

THINK.SHIFT
WHITE PAPER



SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Because these days you can't afford to be "anti-social."

THINK SHIFT

Intellectual Capital from Think Shift brains

PG2	PG3	PG4	PG6	PG8	PG10	PG11
Introduction	Social Media 101	Risk and Liability	Balancing Risk With Reward	Six Steps For Getting Social	To Conclude	Footnotes



INTRO- DUCTION

At its core, social media provides a voice. The public (not the advertiser, not the business executive) now holds the power.

Within the space of a decade, social media changed the way people communicate. It's the kind of phenomenon that simply can't be manufactured. **At its core, social media provides a voice. The public (not the advertiser, not the business executive) now holds the power.** Social media distinguishes itself from traditional media by not only delivering content to its audience, but also by allowing its audience members to create and distribute their own content.

While the public enjoys increasing transparency and engagement, the benefits of social media are not limited to the end-user. Social media applications allow organizations and businesses of any size – including non-profits or government agencies – to “engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than can be achieved with more traditional communication tools¹.”

While anyone can create a Facebook page or begin tweeting, it's wise for an organization to begin its foray into social media with a bit more consideration. Our intent in writing is to help you do just that. We start with a basic definition of social media, its categories and their uses. We talk about managing some of the most common risks associated with social media, and look at the benefits of adopting a strategic social media plan. Finally, we provide six steps for getting social.

In a nutshell, social media refers to “online technologies and practices to share content, opinions and information, promote discussion and build relationships. Social media services and tools involve a combination of technology, telecommunications and social interaction. They can use a variety of formats, including text, pictures, audio and video².”

Social media can be broken into any number of categories (a quick Google search provides links and infographics that claim there are as many as 30 types of social media sites). For simplicity's sake, we've kept it to four categories: collaborative projects, blogs and microblogs, content communities, social networks¹.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS let multiple users contribute content simultaneously. Within this category, we can further distinguish between *wikis* – websites (like Wikipedia) that allow users to add, remove and edit text-based content – and *bookmarking sites* (like Stumbleupon or Digg) that enable users to save, compile and navigate different links. Often, bookmarking sites encourage user comments and voting to determine which content deserves a prominent position on the site. A key takeaway for organizations:

Collaborative projects are becoming the **primary source of information** for a growing number of online users¹.

BLOGS are websites that typically contain reverse-chronologically organized entries that allow for interaction and discussion through comments or forums. Blog authors can determine whether comments require moderation before going live; certain blogs choose to require users to register and login before posting comments. With *microblogs* (like Twitter) users post short messages, which are then pushed out to anyone who subscribes to that user.

CONTENT COMMUNITIES allow users to upload, share and discuss different types of media including images (ex: Flickr) and video (ex: YouTube). The statistics for YouTube are staggering: More video is uploaded to YouTube in one month than was created by the three major networks in 60 years. Four billion videos are viewed each day. One hour of video is uploaded every second.³

It's a reminder to organizations that **people respond to images and video – it may be the most effective way to communicate your message.**

SOCIAL NETWORKS (like Facebook or LinkedIn) allow users to create a profile, find, interact and share content (text updates, links, images and video) with members of their networks. To best make use of social networking sites, organizations should **keep in mind the users' primary reason for being there – LinkedIn users have a very different goal than Facebook users – and tailor content to that purpose.**

As IBM's Tish Falco notes, “people are using social media channels to not only communicate with their friends and family about their everyday lives, but to talk to other people about their customer experience with companies and organizations.” Audiences can now share their experiences with others “to promote positive or negative word-of-mouth advertising⁴.”

Some of the most common risks associated with the use of social media are cyber-security, misinformation and offensive or damaging comments.

Cyber-security is a risk for anyone who uses the internet, but the severity of risk is amplified when it comes to companies or government agencies. Intellectual property and personal information are prime targets: a breach can affect an organization's reputation and public confidence overnight⁵. Although organizations can take steps to prevent their social accounts from being hacked (firewalls, passcodes, etc), as protective methods become more advanced, so do viruses and hacking capabilities⁵.

The viral nature of social media means *misinformation* can spread exponentially. **A false or misleading post or piece of content can be transferred in real time to a huge audience, spreading much faster than any type of traditional media.** With virtually no time between posting and public reaction, retractions prove impossible.

To test just how easy it is to spread false information through social media, Day4 (a Swedish production company) created a 3D rendering of a unique screw, and anonymously uploaded the image to Reddit with the text, "A friend took a photo a while ago at that fruit company, they are obviously even creating their own screws." Less than 12 hours later, the news of Apple's new asymmetric screw had begun to spread. Most concerning, perhaps, is Day4's observation that the further the information got from the original source, the more the perception of truth increased⁶.

Social media presents a golden opportunity to build brand reputation and gain public interest, but it also opens a company up to vulnerability and the possibility of having *offensive or damaging comments* published and shared. And the threat is not always an external one: a single employee's personal opinion can become attributed to the organization as a whole. To protect an entire agency from assuming liability due to the actions of one employee, legal guidance stresses the importance of establishing a company-wide social media policy.

