



SOCIAL MEDIA FACT SHEET

What is social media?

Social media is integrated technology that allows users to generate their own content and then share that content through various connections. Social media is synonymous with Web 2.0, technology that focuses on integration, collaboration, and interaction. There are numerous social media tools available, many for little or no cost. Examples of social media include blogs, social networking sites, microblogging sites, photo- and video-sharing sites, location-based networks, wikis, mashups, RSS feeds, and podcasts.

How is social media different from traditional media?

Social media uses new technology and therefore has many aspects that differentiate it from traditional media outlets.

Immediacy – Where newspapers have to wait for the next publication, and television news stations have to get a reporter to the scene, social media allows news to come straight from the source in real time. This allows users to control the conversation by being the first to distribute information and by having the ability to immediately respond to inaccurate or negative information.

Interaction – Where traditional forms of communication tend to be one-way communication, social media facilitates conversations and interactions among users. Users are also able to decide what content they want and how they want to receive it.

Audience – By reaching out in new ways, an agency can reach audiences that have typically been difficult to reach, audiences that may need to hear these messages the most. Social media are not tools used only by youth. With worldwide users, social media channels provide agencies with a platform to reach out to larger audiences than ever.

What does social media have to do with law enforcement?

The world has embraced social media and is using it in new ways every day. Organizations in any arena that dismiss social media will find themselves falling behind. Law enforcement agencies can use social media tools for various functions. Photos, video, news, alerts, and educational information can be immediately shared with community members. Agencies can and do use these tools to post alerts and press releases, engage in community outreach, and prevent and solve crimes.

Social media strategy

It is important to have a social media policy and strategy before your agency starts to use social media tools. Consult the legal and communications office for your agency or unit of government to determine the most effective approach. It may also be helpful to browse other agency sites to see how they are currently using the various services. Here are some questions to consider when developing your strategy:

- Who is your audience?
- What are you hoping to get from using social media?
- What type of messages are you planning to publish? What other information (such as photos and videos) do you hope to publish?
- What social media sites will you use?
- Who will be in charge of maintaining your social media sites?
- How often will you post new content?
- What will be your policy for dealing with offensive and negative comments?

Some of these questions can also be addressed in your agency's social media policy. When creating your social media policy, think about scope of the policy, staff members' personal use, official agency use, and related legal issues.

Agencies using social media

- Houston, Texas, Police Department
- Boynton Beach, Florida, Police Department
- Wichita, Kansas, Police Department
- Chicago, Illinois, Police Department
- San Diego County, California, Sheriff's Department
- Texas A&M University Police Department

International Association of Chiefs of Police

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