

Government as Part of the Revolution: Using Social Media to Achieve Public Goals

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Abstract: Social media is growing rapidly because it supports some important social needs. Government will need to understand how social media support these social needs if government is to use social media well. Social media supports the increased reliance on human networks, the need for rapid interactive communications, the need to blur what is private and public, and the need for engaging multimedia. Whether government can use social media will depend upon how well government can see, understand, and attend to these needs. Can government move from hierarchical, controlled communications to where it is just an (important) node within a network? Social media is about fast, interactive communications. How will bureaucracies adapt to the increased pressures for timely responses? Social media, therefore, presents novel and challenging strategic, policy, and managerial issues for many US governments. This paper reports on an environmental scan of the important issues facing US governments and the creative ways in which they are adapting to the challenges. This is supplemented by an in-depth participant-observation study of the use of social media by several departments within the City of Columbus, State of Ohio, USA. Proponents of social media, like those of the early days of the Internet, are wildly enthusiastic about how much social media can do to improve government. Claims are made that this technology is paradigm-shifting, like the printing press, which put knowledge into the hands of the ordinary person. Given the many policy and managerial issues yet to be resolved, it is clear that there is no technology imperative that will necessarily drive government to become more democratic. Early web government pages could have been made more interactive, yet they primarily took on the task of broadcasting a one way instead of a two way flow of information. There is no reason to believe that Twitter would not follow the same path. It could easily become an application whose only benefit is in more quickly broadcasting information to a mobile phone. A better way to think about social media is that it merely provides a small window of opportunity, which for a short period of time, allows government to comprehensively reexamine how it does things, and thereby, provides the opportunity to change policies and procedures in a way that improves government. Governments typically ask how can we adapt social media to the way in which we do business? A very different question is how can social media provide us a way to do things in way that we have not done before? The question that is asked will determine whether a revolution will actually place.

Keywords: social media, Gov 2.0, e-governance, eGovernment, social capital

1. Should we take the chance?

A recent *Cleveland Plain-Dealer* newspaper article reported on the use of Twitter by US state governments.

"When a tanker truck exploded July 15, closing a section of Interstate 75 near Detroit, hundreds of motorists were notified of the crash and detours via tweets from the Michigan Department of Transportation..."

"The beauty of tweeting is that it just lends itself to emergency communications," said department spokeswoman Barbara Hicks...

Michigan is among about a dozen states that provide transportation information on social-networking sites by posting updates on Twitter, videos on YouTube and project details on Facebook...

Ohio isn't one of those states...

'We want to make sure that if we decide to use some of the social-networking sites we do it properly,' Varner [Ohio Department of Transportation spokesman [ODOT]] said." (Adapted from (Nieves, 2009))

Citizens were given space to comment on the article. One Ohio citizen came to the defense of Scott Varner. Most of the citizens excoriated ODOT's inability to keep up with the newest technologies.

While there is a risk in implementing these new communications poorly, there is also a risk in not doing it, or even doing it too slowly. Part of ODOT's hesitancy may come from not fully understanding what social media is, who is using it, and from that, being able to derive a good strategy, policy, and best practices.

2. What is social media? Why is it important to government?

2.1 Social media

Social media is really a communications tool rather than an IT application. It is a tool that supports communications within social networks.

The tremendous growth in social media is occurring because it is a set of tools that service several social communications needs. Social media is a tool that: 1) allows individuals to more easily use human networks; 2) expects interactive rather than broadcast communications; 3) is powerful because it uses not only text, but video and audio as well (“multimedia”) and 4) relies on measures and objectives to facilitate communication.

Social media is growing because of the increasing importance of networks. There is an ongoing debate within policy circles about the relative efficacy of markets or bureaucracies (government or private sector) in getting things done. But there is a third institution – networks. Networks span across and within, public, private, and nonprofit sector organizations. In many cases, they can more quickly and accurately provide answers to questions like: “Whom do you know that can get something done for me?” “Who can I ask to get the correct information I need?”

Social media is also powerful because it supports two-way, interactive rather than one-way, broadcast communications. People want easy access to the information they need and the relationships they want to develop. In a world dominated by broadcasting, whether it is television, the daily newspaper, or static web pages, institutions dictate what information is communicated.

Interactive communications, the use of multimedia, becoming “part of” a network instead of assuming command and control imply very different ways for how government does its work. At this juncture, governments are deciding whether they want to cultivate, support, and become an integral part of these networks, or just remain on the periphery.

