

THE STATE *of* SOCIAL MEDIA

in the Public Sector

2020



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CONTENTS

Introduction

Methodology

Social Media Adoption

- 5 *Preferred Platforms*
- 8 *How, When, & What to Post*
- 10 *People Behind the Profiles*
- 12 *Challenges to Adoption*

Policy & Practice

- 15 *Internal Social Media Policy*
- 15 *External Social Media Policy*
- 18 *Responsiveness*
- 18 *Measuring Success*
- 20 *Resources for Communicators*
- 21 *Social Media & Public Record Law*

What's Next?

What You Can Do Now: Best Practices Checklist

INTRODUCTION



ALIX BOWMAN

*Director of Customer Experience
for ArchiveSocial*

It's hard to believe that it has only been 16 years since "TheFacebook" first encouraged us to share our feelings with the world, and barely more than a decade since it gave us the power to "like" each other. Twitter transformed the humble pound sign into the all-mighty hashtag as recently as 2007!

While social media had its share of early adopters (raise your hand if you were on Six Degrees!), widespread adoption and use by the public sector didn't start to pick up until around 2014. This is both when half of the responders to this survey started up their agency's social media, and coincidentally when I found my way to **ArchiveSocial**.

At the time, most of the agencies we worked with were using social media as an extension of their traditional communication channels. While there were certainly early pioneers making engaging content, many agencies used Facebook, Twitter and Google+ (RIP) as digital bulletin boards for one-way communication. The posts were often simple repeats of announcements that could be found in press releases, emails, and static websites. Many of those who were assigned the task of setting up a Facebook page or Twitter account for their agency didn't use social media personally, didn't know anything about it, and didn't have anyone to ask for help. Half the calls and emails I received were people asking, "what are other agencies doing about this?"

My, how things have changed! Today a quick search for the words "City", "Police", or "School" in the search bar of your favorite network will yield thousands of pages and handles producing unique, engaging, and interactive content. The static bulletin board



has become an active conversation connecting residents with city managers. Civic engagement is through the roof as people sign on to comment on council meetings held live on social. Community policing is happening online, not just on the streets. Emergency communication can reach more people, including visitors and tourists who may not have access to traditional channels. Schools can connect parents, teachers, and service providers to build robust communities.

Are there challenges? Of course there are. Battles over user privacy, data protection, and content moderation are happening everywhere from City Council chambers to the Supreme Court. Social Media networks are struggling to balance the demands of their billions of users with the requirements of regulatory bodies.

Public agencies are finding that social networks have become an indispensable part of their communications strategy, yet those networks are often not built to support their needs when it comes to reach and transparency.

The good news is, now there are best practices, resources, conferences, and communities where public sector communicators can ask for help. Even so, I still get frequent calls and emails asking, “what are other agencies doing?” It’s this question that motivated this survey. The time had come to establish industry-wide benchmarks by which public sector communicators can measure their own social media strategy.

“ ”
What are other agencies doing? It’s this question that motivated this survey.

We designed the State of Social Media in the Public Sector survey to collect objective data on the who, what, when, and how of public sector use of social media. The networks are always evolving, as are best practices, so this is a snapshot of where we are in 2020.

After the survey was complete, we followed up with respondents to ask more qualitative questions about their individual challenges, goals, and plans for the future. The conclusion we drew from both the survey results and these conversations is that while social media has become indispensable for public sector communicators, the funding, staffing, and resources available to take advantage of it are still lacking. **Our sincere hope is that this report will help start the conversation to change that.**



METHODOLOGY

The State of Social Media in the Public Sector survey was designed as a **benchmarking tool for public sector agencies** who are using social media as a channel for official communication. The topics covered in the survey were based on frequently asked questions posed by ArchiveSocial users, members of online forums for public sector communicators, and attendees at government and education sector conferences.

The survey included questions about demographic information, social media platforms, social media policy and practice, social media software, metrics, and public records. Some respondents received a more limited set of questions based on their preliminary responses. All respondents were given the option to take the survey anonymously.

