

NEW MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEB 2.0

Gov 2.0 Revisited: Social Media Strategies in the Public Sector

Ines Mergel

Government 2.0—or the use of social media in the public sector—has become a hot topic. Agencies and departments on all levels of government are adding Facebook, Twitter or YouTube buttons to their otherwise static—in-frequently updated—websites. It is still not clear how successful and useful social media is in the public sector and how agencies can design their own social media strategies.

The term Government 2.0 was coined by Eggers in 2005 as the way that “Unhyped and therefore unnoticed, technology is altering the behavior and mission of city halls, state-houses, schools and federal agencies across America.” He goes on, describing Government 2.0 as “A form of digital revolution that transforms government.” Only with the successful Internet campaign and use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter of the then presidential candidate Obama the term was picked up again and is now widely used to describe the use of new forms of technology such as free and open social networking services in government (sometimes called social media or new media).

President Obama’s so-called Open Government memo from January 21, 2009 called for a more transparent, participatory and collaborative government and directed “Executive departments and agencies should harness new technologies to put information about their operations and decisions online and readily available to the public.”

Today, Government 2.0 is the “hyped” form of the use of social media in government and by its diverse stakeholders that transforms the way that government interacts with citizens in a participatory, transparent and collaborative way. The use of social media and the actual participation of all federal departments and agencies were reinforced by the Office of Management and

Budget Director Peter Orzag’s executive directive giving agencies a 60-day deadline to publish their open government plans and upload their first datasets to a dedicated website called *data.gov*.

In April 2010, Cass Sunstein, Whitehouse advisor, published a memo that specified the use of social media in government advising the heads of the federal agencies and departments on how to handle content published and public feedback posted on social media sites under the Paperwork Reduction Act. While agencies were hesitant at the beginning, the GSA’s “Terms of Service Process for Free Social Media Products” with no-cost social media providers made it easier for agencies and departments to pick and chose the applications they found useful to promote a greater openness.

What we can now observe is a surge to use social networking services in government: almost every federal agency and department has at least one Facebook organizational page and at least one official Twitter account—many even have a dedicated social media site which aggregates all their different accounts (see for example *cdc.gov/socialmedia*).

Although for many agencies it has become mainstream practice to use social media applications and “be where our audiences are,” it is clear that not every agency has the same goal or a dedicated social media strategy. Some start by setting up blogs, Facebook fanpages, several Twitter accounts, YouTube channels, etc., but the actual use and outreach proves to be very diverse.

“We have to be where the people are!”

From my interactions with new media directors in the federal agencies and departments, I differentiate between three different types of social media use to promote transparency, participation and collaboration:

- *The first strategy can be called push strategy:* The new medium is used as an extension of the existing (usually relatively static) Internet presence and is used as an additional communication channel “to get the message out.” This results in un-moderated Twitter updates that are mainly used to publish press releases or appearances of the secretaries, unmanned Facebook walls that are blocked for public comments and sparsely populated YouTube channels.

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- *The second strategy can be called pull strategy:* Social media applications are used to bring audiences back to an organization’s website, where the news is aggregated (to avoid losing control of what happens with the information). Pull strategies are actively involving audiences using some degree of interaction that result in a few comments from on Facebook walls and a few retweets (reuses of messages by other Twitter users) or answers to comments on responses from Twitter followers. Examples include the CDC’s use of social media tools to alert and inform the public about peanut salmonella outbreak or its H1N1 flu campaign.
- *The third strategy—and at the same time the least observable—can be called networking strategy.* The use of social media tools is highly interactive with a lot of back and forward between the agency and its diverse constituencies. The new media directors usually have a sense of who is following them and who they want to reach. They are using Facebook, Twitter, etc., very strategically not only to control and direct messages to their audiences, but also to have their ears and eyes on the channels where the actual issues are being discussed that might be of relevance to their agency’s or department’s mission. Social media tools are not only used for mere publishing purposes and are not viewed as a time sink of the already over-

worked IT staff, but as a strategic information sharing and knowledge creation tool involving social media champions from different content areas.

One agency that stands out is GSA that used an informal social networking site called *GovLoop.com* to create a group and discuss their “Acquisition 2.0” strategy. The discussions of a diverse audience of government employees has led to the creation of the Better Buy wiki project (see *betterbuy.fas.gsa.gov*) that truly transforms the acquisition process of GSA multibillion dollar budget: Tenders are now “crowd-sourced”—meaning that vendors and agencies are asked to submit their revisions to the final document before it is officially released for solicitation.

How to design your social media strategy

The question now is: What does a successful social media strategy look like? On the federal level very few departments and agencies have made their social media strategies or policies publicly available, but from interviews with the current new media directors I derived a few general observations:

- It is necessary to get people on board and don’t put the use and content creation on the shoulders of the one-person IT shop, instead understand the need to socialize your strategy and find champions who are interested in experimenting with new media and include them in early efforts.
- Social media does not replace the existing traditional channels of communication with government’s stakeholders, instead it provides a test bed for new ways of interactions with citizens and public.
- Design your social media strategy around the mission and the audiences you are trying to reach and not the necessity to be out there and part of the movement. Make a conscious decision what your expectations are and if you have the manpower to actually interact and network with your audiences.
- Reach has not yet proven its value and measurement of the outcome is difficult. The pure number of Twitter followers or Facebook fans does not indicate the actual impact. It is more important to understand who follows your Twitter or Facebook profile; what do your followers do with the content and who is in the network of each of these followers: Social networks have the ability to distribute information from friends to friends and their friends and can therefore reach many more than just the few directly following your updates.

