloted a web-based tool that allows community members to record how they use their local marine environment. Users of **SAMPIT** (South Australia's Marine Parks Information Tool) can utilise a GoogleMaps™ application to record activities ranging from commercial and recreational fishing to beach walking and community group work. Over 230 people trialled SAMPIT in the first nine months, helping to inform the zoning and management plans being developed for South Australia's marine parks network.

BEFORE UTILISING SOCIAL MEDIA, AGENCIES SHOULD:

- determine their **business need** and investigate options
- identify **traditional communication** and community engagement activities that could be enhanced by social media (also consider those without access)
- consult with their **communications office** and consider all policy aspects
- consult with their **risk management** team to develop a risk management strategy
- consult with their **records management** unit to determine what records should be kept to document the business function or activity, how long they should be kept, and how they should eventually be disposed of
- consult with their **ICT department** to discuss the technical aspects and work out a strategy for records capture
- gain the appropriate level of **approval** – this may require the production of a business case
- **dedicate resources** – social media can do more harm than good if it gets neglected.



Guidance for agencies hosting social media

While an agency may develop and host an online community, it is the people who join and contribute to that community who make it their own. The community must be genuinely open to citizen-generated content if it is to leverage the power of this medium, and also avoid any backlash from people who feel that they have been disenfranchised or excluded.

Below is some guidance to assist agencies who have created an online discussion board, blog, social networking page, or something similar in order to engage with the community.

In 2009, as part of a larger communications strategy, the Singapore Government began using a variety of social media tools to engage with citizens. The Singapore Health Minister uses a blog to personally discuss healthcare issues and changes in policies. Visitors to the blog are encouraged to engage further on the 'Ministry of Health' Facebook® page. A healthy mix of industry experts and the public contribute to the depth and knowledge of the discussions. Within six months of its creation, the Minister's blog attracted 20 000 unique visitors; and the 'Ministry of Health' Facebook® page had over 3000 fans.

AGENCIES HOSTING SOCIAL MEDIA SHOULD CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- **Spark conversations.** As creators, it is acceptable for an agency to begin a discussion topic to help kick-start ideas for group members to discuss. However, this needs to be planned. The important thing is to avoid saturating it with 'official' topics.
- **Maintain contact with group members.** Many online communities provide the ability to email all members. It's important to use this tool to value-add to the membership; however, it should be used sparingly. Members don't want to be bombarded with emails from government.
- **Monitor for inappropriate content.** Contributions that contain offensive, defamatory or other inappropriate content may be removed. Please note this is different from removing negative comments or complaints.
- **Respond appropriately to negative criticism.** Ownership should be taken of serious negative criticism and not ignored.
- **Do not censor discussion.** For example, by attempting to remove a comment from a discussion board that is 'negative'.
- **Avoid saturating with government staff.** The aim of 'official government' social media is to engage with the audience and encourage membership from the general public.
- **Do not post comments via another user.** For example, asking a member to post a discussion item on the SA Government's behalf, posing as a genuine comment from the public.
- **Avoid using the membership list for unrelated marketing purposes.** The members have joined to participate in that group only - not to become part of a government mailing list for other, non-relevant information.



Guidance for staff using social media - official use

The protocols that apply when you are acting as an official representative of your agency are the same whether you are talking to the media, speaking at a conference or using social media.

Staff making comments or contributions on behalf of their agency should only do so with express approval.

The South Australian Tourism Commission [**SATC**] sees social media as an exciting way to keep in touch with consumers. It uses Twitter™ to post positive, quirky, and informative pieces about South Australia – to give people reasons to holiday here. Nine months since its creation in January 2009, the Tourism SA ‘tweet’ had more than 1500 followers. The SATC also has a YouTube™ channel to share its footage of South Australia and give consumers a glimpse of some of the wonderful experiences that our state has to offer.

WHEN CONTRIBUTING ON BEHALF OF THEIR AGENCY, STAFF SHOULD CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- Before engaging with a specific social media channel, ensure you understand its conventions and etiquette.
- When you are speaking on behalf of your agency, identify yourself as such.
- Correct any factual inaccuracies you find relating to government policy.
- Where users ask questions about policy or published information with which you are familiar, provide answers to the queries.
- Refer people to government sites, where appropriate.
- Ensure that any comment you make on matters of government policy is appropriate to the agency role you hold, and remains politically neutral.
- Do not give out personal details of yourself or other staff.
- Do not post any material that is protected by copyright. Consider using the Government Information Licensing Framework to license your own work in a way that facilitates sharing.



Guidance for staff using social media - personal use

The *Code of Ethics – South Australian Public Sector* provides an ethical framework to guide staff conduct. Public sector staff who fail to comply with the standards of conduct set out by the code may be liable to disciplinary action. The Code of Ethics includes a requirement for public sector employees to **at all times**, conduct themselves in a manner that will not bring ‘them, the agency in which they work, or the public sector or Government into disrepute’¹. The Code of Ethics allows employees to act in a private capacity to influence public opinion or promote issues of public interest. However, employees should still ensure that their conduct is consistent with the responsibilities described above.

While social media appears to blur private and public spheres, **activities on social media websites should be considered public activities**. Despite the availability of privacy functions on social media websites, the possibility exists for content to be shared beyond intended recipients. Additionally, it should be noted that the terms and conditions of use for most social media sites state that all content becomes the property of the site on which it is posted. This makes the public nature of these websites inescapable. Online content is also essentially permanent – a fact that must also be taken into consideration when posting.

Staff should always think before they post, and they should use their common sense.

WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA, STAFF SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- Could what you are doing **harm the reputation** of your agency or the state?
- Are you disclosing any agency material that you are **not specifically authorised to disclose**?
- Have you made it clear to others when your contribution is as a private individual and **not as a representative of your agency**?
- Are you willing to **defend what you post** to your manager? Would you be comfortable saying it to a stranger at a bus stop, or posting it on a public shop window?
- Are you using **government-owned infrastructure**? Do you have permission to use it in this way (this includes the use of your government email address)?
- Are you behaving with **integrity, respect** and **accountability**?

¹ Code of Ethics – South Australian Public Sector, Commissioner for Public Employment, Office for Ethical Standards and Professional Integrity, February 2010, page 13.

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