The survey was distributed to **over 10,000 public sector agencies** in the United States and Canada. Recipients included state and local governments, law enforcement agencies, and school districts. Six hundred twenty-nine individuals completed the survey. Eighteen respondents provided additional insights through individual phone interviews.

Close to **half of the respondents represent town, city, or county governments** (310). The next two largest groups of participants represented school districts (113) and law enforcement (91). The largest group of respondents (32.3%) represented populations between 10,000-50,000, while the second largest respondent group (24.8%) represented populations of <10,000.

WHO DID WE TALK TO?

629

total respondents from US and Canada state and local **governments, law enforcement agencies, school districts**



310

City/town/county governments



113

School districts



91

Law enforcement agencies



40

State agencies



26

Special districts



14

Fire departments



8

Federal agencies



5

Higher education



22

Other (utilities, officials, education and healthcare)

Demographics



MOST RESPONDENTS HAVE ROLES IN WHICH THEY ARE
DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR COMMUNICATION:



215

Public Information
or Relations



167

Social Media or
Communications



35

Clerk or Records
Management



30

Information Technology



12

Web Manager



16

Superintendent



23

Administrative



27

Police/Fire/Sheriff



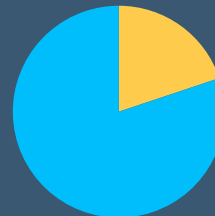
104

Other

POPULATIONS SERVED



32.3% of respondents
represented
populations between
10,000-50,000



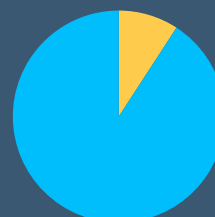
24.8% of
respondents serve
populations
of <10,000



14.5% serve
100,000-500,000



14.4% serve
50,000-100,000



10.1% serve
>1 million



3.7% serve 500,000
to 1 million



SOCIAL MEDIA ADOPTION BY PUBLIC AGENCIES

The majority of public sector communicators responding to the survey (78.9%) use social media personally as well as professionally, though a surprising 15% only use social media as a function of their role and have no personal online social presence.

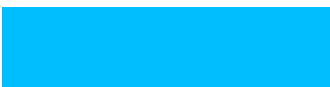
Of those using it professionally, a third have been using social media as a regular part of their job responsibilities for three to five years, while the majority (52.4%) have been doing so for more than five years. The remaining respondents either only use it personally (3.8%) or not at all (1.9%).

The survey did not include a question about how long the public agency had been using social media, but this was asked in follow up interviews. While many public sector agencies adopted social media soon after Twitter and Facebook became publicly available in 2006, the peak adoption of both platforms happened between 2010-2014. Broadly speaking, government and law enforcement agencies initiated social media slightly earlier than public education districts. **In most cases, Twitter was adopted first, then Facebook.**

PREFERRED PLATFORMS

Survey participants were asked to identify the social media networks currently in use by their agency. An overwhelming 98% of the respondents indicate that they use Facebook. Twitter came in second place, with 84%, and Instagram and YouTube were close behind with 72% and 64% respectively. The other networks listed in the survey were LinkedIn (40.1%), Nextdoor (31.4%), Flickr (9.4%), Pinterest (9.4%), Vimeo (7.6%), Snapchat (5.1%), and TikTok (1%). Respondents also reported using Nixle, Reddit, Neighbor, and Glassdoor; as well as websites and podcasts.

AGENCIES CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT **FACEBOOK**



83%

said that if they were limited to a single network, Facebook would be the one they would use



78%

of those who aren't looking to expand are also only a team of 1 or two people.



OVER 50%

of respondents have no immediate plan to add new networks to their portfolio.



Given the high percentage of respondents using Facebook for official communication, it should come as no surprise that it was also overwhelmingly chosen as the one platform that agencies can't live without. 83% said that if they were limited to a single network, **Facebook would be the one they would use.** This makes sense given that it is still the most popular worldwide in terms of daily active users.[†] Twitter was the first choice for only 10% of agencies, and all others from Nextdoor to TikTok, registered at 3% or less.