"The most important thing that companies can do to reduce liability when using social media ...is, firstly, to create a strong social media policy outlining acceptable and unacceptable behaviour according to specific agency rules and regulations."

According to Robert Gabor, corporate and commercial lawyer with Aikins Law, "the most important thing that companies can do to reduce liability when using social media ...is, firstly, to create a strong social media policy outlining acceptable and unacceptable behaviour according to specific agency rules and regulations. Secondly, make sure employees know about this policy and acknowledge it by signing an agreement or contract. Lastly, have that policy enforced, most likely through monitoring."

In most cases, it is not realistic to assign one individual the task of vetting all social media posts and comments before they are published. As such, employees must understand that they are personally responsible for all of their social media actions, and for making sure all contributions pass a standards checklist before being officially released.

Similarly, clear directions on how to respond to external actions comments (negative or positive) should be included in an organization's social media policy.

By developing a solid social strategy, organizations can manage their risk – tackling those tough comments and finding **effective means of engaging the masses.**



“Using social media is not an easy task and may require new ways of thinking, but the potential gains are far from being negligible¹.”

1. BRAND TRUST AND LOYALTY According to a 2010 survey, **users want to engage with organizations using social media.** The results showed that “62% of respondents trust information they receive from their social networks,” and “58% of consumers state that regular communication with a company through social media improves their loyalty⁴.”

2. A CHANGING LANDSCAPE Many organizations still rely heavily (or solely) on traditional communication methods to convey a message to their audiences, and this is especially true of public sector communications⁴. **Traditional media, however, no longer holds the monopoly as the most effective way to communicate and market a message.** Not only are traditional media (like radio, television and print ads) facing audience decline, they are also significantly more cost intensive. Some question their efficacy, suggesting that media literate audiences are becoming increasingly desensitized to traditional marketing and advertising⁷.

A related advantage is that **social media presents engagement opportunities with traditionally hard to reach groups.** By engaging audiences where they already are – instead of hoping to catch them in traditional media spaces – social media is providing better opportunities for dialogue.

3. ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY Most social media platforms are free to use and don’t require extensive staff training or technological know-how. As such, organizations may be able to save money, while investing time online in public engagement and building client relationships. Tracking and analytics allow organizations to better gauge their return on investment. (That billboard won’t tell you how many people are engaging with it, but your Facebook page will.)

4. INSIGHT AND IMPROVEMENT Companies find they can gain valuable insight into client opinions, ideas and trends from these posts – often informing recommendations for improvement across the organization. Case in point: With more than 164,000 followers, West Jet Airlines’ Twitter account (@WestJet) has become a popular connecting point for the company and its clients.

Shaw Telecommunications also jumped on the Twitter bandwagon with the launch of its account (@Shawhelp), which boasts a quick and accurate response for every client inquiry. Public agencies can experience similar benefits. When used properly, social media is a powerful tool for discovering what policies and practices are working and what needs to change.

When used properly, social media is a powerful tool for discovering what policies and practices are working and what needs to change.

SeeClickFix is a social media application doing just that. Citizens can flag and monitor issues within their communities in real-time. SeeClickFix and similar apps provide the public an accessible platform to get their voices heard and concerns addressed.

5. TRANSPARENCY In 2009, the White House released an official directive mandating the use of social media within the public sector – with the goal of government openness and accountability. Along with other practices, federal agencies were required to use social media as a way to foster transparency, participation and collaboration⁴.

The Obama administration seems to have recognized one of the most significant benefits of proper social media use: it publically demonstrates that your organization is forward-thinking and adaptable. **It reveals a willingness to be transparent and accountable, which is one of the easiest ways to encourage public participation.** It shows a desire to create open communication pathways and to connect with your audience.



Six Steps for Getting Social



After considering the many categories of social media and weighing its risks and rewards, organizations may view preparing and implementing a social media plan as a daunting task. To help you move forward, we've identified six simple steps that are integral to creating and maintaining a successful social media plan: **S**et specific goals, **O**rganize social media, **C**ontrol risk and liability, **I**ntegrate policy, **A**nalyze the results and **L**everage success.

1. SET SPECIFIC GOALS for using social media. These should be a direct reflection of your organization's values. Is your agency focused on increasing public awareness and exposure? Are you interested in gaining insight into public opinion in order to tailor products, policies or programs? Are you hoping to reach a younger demographic and search for new employees to join your organization? The list of possibilities is endless, but by starting with a clear understanding of what your company stands for, your mission, vision and key point of differentiation, you'll be able to more easily identify and narrow your options.

2. ORGANIZE SOCIAL MEDIA Determine what type of social media will best help your company meet these goals. Different social media platforms carry out different functions and offer certain specializations. If your social media plan tries to make use of too many channels, you won't be able to effectively communicate through any of them. Look into tools (like HootSuite) that can help you manage your social channels. Be sure to keep a centralized list of all login data, and don't use personal accounts to set up profiles for your organization.