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Majority of Americans Get News from Online and Offline Sources Every Day

Washington, DC—The overwhelming majority of Americans (92 percent) use multiple platforms to get their daily news.

And the internet is now the third most-popular news platform. It falls behind local and national television news and ahead of national print newspapers, local print newspapers and radio. Still, the overall reality is that the internet fits into a broad pattern of news consumption by Americans. Six in ten (59 percent) get news from a combination of online and offline sources on a typical day.

Just 7 percent of American adults get their daily news from a single media platform, and those who do typically rely on either the internet or local television news.

“Americans have become news grazers both on and offline—but within limits,” says Amy Mitchell, Deputy Director for The Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, “They generally don’t have one favorite website but also don’t search aimlessly. Most online news consumers regularly draw on just a handful of different sites.”

The internet and mobile technologies are at the center of the story of how people’s relationship to news is changing. In today’s new multi-platform media environment, people’s relationship to news is becoming portable, personalized, and participatory:

- **Portable:** 33 percent of cell phone owners now access news on their cell phones.
- **Personalized:** 28 percent of internet users have customized their home page to include news from sources and on topics that particularly interest them.
- **Participatory:** 37 percent of internet users

have contributed to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via postings on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter.

33 percent of cell owners get news on their mobile devices; 28 percent have personalized their news experience; and 37 percent have participated in creating or reacting to news...

The rise of social media like social networking sites and blogs has helped the news become a social experience for consumers; people use their social networks and social networking technology to filter, assess, and react to news. They also use traditional email and other tools to swap stories and comment on them.

These findings form the centerpiece of a new report from the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project and the Project for Excellence in Journalism aimed at understanding today’s news environment and the “new” news consumer. The report is based on a national telephone survey of 2,259 adults ages 18 and older.

“News awareness is becoming an anytime, anywhere, any device activity for those who want to stay informed,” argued Kristen Purcell, Associate Director for Research at the Pew Research Center’s Internet &

American Life Project. “We see new segments of avid news consumers built around those who have set up news alerts and those who are eager to be part of the news-creation and news-commentary environment.”

Other main findings from the report:

- *Six in ten American adults (61 percent) get news online on a typical day, and 71 percent of Americans get news online at least occasionally.*
- *Getting news is an important social act.* Some 72 percent of American news consumers say they follow the news because they enjoy talking with others about what is happening in the world and 69 percent say keeping up with the news is a social or civic obligation. Moreover, among those who get news online, 75 percent get news forwarded through email or posts on social networking sites and 52 percent share links to news with others via those means.
- *When getting news online, Americans use just a handful of news sites and do not have a favorite.* The majority of online news consumers (57 percent) routinely rely on just two to five websites for their news, and only 35 percent have a favorite.
- *Portal websites like Google News, AOL and Topix are the most commonly used online news sources,* visited by over half of online news users (56 percent) on a typical day. Also faring well are the sites of traditional news organizations with an offline presence, such as CNN, BBC and local or national newspapers. Age, political party and ideology all affect an individual’s preference for particular online news sources.
- *The 26 percent of Americans who get news*

on their cell phones are typically white males, median age 34, who have graduated from college and are employed full-time. Overall, cell users under age 50 are almost three times as likely as their older counterparts to get news on their cell phones (43 percent v. 15 percent).

- *Americans have mixed feelings about the current news environment.* Over half (55 percent) say it is easier to keep up with news and information today than it was five years ago, but 70 percent feel the amount of news and information available from different sources is overwhelming.
- *Americans also have mixed feelings about the quality of news today.* Just under two-thirds (63 percent) agree with statement that “major news organizations do a good job covering all of the important news stories and subjects that matter to me.” Yet 71 percent also agree that “most news sources today are biased in their coverage.”

This report is based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research International between December 28, 2009, and January 19, 2010, among a sample of 2,259 adults, 18 and older, who were contacted on landline and cell phones.

The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project is one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center. For more information on the Internet & American Life project visit <http://pewinternet.org/>. The Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism is dedicated to trying to understand the information revolution. For more information on the journalism project visit www.journalism.org.

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It's Clear Social Media is Here to Stay

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- While a lot of rumors circulate about generational differences and that the main audience are young citizens, it has become clear that social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook have the highest increase rates in the age group of +35 year olds. Moreover, the Facebook newsfeed has the potential to become an important information mechanism that aggregates traditional media sources with information spreading through the trusted friendship network people are paying attention to.

Over a year into the Government 2.0 movement it is clear that social media is here to stay and not a fleeting fad. Although there is a surge to jump on the bandwagon, deciding how the different social media channels fit into an agency’s mission is a crucial step that should involve top management but also all departments that might populate the social media channels with content.

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