Finally, when asked about launching future networks at the agency level, over half (59%) responded that they did not have any plans to add new networks in the coming year as they are content with their current social media presence. For those that do plan to launch new networks, Instagram was number one (10.3%), followed by YouTube (6.2%), Nextdoor (5.2%), and LinkedIn (4.2%).

All other networks were chosen by 3% or less of respondents. Several communicators who participated in the follow up interviews identified video as the number one content type they want to produce more of across all platforms.

[†] <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

IS THERE A GENERATIONAL DIVIDE ON SOCIAL?

When asked how the platforms differ in terms of content and audience, many of the agencies interviewed described the platforms in terms of the typical age or generation of its users. Instagram was cited as the place to be for Millennials and Gen-Z, while Facebook was called the go-to for Gen-X and Boomers. According to Pew Research Center, however, only the Instagram assumption holds true. Their surveys indicate that Facebook is still the **most popular network for every age group** that is active on social media.

We got a fresh take on the differences between users on the major platforms from Warren Kagarise, Digital Engagement Manager from King County, WA. From his perspective, the platforms serve different basic functions, regardless of your age.

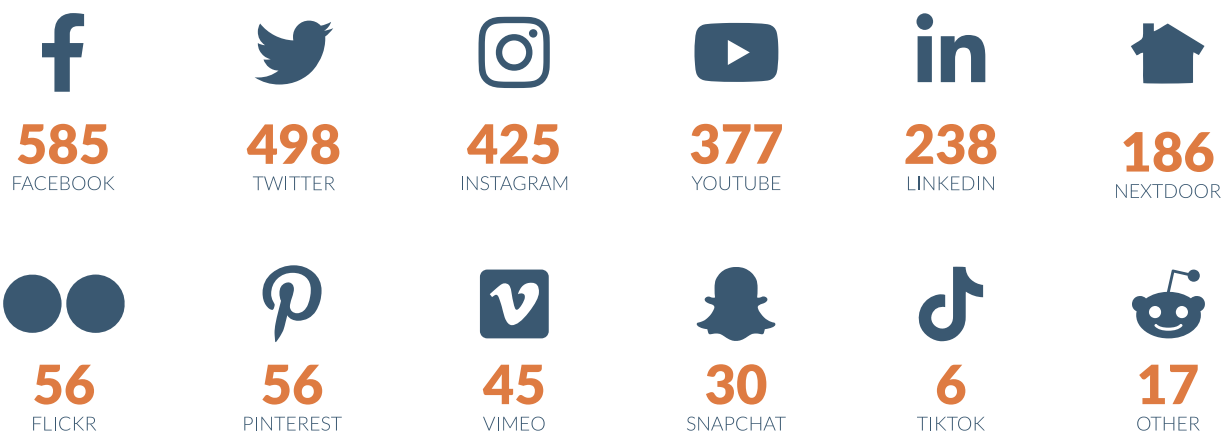
- **Twitter** is for folks who want the “news you can use.”
- **Facebook** is best for engaging community stakeholders, partners, and a cross-section of your community. It offers the best opportunity for discussion.
- **Instagram** attracts younger people who advocate for the things they want the county to do. It also seems to be the platform with the most positive comments and content.
- **Nextdoor** is a tool for pushing information and giving the public a clear call to action.



Preferred Platforms



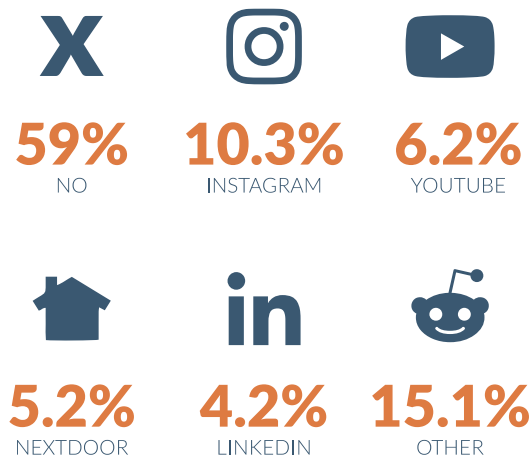
WHAT **SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS** DO YOU USE?



IF YOU COULD ONLY
KEEP **ONE**, WHAT
WOULD IT BE?



DO YOU PLAN TO
LAUNCH ANY MORE
IN THE NEXT YEAR?



HOW, WHEN, & WHAT TO POST

Most of the respondents indicated that they post to at least one social media network at least once a day. 35% post daily, while 27% post twice or more each day. 31.1% average one to four posts per week, while the rest post a few times per month or only as needed. When asked if they post unique content on each of the social media channels, over half (51.8%) said that they use the same content, making only a few small tweaks to fit a particular channel.

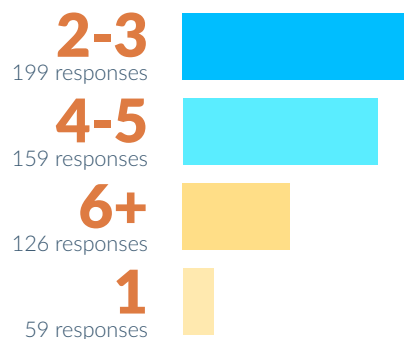
The survey did not ask whether the frequency of posting and differences in content were a deliberate choice or whether this was a result of staffing shortages and/or budgetary constraints.

Slightly less than half (44.9%) of the survey respondents reported using software to help schedule posts and publish content to social media accounts. Of those who do use scheduling and publishing software, Hootsuite was the most popular choice (60.2%). The next most commonly used software was Tweetdeck (27%), followed by Sprout Social (12%) and Buffer (5.6%).

Other social media publishing software not presented in the options but reported by users include Dlvr.it, HeyOrca, Thrillshare, Later, Sprinklr, Zoho Social, and Skedsocial. Several other social media tools for content creation, website design, and social listening were reported, but these fell into categories outside of the scope of the question. Respondents were similarly divided on the subject of ads and boosting posts.

“ ”
Forty-three percent (43%) of respondents say they pay for ads or boosted their social media posts, while 56% do not.

HOW MANY SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS DOES YOUR AGENCY CREATE CONTENT FOR AND/OR MANAGE?

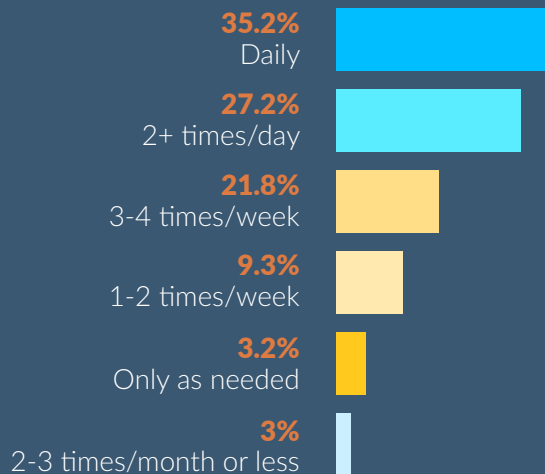


How, When, & What to Post



The verdict is clear, you have to **keep your content fresh** on social media if you want to stay relevant. Most users are **posting at least once a day** if not more, but respondents report that it can be challenging to keep up with the constant demand for new content, especially on weekends. When asked specifically what they would do more of if given the resources, interviewees identified **video as the number one content type** they want to produce more of across all platforms.

ON AVERAGE, HOW OFTEN
DOES YOUR **AGENCY POST ON**
AT LEAST ONE NETWORK?



ARE YOU USING
SCHEDULING SOFTWARE?
IF YES, WHICH ONE?



1. Hootsuite



2. Tweetdeck



3. Sprout



4. Buffer



5. Other

Dlvr.it, HeyOrca, Thrillshare, Later, Sprinklr, Zoho Social, and Skedsocial

DO YOU PAY FOR ADS OR
BOOSTED POSTS?



43% YES



56% NO



PEOPLE BEHIND THE PROFILES

The overwhelming majority (92.1%) of those who took the survey are directly responsible for creating content on one or more of their agency's social media networks. However, **only 21.3% of respondents have social media in their job title.** This is not surprising given the relatively recent adoption of social media by the public sector.

While most of those who manage social media for their agencies do have a broader communication or public information role (49.4%), close to 18% of those surveyed who do use social media as part of their job do not have a job title typically associated with official communication. This indicates that many public sector employees have been asked to take on social media in addition to existing work roles and responsibilities. The titles given for these individuals are wide-ranging and include Detective, Mayor, Executive Assistant, City Planner, Clerk, IT Director, Officer and many more.

Given the relatively small number of individuals with roles dedicated to social media, it is unsurprising that **over half of those responsible (55%) manage their agency's social presence as a team of one (36.1%) or two (18.9%) people.** After that, the most common team size is 3-5 (27.5%). Only 17.9% of respondents reported larger teams.

There was no correlation found between the size of the team and the population served. For example, there are teams of one or two managing social media for agencies serving several hundred thousand residents, and large teams of nine or more contributing to social media for populations under 10,000. Based on information provided in the follow up interviews, this discrepancy can be explained by how the question was interpreted.

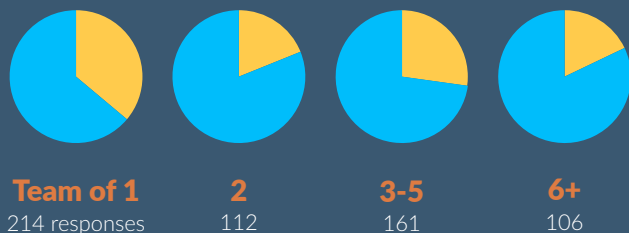
For instance, there are teams of one in large agencies who do all the posting themselves, but receive content from multiple departments. For the reverse scenario, there are small agencies who allow individuals from a wide range of departments to post directly to shared or dedicated pages (for example, parks and libraries).

There is also no apparent correlation between the number of social media accounts managed by an agency and the size of the population served. While **the most common number of social media accounts reported was 2-3 (36.4%),** there were similar numbers of survey respondents indicating that they managed 4-5 social media pages (29.1%), or 6 or more (23.1%). Only 10.8% of respondents reported that they manage a single page.

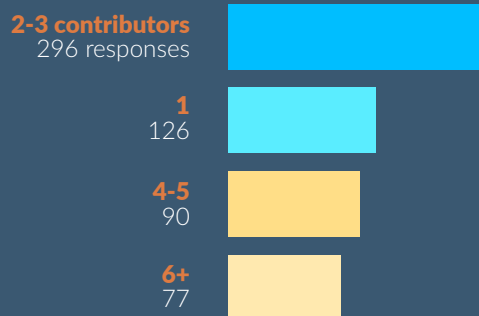
People Behind the Profiles



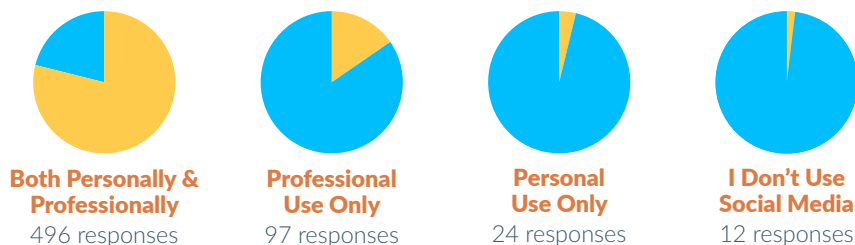
HOW BIG IS YOUR TEAM OR DEPARTMENT?



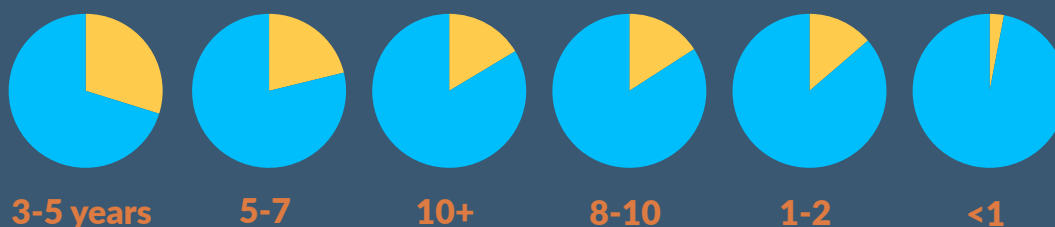
HOW MANY CONTRIBUTORS ARE ON YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA?



HOW DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA?



HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES?



WHEN SOCIAL MEDIA IS A SOLO PROJECT

Geno Palazzari, Communications Manager for the City of Gillette, Wyoming, said that he takes care of 99% of the social media himself, but struggles as a “one man show... with not a lot of bandwidth to do much more.” He is quick to add that social media is worth the effort, and has allowed him to have a positive impact on his community. Whether it is helping solve issues for residents or just keeping them informed, he gets “a lot of thanks for letting people know what the heck is going on.”

Amy Blalock, a Public Affairs Manager in Durham, North Carolina, and a social media team of one who also works with non-communication employees tasked with social media management, said that “many employees in local government are asked to create social media communications and they don’t have formal training in social media.” She adds that operating as a team of one is exceedingly difficult as **“trying to be your best self on social media 24/7 is hard.”**

While Geno and Amy get an amazing amount accomplished on their cities’ social, it can be hard to find work-life balance without backup. Kara Roberson of Wentzville, Missouri, says her priorities are to answer direct questions, correct misinformation, and provide as much detail as possible, but as a team of one, she is “on the phone constantly.” Like many others interviewed for this survey, one of Kara’s priorities for 2020 is to push for more budget to add members to the team to meet the demands for content and be even more responsive.

CHALLENGES TO ADOPTION

One of the most revealing questions in the survey asked, “what is the biggest challenge to social media adoption by your agency?” The top answer differed depending on whether or not the respondent was responsible for managing the agency’s social media.

Respondents who do not use social media as part of their jobs identified the ability to stay in compliance with records laws as the biggest hurdle for agency social media adoption (36.1%) followed by staffing and support for content and management (30.6%).

Those who actually had responsibility for their agency’s social media were far more likely to identify insufficient staffing as their biggest challenge (41%), followed by concern over the ability to manage controversy (22.9%). This group was least concerned about their ability to remain compliant. Other challenges identified were building engagement (18.5%), and gaining buy-in from higher-ups (8.9%).

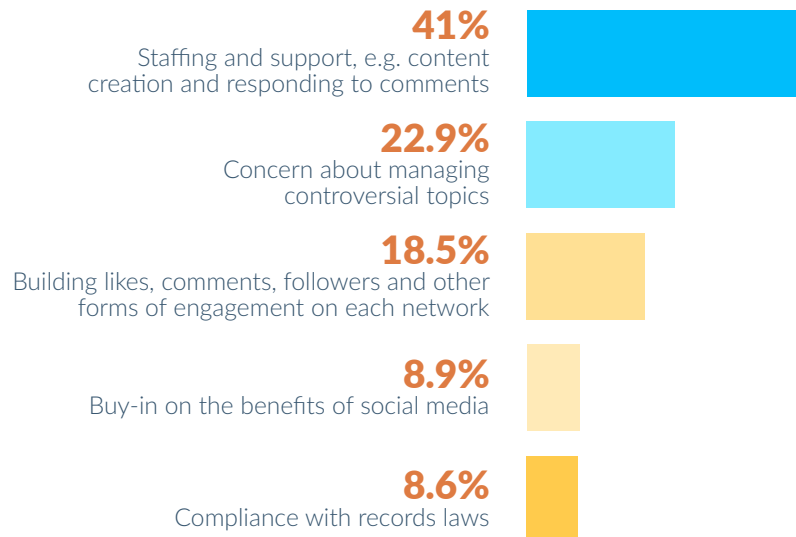


Challenges to Adoption

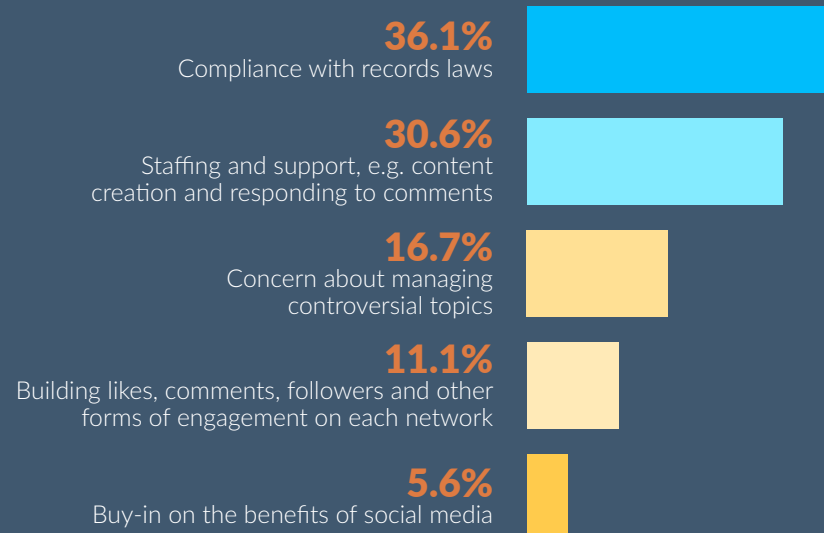


WHAT IS **THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE** TO
SOCIAL MEDIA ADOPTION BY YOUR AGENCY?

TOP CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY **SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS**



TOP CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY **SOCIAL MEDIA STAKEHOLDERS**



POLICY & PRACTICE

The next section of the survey focused on questions regarding social media policy, management, and practice. While the survey did not specifically ask why agencies started using social media to communicate with the public initially, this topic was addressed in the interviews conducted following the survey.

When asked why their agency started using social media, the response from interviewees was mixed. For agencies that did have a deliberate strategy or purpose when they started, the most commonly cited reason was **a desire to control the narrative and deliver consistent and accurate information to constituents**. Several agencies, particularly those with smaller populations, said they can no longer rely on traditional media outlets to distribute information. In some cases this is because the local media no longer exists for their market. Where it does exist, respondents reported that the media no longer accepts press releases from public agencies except on a limited range of topics.

“ ”
Without access to traditional media, agencies turned to social media to tell their own stories.

Other common reasons cited for being on social media include:

- Improving customer service, and building trust between agencies and the community
- Establishing an audience for emergency communications
- Increasing access to decision-making bodies (e.g. live streamed council meetings)

HOW TO GET 1,000 FOLLOWERS BEFORE YOUR FIRST TWEET:

When the Chesapeake Public School District in Virginia decided to get on Twitter, Director of Communications Angie Smith knew they needed to start with a clear purpose. Smith and her team developed a written strategy designed to inform the school community, promote events, and shine a spotlight on the achievements of their students and staff.

Smith built excitement around the district's Twitter by promoting the time and date of their first tweet weeks in advance. **They even put a countdown clock on the district website!** When the day came, the district already had 1,000 followers waiting to read, “One small tweet for Twitter, one big tweet for CPS.”



INTERNAL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

The survey continued with questions exploring how internal contributors to official agency pages are managed. Even though the data above suggests that agency social media pages are managed in large part by only one or two people, the majority of respondents (71%) indicated that multiple people contribute content to these pages. In over 7% of agencies, the number of individual contributors is ten or more.

The majority of respondents (67.8%) indicated that they do have a formal policy in place that governs these contributors. Typically these policies provide guidance on tone, official representation, approved topics, and purpose.

The 32.2% who do not have a formal policy in place were then asked how they manage content produced by secondary contributors. Of that group, 31.4% do all of the posting themselves (though only ⅓ of this group also creates all the content), 29.3% share a login, and 20.4% approve all content before it is posted. The remaining respondents who do not have a policy in place use a variety of methods including training, committee approval, and careful monitoring of content after posting.

EXTERNAL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Surprisingly, only 58.7% of respondents have a social media policy in place for external users. What's more, 12.7% of those who do have a policy in place do not have it publicly posted. