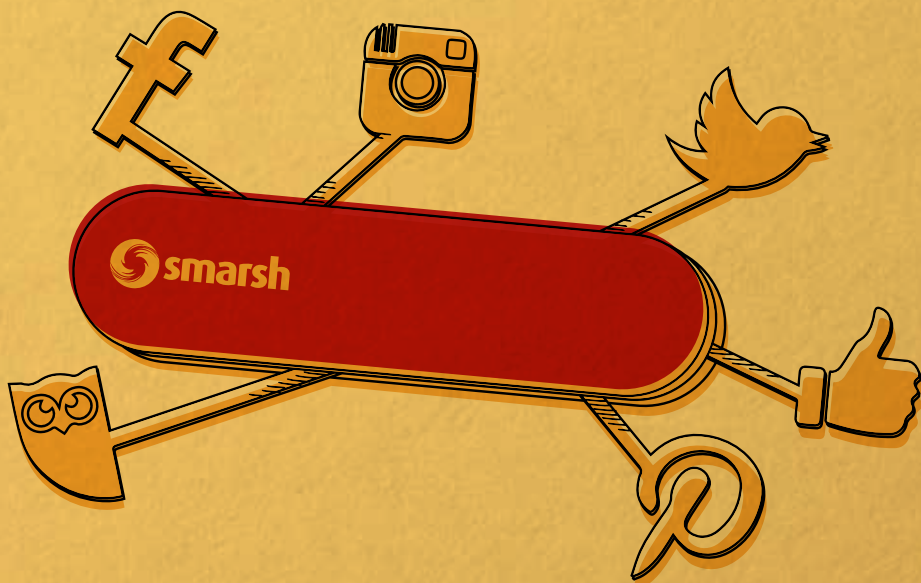


THE GOVERNMENT SOCIAL MEDIA SURVIVAL GUIDE

The government agency's guide for best practices, leveraging social media, attracting more followers, managing emergencies, and much, much more.



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This Guide will help government departments and agencies leverage their social media use, and turn it into an asset. Follow this guide to learn how to attract more followers, social media best practices, emergency management, rumor control, and so much more.

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WHY DOES PUBLIC SECTOR NEED SOCIAL MEDIA TO COMMUNICATE?

Public sector organizations have a lot to offer the communities they serve through social media. Updates on your website or items on your city council meeting agenda can now foster real-time interaction with your constituents.

Imagine using your Facebook page to enhance the search for missing children, or promote fundraising activities and other community events more effectively and efficiently than traditional outreach methods.



A Closer Look:

Utility companies have a great opportunity to quickly respond to outages, and provide estimated service restoration times and other service updates on Twitter.

UNDERSTAND YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Before you can really delve into the execution of social media, you must define your target audience. Back in grade school, we learned to ask: "Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why?, and How?" The same questions can be applied to social media:



- **Who is in your ideal audience?** Age, gender, likes, dislikes, etc. are all vital to reaching your audience.
- **What will they find relevant, useful, and engaging?** Content must be relevant to the lives and motivations of your audience. For instance, if they love discussing great food, talking to them about home improvement is ineffective—unless it's focused on the kitchen, of course.



- **When are they most active online?** Engage them when they're most active and likely to see your content.
- **Where are they on social media?** Use the social media platforms they use the most to make sure your message is heard.
- **Why will they follow you?** Decide if you want to position yourself as a trusted community member, a news source, an overall voice of the community, or all of the above.
- **How can you keep them engaged?** Make sure your content is fresh, timely, and meets their needs.

Answering these questions will help you determine your desired audience, what makes them tick, and how you can make sure your presence is recognized.

SELECT THE RIGHT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

After determining which social media platform your audience prefers, you can take a closer look at how those platforms align with your organization's goals.



Facebook features large audiences and allows you to tell longer stories



Twitter is great at reaching large audiences and driving traffic to websites with short, succinct messages



Instagram helps you tell stories using photos



Pinterest allows your audience to add and upload content directly to their boards and save it

Building a solid social media presence will require the time and resources to closely monitor and adjust your strategy, provide information to your community, and keep them engaged. Generally speaking, to create a successful presence, you should adopt at least two of the platforms your audience uses most.

CONTENT RELEASE STRATEGY

Releasing the right amount of content for each platform is crucial to achieve success. The goal is to stay top of mind with your audience without causing content fatigue. Below are recommended best practices for posting to each of your accounts consistently and getting in front of your audience.



- **Twitter:**
At least 5 times a day (20 posts is optimal)
- **Facebook:**
1 or 2 posts a day
- **LinkedIn:**
Limit to once a day
- **Pinterest:**
5 pins per day
- **Instagram:**
Post at least once a day. If posting multiple times, be sure to spread them out.

After getting into a regular posting rhythm across your preferred social media channels, experiment with the number of your posts, and pay attention to the engagement you get. Your particular audience might enjoy more content on Facebook or Pinterest than on Twitter or Instagram. If you find that your audience enjoys more content posted to a particular platform, you can better engage with your audience using their preferred content delivery system.

Platforms such as Facebook reward high-performing content by showing it to more people—for free—which helps you organically increase the number of people who see your content.



Tip: Use software that allows you to schedule posts in advance, which frees you up to engage more with your followers.

Remember to include these two very important aspects into your social media strategy:



After Hours:

Social media doesn't stop at 5 p.m. on Friday, and restart at 9 a.m. on Monday. Social media represents an ever-active community; people want to be engaged and expect a response within 15 minutes. Have someone available to handle communication after hours, on weekends, and on holidays to help your agency stay in front of potential issues and continue to build and strengthen a relationship with your community.

Here are a few tips to help manage your account after hours:

- **Establish an afterhours schedule of who is "on call" to respond to social media comments, questions or crisis situations**
- **Create a list of supervisors and other internal contacts you can reach with questions, in case of community/local emergency, or to escalate important issues (See Emergency Preparedness for more detail)**

If your social media policy allows use from a mobile device, you can install the social media apps on your phone and enable notifications. For Facebook, make sure you've also installed "Pages," which provides more functionality when you're on the go. If you already use a social media management platform such as Hootsuite to monitor your social media activity, it also makes sense to install it on your phone.

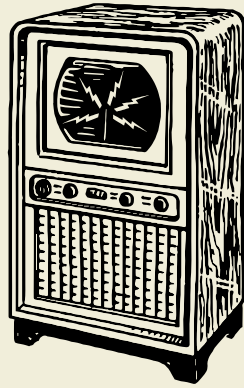
Fast Fact:
The 2007 San Diego Wildfire was the first mass use of hashtags ever.¹



¹ How Twitter's Hashtag Came to Be, The Wall Street Journal Blog, <http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2013/10/03/how-twitters-hashtag-came-to-be/>

Emergency Preparedness

When creating your strategy, it is important to address potential emergencies such as natural disasters, and major global or local events or security breaches. Consult with management and other stakeholders to develop a plan that includes who to contact, roles and responsibilities, and the specific information you can communicate to followers, based on the type of event. Here are some questions to help you plan for each scenario:



- **Natural disasters:** Is there a location where people can seek shelter? Is there a local broadcast station people can turn to for additional information? Where can people donate their time or funds to help the people affected by a natural disaster?
- **Data or security breaches:** Where can people find out if their information has been compromised? What are the next steps for those affected? What is the organization doing to investigate and manage the situation?

Creating a comprehensive strategy ahead of an emergency can make it easier to alert your community in a timely, more effective manner.

GET SIGN-OFF FROM MANAGEMENT



Before using social media, present your plan to key stakeholders. Use this time to communicate your social media goals with those who will help you succeed—such as your direct manager and other team leads—and ensure that it aligns with how your agency prefers to be represented in the public eye.

This process allows management to provide feedback on the use of social media as a communication tool, and mitigate the risk of not communicating in line with established policies. Operating outside policy or approved guidelines could easily jeopardize your organization's ability to use social media in the future.

For a well-informed and transparent discussion, remember to:

- **Explain** the different social media platforms and provide examples of how other agencies use it to communicate with their audience.
- **Present** a content policy that addresses who is responsible for creating, reviewing, and posting content.
- **Define** the "tone" or voice of your agency, including key words or phrases you can or cannot use when communicating with the public.
- **Suggest** an archiving solution, such as The Archiving Platform™ from Smarsh to aid in records requests, and reduce man-hours and costs.
- **Discuss** the standards you will use to track your success rate (See Measuring Success).



CONTENT CREATION

It's one thing to know how frequently you need to post on social media to gain traction with your audience, but it's another to know how to create content that holds their attention.

The 80/20 Rule

To keep your audience engaged, use the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of your content comes from **other sources** and 20 percent is **original content** you created. By following this rule, you can curate the content your audience finds relevant and interesting. As a result, they are more likely to pay attention when you create promotional and agency-focused posts. People don't want to read a feed jam packed with content that only speaks about your agency. By mixing it with third-party content, people tune in longer, and consider you a valued resource. Sharing a mixture of content from a variety of sources allows your office to share the burden of content creation, while also having enough content to maintain enough posted content to stay in front of your audience.

Source content through strategy

Keeping your audience in mind, focus on items that speak to their interests (see Understanding Your Target Audience). Content can comprise material from organizations you work with, those that are active in your community, and "sister" groups in other geographies.

Tip: For offices in public health, during flu season, this could be as simple as sharing a video from Sesame Street found on YouTube on the importance of handwashing.

Tip: Using software that allows you to schedule posts in advance frees you up to engage more with your followers.

Create a content library

You will be better served to create a content library of "evergreen" content-or pieces that are always relevant. These pieces can be shared over and over again without being outdated. For each piece of content, create five separate posts under 140 characters, including the link to the source. By keeping each post to the length of a tweet, you ensure your content will post across **all** the social networks. Saving these posts to a library lets you recycle content without re-creating the wheel.



Tip: Create a list of relevant accounts whose content you can share, then subscribe to their RSS feeds (if they have them). This will have all their content come to you, reducing the amount of time you spend gathering content.

WHO SHOULD APPROVE CONTENT, AND WHEN?

When creating content, you will need to decide whether to have each post approved by a supervisor or other stakeholders before it's shared on social media or have someone on staff check your outgoing social media posts for compliance with your organization's policies and other mandates after they have posted. There are pros and cons to each of these approaches.

Pre-approval

Pre-approval of social media posts is used widely by public sector organizations. One benefit of this approach is that it ensures your supervisor or management team is aware of outgoing messaging, and approves it before it's shared / published.



However, getting all posts pre-approved can take a substantial amount of time, inhibiting the number of posts you can realistically share, and the number of comments you can respond to quickly. This tends to hamper real-time, authentic relationship-building.

Checking Posts After They've Been Published

This approach assumes that in general, social media content does not need to be approved by a supervisor or management before it can be posted. Instead, someone on staff is tasked with 'monitoring' posts manually by logging into the organizations social media accounts several times a day to check on content (very time consuming), or using a social media monitoring solution, like NUVI, to help catch posts that need immediate attention or response.

In the public sector, it's important for a designated staff member to review official organizational posts and **also** keep tabs on comments from external constituents (community members, voters, industry leaders, etc.) to ensure their voices are heard and responded to appropriately. An overall benefit of this approach is that it allows you to respond to comments and sentiments from the public in real time. As a result, you can foster natural conversations that build authenticity and connection, which can be crucial in building trust with the community.

The drawback is that it increases the risk of sharing an off-message post. However, often you can still take corrective action on a post after it's been shared.

ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE

A well-rounded social media strategy comprises three main components: relevant content, incremental growth, and consistent engagement. When organizations struggle with social media, lack of engagement with their audience is typically the culprit. You may choose to simply publish content and blast it to the masses, but don't forget to take a moment and engage your followers. Talk to them, **about** them. Draw them into conversation. Help them with their concerns and issues. At a minimum, you need to answer their questions in a timely manner—typically within 15 minutes. Create a space to talk to your engaged followers: Did they retweet your content? Thank them. Did they Instagram a picture from your lobby and tag your location? Talk to them about their visit.

Once you have built a culture among your loyal followers, you'll be amazed what they are willing to do to further your message—without you asking them to do it.



How to Deal with Hecklers and Trolls

Most people who have been on social media for a while have experienced hecklers and trolls. Dealing with them is similar to how you would respond to a face-to-face encounter. When you first receive criticism, you may have the urge to immediately delete it. Don't. Most of the time, these posts will give your organization the opportunity to strengthen an obviously strained relationship with someone in your community, and clear up any miscommunication. Here are three steps to help you handle the not-so-nice stuff-while maintaining your professionalism and integrity:

● **Step 1:**

Acknowledge the complaint:

Most of the time, people just want to be heard. Repeating their concern back to them shows you're paying attention. Remember, your responses are public; admitting fault where your organization has none is not recommended.



● Step 2:

Express Empathy:

Making statements that use "feeling" words can humanize and diffuse the situation. Expressing empathy can be folded into the first step by acknowledging their concern. Make statements with "feeling phrases" such as:

- o I'm sorry you feel...
- o I understand you're unhappy with...
- o I hear your concern...
- o I apologize for...

Responding directly to the post also allows people who are not involved in the concern or incident to see the personality of your agency and how well—and quickly—you respond to negative comments or conflict.



● Step 3:

Know when to move the conversation offline.

There are circumstances that you cannot solve in a couple of online posts. If the complaint is of a personal or volatile nature, take the situation away from social media. Offer them an email or phone number they can reach out to. This empowers them by creating opportunity to take control, and they will likely follow your lead. Be sure to re-read the comment thread, and ensure that anyone else who reads it can see that you were proactive in trying to remedy the situation.

NOTE:

If the situation escalates to the point of endangering the safety of others, immediately contact the local authorities. Do not attempt to determine the credibility of the commenters intent.

Trollin', Trollin', Trollin'...

Occasionally, you will run into people who are best categorized as trolls. They do not wish to be pacified. Their only goal is derision. After acknowledging their complaint and expressing empathy, if they show no signs of letting up, stop interacting with them altogether. There is a common saying in social media: "Do not feed the trolls." Interacting with them only provides more ammunition for them to use against you. Should a post spiral out of control, be prepared to delete

it. Only do this when your policy permits it, if the post is going to do more harm than good, or when more people are going to be drawn into the skirmish than could become proponents of your agency.



Rumor Control

Government agencies are in a unique and precarious situation when it comes to maintaining transparency. In government spaces-especially local sectors-thwarting rumors can be the greatest challenge. You can get ahead of these by using your social media accounts to dispel untruths.

One tactic is to create a space on your website to host rumors and local tales. Here, you can fully debunk the myths plaguing your community. In these posts you can link to contributing sources, allowing your audience to see where you are getting your additional information. You can also validate your statements, and establish yourself as a thought leader. When content is finalized, use your social media channels to disseminate the information.

Providing a space where your audience knows they can find the truth enables them to display greater trust in your leadership.

Uh-Ohs and Mistakes

Working in social media is not without risk. Most of the time, a typo is not a huge deal, and connecting the wrong link is more embarrassing than damaging. However, each year we witness large organizations make big mistakes.



While we hope mishaps like linking to inappropriate sites or giving out personal information don't happen to you, it's good to know how to correct these issues. Use the following steps to help mend the mistake.

- **Step 1:** Alert your supervisors and check your social media policy for your organization's stance on deleting/revising posts. Redacting the posts usually removes the potential for further fallout. Remember to check across all platforms to ensure complete deletion.
- **Step 2:** Admit fault and acknowledge the harm-perceived or otherwise-that was caused by the mistake.
- **Step 3:** Commit to being more vigilant to ensure it doesn't happen again.

Addressing mistakes is not an easy or fun task. By tackling the issue head-on and trying to get through it with grace and dignity, you can shorten the lifespan of the mistake-rather than ignoring it and allowing it to simmer.

DETERMINING VALUE

Review your main reasons for using social media. What were your main motivators? Then, figure out how you can track your results. If you want greater exposure in your community to drive civic engagement, tracking the number of people who follow you and live within your area is an easy metric to monitor. Analyzing the data can show important trends, such as month-to-month growth and most-popular topics or information that generated the most interest. It can also help establish the value of your content and engagement.

Every couple of months, revisit your metrics to make sure you're:

- Reaching a relevant audience
- Creating enough quality content
- Consistently interacting with your community to foster a loyal following and driving engagement



By measuring your success and continuing to refine your strategies, you will ensure maximum return on the time and energy you put into managing your social media accounts. If you don't see growth, the problem may lie within one of the aforementioned points. After analyzing which efforts are not working to your advantage, be sure to adjust and find the right balance.

MEASURING SUCCESS



Measuring success on social media is much harder than people realize. To measure successfully, pick a set of metrics or key performance indicators (KPI) and stick to them. Everyone wants to have the MOST followers, likes, comments, shares, viral content, etc., but how accurate is that for gauging effectiveness? If your only goal is to be liked, those numbers and stats work great. If you want to drive awareness for a cause or increase event attendance, you need to measure success by different metrics.

WHY AUTOMATE?

Given the sheer number of posts you need to create to stay at the top of the feed and garner attention, you can choose to either be chained to logging in and manually posting to each platform, or automate your delivery. On Twitter, maintaining visibility can mean posting more than 20 times a day. Multiply this by the number of accounts and platforms you use...you see where this is going.



Knowing your audience and their social media habits can provide insight as to when they are on social media, which helps you create a schedule for automated posting. There are several tools designed to help in the scheduling process such as Hootsuite, Buffer, or Sprout Social.

Although posting organically is more authentic, most teams do not have the bandwidth or resources. Working smarter-not harder-through automation can help you achieve greater reach within your community, while creating more engagement opportunities.

PUBLIC RECORDS, RECORDS REQUESTS, AND THE CASE FOR ARCHIVING



Communicating in the public sector doesn't stop at regularly logging onto social media. You must also be aware of the requirements for retaining records of your communications. Essentially, if the content occurs electronically, it must be retained—or archived—electronically. Every post, comment, like, share, pin, or tweet you create or receive, is considered a matter of public record. It's difficult to capture and reproduce every interaction on social media—including posts that have been removed or flattened into a text-based, email-like format when being retained. Social media companies are not required to provide content, and requesting records from other stakeholders, printing and filing hard copies, and storing them in file drawers are not viable alternatives.

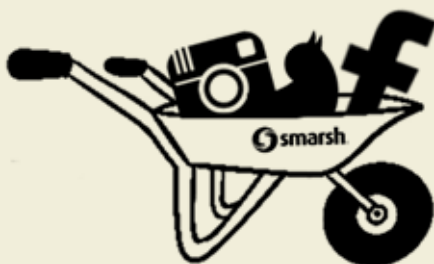
What Needs to be Archived:

- The original post, along with any comments and actions.
- All metadata, which provides evidence of the creation and actions taken within the post.
- All revisions and deletions made by you, someone in your department, or a member of the community.

Records requests allow members of the community to ask for any incoming and outbound conversations, for any time period. Not only are the number of requests made to agencies in the public sector increasing in volume, it's also increasing the pressure on your department to fulfill these requests in a timely manner. Failure to do so can expose you to public scrutiny, and expensive, high-profile lawsuits.



THE SOLUTION



Automated archiving can eliminate these pain points by streamlining the process, making it more time efficient, reducing manual labor and the risk of error, plus the added benefit of making it safe to use social media platforms that facilitate communication.

7 Major Benefits of Automated Archiving:

- Automatic ingestion, indexing, and retention across content types makes it easier to locate and produce records—as they originally occurred.
- A secure, cloud-based solution eliminates the need for on-premise storage—allowing you to produce information quickly and from a single source.
- A platform with a fast and thorough search feature makes it easy to retrieve content by keyword or other granular criteria detailed in the records request.

- Reduced response time can mitigate the risk of lawsuits brought on by a failure to satisfy records requests in a timely manner.
- Links, photos, attachments, and other metadata are ingested and retained—along with any edits or deletions made to the original post—in proper context.
- Increase your productivity with automated filters that keep irrelevant messages out of your review process, so you can focus on greater risks.
- Safely expand your social program to reach your community when, where, and how they communicate—knowing that the content is being supervised and policy-checked.

The Archiving Platform™ from Smarsh is a leading, cloud-based, comprehensive archive platform supporting a broad range of content types, including email, instant and text messages, web, video, and social media. Core features include the retention of all archived content in an indexed and search-ready state, policies, cases and admin/reporting functions. Core features can be extended and enhanced with specialized workflow add-on modules for message supervision/review, discovery, and personal access to archived email from any device, including mobile ones.



Smarsh delivers cloud-based archiving solutions for the information-driven enterprise. Its centralized platform provides a unified compliance and e-discovery workflow across the entire range of digital communications, including email, public and enterprise social media, websites, instant messaging and mobile messaging. Founded in 2001, Smarsh helps more than 20,000 organizations meet regulatory compliance, e-discovery and record retention requirements. The company is headquartered in Portland, Ore. with offices in New York, Boston, Los Angeles and London.

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