This view is very new and probably challenging to the current way of getting things done and how government engages in building a longer-term strategy. It is also challenging to how the government conducts its day-to-day operations and the long-term goal of improving its relationship with its citizens.

One of the most important trends in governance, and perhaps society as a whole, has been the blurring of the public and private sectors (Bozeman, 1987). Whether it is contracting out, collaborative government, the many hybrid organizations now being created, or the increasing interdependency of private organizations and public organizations, it is becoming increasingly difficult to rely on notions of hierarchical command and control governance. The same blurring of what is public and private also permeates social media. Because social media blurs the public and the private (shows our humanity) and because it is interactive rather than broadcasting, it can help reestablish trust in government administrators.

Multimedia is a powerful component of most social media technologies, either because they employ or point to, visual and sound information as well as text. Humans are visual creatures and social media can tell a story or make the case for an argument in a far more compelling manner.

Objectives and measures are important to every public policy and management initiative. In the social media culture, they are of central importance. There are two important aspects of social media that need to be understood when it comes to objectives and measures. The first aspect is that if an organization or individual uses social media just to “be cool” or “with it”, those efforts will quickly become diffused and scattered and a waste of time and resources. Focused objectives are necessary to use social media well. The second important aspect is that metrics are a central part of this culture. People count all things: messages, postings, and communications, across all kinds of groups. These measures of network influence focus on how important the message is and how important the communicator is. The ability to collect this data is enabled by the open source nature of the technology.

Popularity, membership in networks, and being seen and heard in these networks directly influences how effective governments will be in effectively using the technology. Popularity, in part, derives from

the quality of the material and its potential interest to the intended audience. But popularity (and effectiveness) also are dependent upon how well the media is intrinsically understood by government, how creative its users are in thinking about the media can be used, and how well the particular features of the communications media are used on a daily basis. Governments can decide to “dabble” in social media, but the measures that are part of social media will quickly reveal if government is doing it well and if anybody is really listening.

It is important to see that these characteristics reinforce each other. The need for quick and reliable information is supported by the move to networks. The reduction in formality, the highly interactive and rapid nature of the technology, and the blurring of what is public and private, reduces communications barriers among the varied users within a network. The use of multimedia entices users into the networks and engages them. Measures help users gauge the quality of the message. Networks allow users to find other users who can “vouch” for the insure that the relevance, quality, and trustworthiness of the information.

Clearly, there are many government objectives and communications needs that are being adequately serviced by other communications media. What might be some examples of important government issues that could be addressed by using social media?

2.2 Why is it important to government?

2.2.1 Trust and social capital

Trust, or “social capital”, is essential to how networks operate. Trust has also been an essential in explaining what constitutes good public administration (Wilson, 1887). In networks, individuals use trust in evaluating how good information is and they use social capital in evaluating a person’s reputation and whether they can be trusted. In public administration, trust involves maintaining the delicate balance between having administrators be appropriately responsive to the people, and also having citizens trust administrators’ experience and expertise so that citizens are not involved in every government decision. Administrators must also trust in democracy’s sovereign – the citizen. In an age where networks are rising in importance, it is important to understand how trust is used in both bureaucracies and in networks to maximize government’s efforts in achieving public goals.

Recent work on “social capital” offers promise in understanding how social media networks operate. “Social capital” includes the reputation that one has among their peers (Putnam, 1993) or the: 1) obligations and expectations that we have of one another; 2) the important information channels that sustain networks and informal organizations; and 3) the social norms that bind our actions and create an expectation that others will behave in predictable ways (Coleman, 1988). Research in this area examines how trust is created, nurtured, and measured.

If government wants to increase trust, it is important to understand that it is easier for citizens to vest their trust, not in the abstract institution “government” (Giddens, 1990), but in the people who work in government. Social media, unlike state web pages, offers citizens access to people. It offers a way to create tighter, social networks that support trust in government. The less that government is seen as a “faceless” website, and more as individuals who have a name, have a reputation, and can give a commitment about what can and will be done, the easier it will be to see government as something (someone) working on their behalf.

Social media strongly supports network communications and enables governments to communicate better within the multiple networks outside of government and the informal organization (networks) within government. Leveraging these networks offers enhanced opportunities to achieve public goals.

2.2.2 Making more effective use of dwindling resources

Government also faces tremendous challenges in finding the resources it needs to advance the public interest. It is clear that government cannot do it alone but, instead, must find creative and innovative ways to leverage resources outside of its control. Effectively using, and participating in, networks of individuals, organizations, and institutions, offers great promise in finding and mobilizing these resources towards achieving public goals.