3. CONTROL RISK AND LIABILITY Begin by identifying the risks most associated with the type(s) of social media you selected. Then, specifically address those concerns in your organization's social media policy. Reduce liability by ensuring that your policy clearly identifies social media boundaries and guidelines for staff. This policy will

differ depending on your organization and unique brand. Bridget Hoffer, Executive Director of Communications, Marketing and Brand for the CBC puts it this way:

“It is important to let the creative content drive brand experience. It is also important that everyone adhere to a settled upon standards of practice. At the CBC, this is the Journalistic Policy Book. It is important that individuals within the public sector apply traditional standards and practices to these modern media platforms. Employees need to understand that taking a position on a topic will have implications. It is important to be able to differentiate between using social media and presenting an opinion from an individual voice or statement from a corporate voice.”

4. INTEGRATE POLICY Creating an appropriate policy is one thing; enforcing the policy and integrating it into company practices is another. It's essential that the employee body understands and agrees to your policy. Consider all the implications or roadblocks to implementing the policy, and outline consequences for noncompliance. Look for ways to engage all branches of your organization, so your social media presence does become the voice of a single department. Create social ambassadors throughout all levels of the organization.

5. ANALYZE THE RESULTS To get the most out of social media, your organization will need review the analytics data and learn from it. Programs and companies can help provide detailed explanations, reports and insights into your specific social media statistics, helping you identify trends and meaningful patterns in the numbers. Measure success by whether you are achieving the goals you established and how well you're reaching your target audiences with your intended message. By tracking successes and opportunities for growth, you can understand what's working and what's not, adjusting where necessary.

6. LEVERAGE SUCCESS Once an organization reaches this step, it is important to survey the situation and decide where to further develop your social media plan. This may mean amending your social media policy or adding different social media platforms to better reach and engage your audience. It can also be an opportunity to re-evaluate your goals; you may notice that you're finding success with an audience you may not have expected, and that's okay. Look for ways to be responsive to changing audiences and interests – stay agile.



Social media presents a prolific cultural opportunity for organizations in both the private and public sectors. It blurs the lines between public relations, market research, advertising and branding, and in order to be used successfully, it must be integrated on all levels of an organization.

“In many ways, organizations are still thinking in a ‘managing behaviour and activity’ mindset. If change of this mindset can grow into empowerment around a purpose, social media will reflect that and be more engaging, followed and effective,” says David Baker, CEO of Think Shift Advertising.

1. *Users of the world, unite!* The challenges and opportunities of Social Media, Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (<http://michaelhaenlein.com/Publications/Kaplan,%20Andreas%20-%20Users%20of%20the%20world,%20unite.pdf>).
2. *Communicating with the outside world* – Guidelines for All Staff on the Use of Social Media, European Commission (http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/docs/guidelines_social_media_en.pdf).
3. *YouTube Press Room Statistics* (http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics).
4. *Taking Social Media Public: Social Media for Successful Citizen Relationship Management*, Tish Falco, IBM Global Business Services (http://www-935.ibm.com/services/us/en/attachments/pdf/Social_Media--RN_White_Paper.pdf).
5. *Cyber Security information for Canadian businesses*, Public Safety Canada (<http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/ns/cbr/csb-eng.aspx#c2>).
6. *How we screwed (almost) the whole Apple community (updated)*, Lukasz Lindell, Day4 (<http://day4.se/how-we-screwed-almost-the-whole-apple-community/>).
7. *Whitepaper 14: Social media in the public sector*, John Shewell, Public Relations Whitepaper Series, DWPub ([http://www.wired-gov.net/wg/wg-images-1.nsf/img/DNWA-8V7FBY/\\$file/DWPub_Public_Relations_Whitepaper14_Social_media_in_the_public_sector.pdf](http://www.wired-gov.net/wg/wg-images-1.nsf/img/DNWA-8V7FBY/$file/DWPub_Public_Relations_Whitepaper14_Social_media_in_the_public_sector.pdf)).

WORKS REFERENCED

www.mikekujawski.ca/ftp/SocialMediaPublicSectorPolicyDilemmas.pdf
www.gov.sk.ca/social-media-guidelines
www.nhsconfed.org/Documents/cogitamus_report_Aug2012.pdf
www.dodccrp.org/events/17th_icrts_2012/post_conference/papers/007.pdf
www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/ns/cbr/index-eng.aspx

“The public sector needs organizational change, developing a culture of trust and openness that will allow public servants to take advantage of the benefits that social media offer.”

-Fyfe and Crookall

CONTACT US

A – 120 DONALD STREET, WINNIPEG, MB R3C 4G2 | 204.989.4323



DAVID BAKER

CEO
dcb@thinkshiftinc.com



ALEX VARRICCHIO

Director of Marketing
alexv@thinkshiftinc.com