Effectively using, and participating in, networks of individuals, organizations, and institutions, offers great promise in finding and mobilizing these resources to work for the public good (“co-production” (Ostrom, 1996) or “collaborative government” (Bingham et al., 2005)). Coordination of networks and managing partnerships and networks will become an increasingly important skill (Agranoff, 2007).

Increasing trust and making more effective use of dwindling resources are just two ways in which social media might be useful to government. Empirical research is needed to determine whether governments use social media in these ways and what implementation barriers they face.

3. Methods

At present there is very little empirical research on the use of social media by government. When the City of Columbus, Ohio, USA, decided to engage in an experiment with social media, the author was asked to provide advice and guidance on the study. In particular, the author was asked to make suggestions about: 1) how social media could be better utilized; 2) to conduct a scan of how other governments were using social media; and 3) to write up specific recommendations on how Columbus might want to change its various ITC policies.

This request provided an opportunity to conduct an embedded single-case study to develop insights about how government could use social media and what some of difficulties in using social media might be. The goal was to develop a “thick description” of the important issues and their interplay that could generate propositions for further study. The participant observant research yielded a report (Landsbergen, 2009) identifying the opportunities and risks in using social media, best practices as revealed through an environmental scan of what Columbus and other US governments were doing, and specific language supporting the recommended policy changes. Further discussion of some of the issues uncovered and the recommendations on how to deal with these issues can be found in Sections 4 and 5, below.

3.1 Let all flowers bloom

Columbus is the state capital of Ohio, a Midwestern state in the United States. It is the sixteenth largest city in the US and has a population of approximately 755,000, ahead of Cleveland, Ohio (population 438,000) and Cincinnati (population 331,285) (2008 US Census).

Interestingly, the City’s decision to experiment was instigated by the need to respond to a potential crisis situation - the Health Department’s success in using Twitter and Facebook to broadcast information about the H1N1 virus. In addition, earlier initiatives by a rival branch of government – the elected City Council - in using Twitter and Facebook, created competitive pressures the executive branch departments to innovate.

With the explosion of interest in social media, The Department of Technology (DOT) wanted to make sure that any “rogue experiments” in social media were covered by the City’s policies on communications, information technology, security, and public records. In addition, the DOT, to its credit, decided that every department could benefit from the collective experience of those departments already using social media. The shared experience could also help in developing a shared vision for how central resources could make better use of the new technology. City departments were asked to send representatives to an *ad hoc* group (hereinafter, “Social Media Group”). Representatives included staff already working with social media, as well as communications professionals, IT security professionals, and human resources managers. Approximately twenty core members participated on a regular basis and up to thirty-five members who participated at least once. The Department of Technology sponsored the meetings and provided technical and logistical support.

3.2 Participatory action research to generate insights and recommendations

The study utilized a participatory action research approach on a single case study with an embedded design (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, Yin, 2003). The City of Columbus was the unit of analysis of the case study. Embedded within that case study, was an examination of how the different city departments utilized social media. (See Table 1, *infra*.) The goal of participatory action research is to become a member of a group and thereby gain trust and greater access to the thoughts and opinions of the group. The action orientation comes in taking the thick description resulting from the case study and then pushing the group towards action outcomes, including recommended policies and management practices.

The research began with the author being introduced to the Social Media Group and given an opportunity to explain his role of both facilitating the discussions of the group and providing outside ideas from what other cities and states were doing with social media. After this initial introduction, the researchers attended the weekly meetings, and mostly listened, in order to learn the culture, identify key informants, and gain trust.

The weekly meetings lasted approximately two hours with the first hour devoted to exchanging ideas and technical knowledge. The second half of the hour consisted of a presentation from someone in the larger community on some aspect of social media, including such topics as the importance of marketing or branding. In addition to the weekly meetings, a Facebook was set up to facilitate asynchronous discussion. Informal interviews were conducted with all of the core members at least once during the regular meetings. The conversations surfaced the various concerns of the group and were captured and posted on the Facebook page for comment.

Observational notes of the meetings were taken by both the author and his graduate student and immediately compared after the meeting. Triangulation was employed to validate the observations and the action recommendations using the participant-observer notes, the various Facebook posts, Twitter messages, and interviews.

Systematic, structured interviews were conducted of almost all of the core members. Interview questions were drawn from prior research about the drivers and inhibitors of public sector ITC. Over time, however, the interviews yielded additional questions that were unique to social media. Interviews typically lasted about an hour and included such general questions as the genesis for using social media; 2) what successes they had enjoyed; 3) what challenges they faced; and 4) how their work related to the unit of analysis, the City of Columbus. The observations and recommendations were posted on the group's Facebook page for feedback.

The group was also provided with information from the environmental scan of what other governmental units were doing with social media (See Table 2, *infra*) so that the group could make more informed decisions about what the significant issues and potential solutions were. A final report was made to the City that was based upon both the environmental scan and the findings and recommendations of the social media group.

Table 1: Use of social media by the City of Columbus

Columbus Unit	Link to relevant pilot project
City Council	<i>Twitter:</i> http://twitter.com/ColumbusCouncil <i>Facebook:</i> http://www.facebook.com/pages/Columbus-OH/Columbus-City-Council/75764527681?ref=ts <i>Podcasts:</i> http://www.columbuscitycouncil.org/media.aspx?id=5104&menu_id=520
Dept. of Health	<i>Twitter:</i> http://twitter.com/columbushealth <i>Facebook:</i> http://www.facebook.com/ColumbusPublicHealth
Dept. of Development	<i>Facebook:</i> http://www.facebook.com/pages/Columbus-OH/Columbus-Planning/115991001536
Dept. of Public Service	<i>Twitter:</i> http://twitter.com/pavingthewayoh
Columbus Police	<i>Twitter:</i> http://twitter.com/columbuspolice <i>Facebook:</i> http://www.facebook.com/pages/Columbus-OH/Columbus-Division-of-Police/92955766761?ref=ts

4. Results

4.1 Environmental scan – how are other governments using social media?

While several Columbus units individually began experimenting with social media, the best way to understand what social media can possibly do, is through actually seeing many examples of how other cities and government agencies are using these media in new and powerful ways. A broad environmental scan complemented the in-depth case study of Columbus.

The environmental scan involved a comprehensive search for any interesting use of social media by national federal, state, and local governments of English-speaking nations. There were several goals. The most immediate goal was to identify policies and best practices that could help identify issues and policies for the two social media of immediate concern, Twitter and Facebook. Moving beyond the

short-term goal of finding wording and concepts that could build a good policy and set of practices, was the longer-term goal of identifying other ways in which other types of social media could be employed. Phone interviews and email exchanges were used to obtain details about interesting and unique implementation schemes. These various uses of social media were collected into one framework. Table 2, identifies the many ways in which social media can improve government and governance. (See Table 2, *infra*). For a more thorough discussion of this framework, interesting and representative examples, and some of the attendant implementation issues, see (Landsbergen, 2010). Five basic mechanisms were identified:

- Competitive elites (political and bureaucratic) respond to requests for information and service from voters. Some of the linkages include obtaining information, working through groups to articulate their interests, politically influencing those elites, and then holding those elites accountable. This is an ideal model. Supporting the claim that social media can improve government would require examining all of these, and other, linkages.
- Social media can increase rule compliance by involving citizens in the formation of rules leading to higher legitimacy and therefore higher compliance. It can also enlist citizens in the policing of legal norms.
- Civic Virtue increases because social media supports human networked communications and the cultivation of social capital. Here, the claim is not that decision-makers will be more responsive to peoples' needs, but rather that the *preferences* of those demands will become more public in nature (Boix and Posner, 1998).
- Bureaucratic efficiency and effectiveness increased for silo-driven government and by facilitating the networks that characterize informal organizations.
- Social media increases social and digital inclusion and thereby political inclusion. It also supports the identification of new leaders and leading organizations.

Table 2: Mechanisms by which social media can realize Gov. 2.0

Mechanism	Variety
	1. Ideal model: Rational voters and competitive elites
	Respond to requests for information
	Public / Private partnerships to respond to requests for information
	Respond to requests for service
	Public / Private partnerships to respond to requests for service
	Helps citizens educate each other
	Helps citizens synthesize, refine, and articulate needs
	Hold government accountable
	2. Rule compliance: Creating, implementing and enforcing governmental policies & regulations
	Participation in the policy process
	Implementing laws and rules
	Enforcement of thefts
	3. Civic virtue - Will social media, because of its public nature, create more civic virtue?
	Political elites push for, and highlight, the innovative use of social media
	4. Bureaucratic efficiency – Improved communications within bureaucracies, among bureaucracies, and between bureaucracies and their stakeholders (G2C and G2B).
	Cheaper and more effective communications
	Faster communications
	Produce an <i>esprit de corps</i> within government
	5. Empowering individuals and developing new leaders
	Digital Inclusion – Demographics of social media
	Social Inclusion - Empowering stakeholders who would not otherwise be heard
	Political Inclusion – Translating digital and social inclusion into greater political inclusion
	Enabling the faster exchange of good ideas and practices
	Making it easier for persons of similar interests to find and work with one another

4.2 Case study analysis

The case study and environmental scan yielded interesting and unexpected sets of issues. The group debated these issues and made many recommendations, including changes to the various policies, in a final report to the City (Please see Section 3. Methods). Due to space limitations, a subset of issues and recommendations are discussed for their potential interest to an international audience.

4.2.1 Lack of organizational resources

Twitter and Facebook are technologies that support both one-way and two-way communications. The easy, and perhaps first use of this medium is similar to a static web page in which the same information is simply broadcasted to the public. The added value in using Twitter or Facebook is that interested parties would receive faster updates of information.

But most people see the real benefit of social media in its support of two-way, interactive communication. The social media culture is such that, unless there is a clear reason to do otherwise, users get tired of being sent a steady stream of information that they could always see. Unfortunately, there is a danger that most governments are now becoming “stuck” in this familiar mode.

But a genuine concern was raised as to how some departments could afford the time to support still another media outlet to populate with information? Of even greater concern was whether an expectation that communications officers now be required to respond to direct requests for information? Where there are not enough people to get the job done now, what would happen if now the organization had to spend time on social media everyday? Interviews with other jurisdictions, however, revealed that the resources demands were not as high as expected.

As to the use of an additional media to manage, good managerial practice is to use multiple media for the same message and technical solutions make that task easier. Interviews with other governments indicated that, where there was a focused project, there was not a significant increase in the demand for resources. Even more interesting is San Francisco’s SF311 service, by which any citizen can send a short Tweet requesting a city service like fixing a pothole or cleaning up a refuse problem. San Francisco acknowledged that there was a danger that this could create an unrealistic expectation about government’s ability to respond, but San Francisco also believed that it was still useful information. It could help the city understand demand and could be used to inform a collective discussion about the City’s resource and spending priorities. Although the city had no numbers to substantiate the claim, they did not believe that there was a significant increase in the demand on resources.

4.2.2 Privacy

The issue of the blurring of public and private thoroughly suffuses social media implementation. On the positive side, the blurring of public and private might enable bureaucracies to present a human face to citizens. A more complicated set of issues surrounds the private lives of public employees. For example, does a government agency have the right to make demands on how public employees spend their time outside of the work environment? Because of the pervasiveness and ubiquity of social media, many codes of conduct now require employees to present themselves even in their private lives “in a professional light” that would not cast a negative light on the government. Insisting on this policy, and more importantly, how violations are sought out, raise significant privacy questions. Privacy could also include protecting the privacy or anonymity of citizens using Twitter or Facebook to contact a government entity.

4.2.3 Public records and records management law

Are the communications in Facebook and Twitter a public record? No clear case law has emerged on this yet, but according to Ohio statutory law, public records do not depend on the type of media but its content:

“An electronic record, , created ... under the jurisdiction of any public office ... which serves to document the organization, functions, ... or other activities of the office.” (Ohio Revised Code 149.011)

Once a record is deemed a public record, managers also need to attend to the records management concerns surrounding the: 1) retention, 2) retrieval, 3) disclosure, and 4) disposal of public records.

Given the possible ephemeral nature of electronic records, one very real concern was how to manage these records so that they could be made available should there be a public records request. New tools are appearing, but in the interim, RSS feeds could be used as the basis for sending the Twitter messages, so that the RSS feeds could be archived and managed. As to the Facebook pages, a similar problem occurs with web-based material. Two basic kinds of strategies have been developed: object-based or event-based capture of information. The choice of strategy depends on the nature of the material, how dynamic that material is, and the particular managerial responsibilities for oversight of that information.

An even more interesting development for the US is the “open data” movement. In these early experiments, the US federal government and cities like San Francisco, Washington DC, and London are supplying data using open standards to “civic entrepreneurs” who are then creating very useful phone “apps” or web pages. Especially exciting is asking the public to come up with ideas (“crowd-sourcing”) about what combination of datasets might be useful. For example, combining information on schools and libraries might allow an entrepreneur to create a service identifying opportunities for after-school care.

4.2.4 Security

One of the important findings is that it is important to view social media as a communications tool rather than another computer-based technology. The immediate implication is that management of social media should really involve communications managers more than computer professionals. To do otherwise, may severely inhibit understanding its potential and limit its utility. But when two-way communications exists, there is a possibility of inserting malware into the government environment. Security, therefore, is one area in which the IT department should take a lead role in the communications team. Security concerns were repeatedly cited by IT professionals as to why there should be no use of social media or very strict policies governing its use. So far, however, it appears that the same precautions and instructions governing the use of email (in downloading and executing alien files or succumbing to a phishing expedition), would apply to social media as well.

4.2.5 Wise use of taxpayer time / perception of use of taxpayer time

While Columbus is a large Midwestern city, it still has populations that do not always value the “latest technology”. Consequently, a very heated discussion arose over whether there should be some kinds of restrictions imposed upon the use of social media by city employees. The concern was that: 1) persons should not be pursuing personal social media while they are on the job; 2) that social media can be addictive for some people; and 3) that the city cannot risk a public situation where someone is on the payroll and word gets out that that city employee is on the job but doing personal business. Table 3 describes this proposal.

Table 3: Ownership and content matrix for public and personal social media activity

Computer / Content	Professional	Personal
City-Owned	Internet accounts to carry out the work of the city must be established on a city-owned computer in order to insure that appropriate security protections are in place. ¹	Short Term: Individual use of city-owned computer for personal Internet use, except for email, is prohibited. Long-Term: It will become necessary very soon to allow users access to other Internet services. ²
Personally-Owned	With the online culture moving towards a 24/7 lifestyle, it may become necessary to revisit the rule that all City-related work be performed on a City-supplied computer. Consider modification of <i>Laptop Policy</i> .	Train and remind employees that even in personal communications that they still have responsibilities. ³

¹ When you discuss City of Columbus or City of Columbus-related matters, coordinate with the Department’s communications officer.

² In the short term, prohibit individual use of city-owned computer for personal Internet use, except for email, until the

City acquires a reputation that it uses other media well and establishes a culture and base of users who know how to use that internet service. Revisit this policy within six months. Long Term Use: in order to recruit talented employees it will become necessary to allow them to use these services for both their own personal and professional needs.

³ If you publish content to any website outside of the City's official online presence (this may include City websites as well as City's official presence on third party sites) and if the content:

- i. has something to do with subjects associated with the City of Columbus, consider a disclaimer such as this: "The following opinions and statements are my own and do not necessarily represent the City of Columbus's positions, strategies or opinions." Never use or reference your formal position when writing in a non-official capacity. Consult your communications officer when in doubt.
- ii. is not related to subjects associated with the City of Columbus, you must still be aware of your association with City of Columbus in online social networks. If you identify yourself as a City of Columbus employee or have a public facing position for which association with the City of Columbus is known to the general public, ensure your profile and related content (even if it is of a personal and not an official nature) is consistent with how you wish to present yourself as a professional, appropriate with the public trust associated with your position, and conforms to existing standards, such as *Central Work Rules*, *Sensitive Information*, *Ethics Policy*, *Privacy Policy*, and *Public Records Policy*.

Employees should be advised that "published content is persistent in the public domain and that anything you do or say on the Internet could be seen by anyone or everyone." They should assume that all communications are in the public domain, available for publishing or discussion in all forms of media.

4.2.6 Encouraging social media

The questions posed, and the recommendations made, predominantly concern limiting or directing how social media should be used. There is a concern that this bias towards control may limit innovation by already risk-averse government agencies. There also needs to be consideration of how to encourage the use of social media by providing support where it is needed. Some of those items include:

- Training
- Understanding how to use the media strategically? "How do I begin?"
- Streamlining processes to obtain permission to use of social media within a government department

One positive alternative is New Zealand's "Guide to Online Participation" that uses principles and aspirations to encourage civil servants to actively find ways to increase online participation rather than guiding action by enumerating all the actions that are prohibited (State Services Commission, 2007).

4.2.7 Other concerns about policy and procedure

The Social Media group debated, researched, and made recommendations on other varied issues, some of which are familiar to the ITC literature while others are quite novel.

- The social media culture is different. How do we insure that new users are aware and practice appropriate "netiquette" and cultural practices? For example, how should organizations make Twitter personable rather than the dull, gray voice of an institution, while at the same time, making sure that the voice is accountable, and if that person leaves, that it will continue? Or, how do we make government understand and accept the importance of metrics in social media that essentially measures the "popularity" of their message?
- How to deal with web accessibility and disability standards?
- How to communicate with those people who are on the wrong side of the "digital divide"?
- The importance of communicating a policy on how to use and refer individuals to non-government information and links.
- How do make sure that social media is not hijacked by malicious users who really are not interested in a conversation? Should government expose itself to persons who are not interested

in sincere communications and would use opportunities for two-way communications to “drag the conversation down”? One example often cited is the “Wall Feature” in Facebook to post negative comments about Columbus and / or post derogatory or impolite comments. How can government use the technology to limit the damage done by a malicious user, but not in a way that inhibits free speech?

- Finding the right balance between centralized policy and local departmental needs.
- Another concern surrounded the “branding” and “marketing” of the Department and its use of social media as it relates to the overall “brand” or “marketing” that the City of Columbus wants to project? A final concern is the use of recognizable names and naming conventions that make it easy for our citizens to locate the various social media outlets. If all departments have the same name, or naming convention, it is one step closer to establishing an overall brand. This overall need, however, might militate against the names that many departments have already adopted for themselves.

The recommendations made to the City of Columbus on each of these points usually involved a holistic approach that included a combination of changes in policy, complemented by management and technology best practices, and finally, good training.

Clearly, there is a large set of issues. Some of these are not new, but are really “old wine in new bottles.” More importantly, the long list of issues also clearly underlines that, much to the chagrin of those who believe that social media portends changes as the printing press, that there are many implementation issues that need to be addressed before social media can be used as a mechanism to achieve the goals of Gov. 2.0 (See Table 2, *supra*).

5. Findings and recommendations

5.1 How to understand the implications of social media for government

Each of the individual issues discussed above are significant and it will take time to work out effective legal, policy and managerial solutions. However, really understanding how to deal with these issues and what social media means for government involves understanding that social media is more of a communications tool than an information technology tool. Once this is understood and that this type of communications - fast, interactive, personal - is quickly becoming the type of communications that citizens desire, government will need new ways of looking at how they communicate and work with their citizens. Social media is about cultivating networks and using them well. This means that governments should now think about how social media can support its relationships within their larger social network of individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions.

The report included an explanation of social media for public managers, an explanation of how Columbus was using social media and the risks and opportunities, as well as the results of the external scan including the results of interviews on the risks and opportunities therein and the general concerns and issues raised by the social media group.

Having identified the opportunities as well as the risks, the report made positive recommendations including suggested change to current communications policy (and other policies) as well as a suggested policy for one specific social media (blogs) and Twitter with specific recommendations on HOW to Use it. The central importance of having clear objectives and measures and how to deal with the risks also motivated the development of suggested Risk Mitigation Strategy and Objectives and Measures (both using Twitter as an example). Finally, social media is about communications and a detailed strategy for managing the communications channels was provided. This section discussed what the City should talk about, how the City should talk about it, and who should do the talking (Williams, 2009).

5.1.1 Risks

Risk in the public sector, and especially when it comes to public sector IT, is a high barrier to innovation. To directly deal with this issue, a risk management strategy was adopted. The risks considered include those emanating from adopting this technology as well as not adopting it or implementing it poorly. Table 4 provides an example of some of the risks considered using the Twitter social media as an example.

The best way to encourage and also mitigate risks in departments is through a team approach. During the time that social media remains a new technology, the team should minimally consist of the communications officer (head of team), a Department of Technology representative, and the line or staff responsible for programs.

Table 4: Risk mitigation (using Twitter as an example)

Risk	Mitigation Action
Criticism arising from an inability to meet the demands of users to join conversations/answer enquiries, due to resource and clearance issues	Reduce by managing expectations with clear, published Twitter policy; use holding replies where answer will need research; (only if swamped) respond to 'themes' not individual replies; respond to common requests through Web pages
Criticism arising from perceptions that our use of Twitter is out of keeping with the ethos of the platform (such as too formal, self-promoting or 'dry')	Reduce by sourcing varied content. Accept that there will be some criticism regardless. Listening before talking to learn culture of those users.
Criticism of jumping on the bandwagon/waste of public money/lack of return on investment/pointless content	Reduce by evaluating against objectives above and adhering to content principles below
In line with government policy (City of Columbus Executive Orders and Policy, State of Ohio law on open records, records management, and Constitutional protections);	Clear notice on published Twitter policy to public on Twitter page and any entry points on how information will be collected, used and retained; Establish 'light' but effective procedural controls and guidelines for Twitter users; require clearance of all tweets through nominated people in digital media team; Training; Easy to use tools that will capture and store information in order to comply with law
Inappropriate content being published in error, such as: Protectively marked, commercially or politically sensitive information	Establish 'light' but effective procedural controls and guidelines for Twitter users; require clearance of all tweets through media team.
Technical security of the Twitter account and potential for hacking and vandalism of content	Change Twitter password frequently using strong passwords; only two members of digital media team to have access to pw; use cotweet.com to devolve access securely; avoid using unknown 3rd party tools that require the account password
Lack of availability due to Twitter being over capacity	Accept (affects all Twitter users, occurs rarely and is brief). Take backup using tweetake.com and upload every month
Changes to the Twitter platform (to add or change features, or to charge users for accessing the service) Squatters/spoofers on Twitter	Review business case for continuing to use the service when any such changes are made. Reduce by registering alternative names. Accept residual risk and monitor for this occurring. Report spoof accounts to Twitter for suspension. (look into the potential for city sites to be branded as, "Verified Accounts" through twitter).
Separate government from politics	Create separate Twitter accounts for those in public office or politically appointed.

Adapted from Neilo Williams (2009) 'Template Twitter Strategy for Government Departments' <http://www.scribd.com/doc/17313280/Template-Twitter-Strategy-for-Government-Departments>

5.1.2 Strategy

Once government sees the possibilities for change, as did Scott Varner in Ohio, they may also see risk and avoid taking any action. Managers should also realize, however, that there is also a risk in ignoring social media or waiting until the risks are known and minimal before acting. Waiting too long to climb onto the learning curve may mean incurring significant costs in always catching up.

To maximize the opportunity to learn and mitigate risks, experiments should focus on small, well-defined projects. (One example could be announcing a public event in which a department uses social media as well as traditional media to "create buzz" and catch the attention of the target audience.) This recommendation to focus on small, well-defined projects aligns with best practices suggested for both the private and non-profit sectors.

An important element of crafting a well-defined strategy includes specifying the important objectives and measures. See Table 5, below, for an example of the kinds of objectives and accompanying measures as might be used with Twitter.

Table 5: Objectives and measures (using Twitter as an example)

Objective	Measure
Targeted communication – facilitating building communities around specific topics such as: neighborhood green initiatives, economic development and competition, innovation, education, volunteers	Number of followers; relevance and type of followers per topic
Extend reach of existing messages online (e.g. news, speeches, web updates, YouTube videos) by building relationships with relevant audiences including intermediaries, stakeholders, and key influencers such as journalists and bloggers	Number of followers; relevance and type of followers; number of web traffic referrals from Twitter to our website content
Provide an informal, ‘human’ voice of the organization to promote engagement with our messages	Feedback from followers (unsolicited and solicited)
Provide thought leadership and credibility, increasing our visibility as the experts in our remit within the online space	Feedback from followers (unsolicited and solicited); number of re-tweets (Twitter users repeating our updates); clickthroughs
Demonstrate commitment to and understanding of digital channels with exemplary use of this emerging channel	Feedback from followers (unsolicited and solicited); +ve, -ve and neutral mentions elsewhere on blogosphere
Provide an additional, low-barrier method for audiences to interact with the Department to provide feedback, seek help and suggest ideas	Volume and quality of @reply and DM contact from followers; impact of this feedback on the Dept
Provide ways for audiences to subscribe to updates (RSS, email)	N/a. Achieved by using a presence on Twitter
Monitor mentions on Twitter of Columbus, elected leaders and policy initiatives, engaging with our critics and key influencers to resolve problems, correct factual inaccuracies, and satisfied customers thanking them and amplifying positive comments	<i>Qualitative</i> assessment of individual cases of turning negatives to positives and positives into brand advocates
Provide live coverage of events (such as policy launches, summits or promotions) for those who cannot attend	<i>Number of</i> events covered per year; positive feedback on that coverage

6. Is social media a force for change?

Social media has been compared to the printing press in its potential for radically changing communications and access to information. But not too long ago, similar claims were made for how the World Wide Web (Web 1.0) would flatten organizations, increase government transparency, and democratize society. Empirical research has shown that a better way to see technology is that it creates a “window of opportunity” to reexamine how things are done, and in the process, to configure processes that are more democratic. This empirical research, the history of the Web, and the long list of implementation issues listed herein provide evidence that social media will not automatically improve government and governance.

Clearly, this paper has outlined just some of the issues that governments must address if they are to use social media well. Twitter and Facebook can engage citizens in two-way communications or just be another way to broadcast a government initiative without encouraging honest feedback.

Governments typically ask “how can we adapt social media to the way in which we do business?” A very different question is “how can social media provide us a way to do things in way that we have not done before?”

This realization should put a tremendous onus on every decision maker to ask: what are our values and principles and how can we use this technology to further those principles? Will government be a part of the revolution?

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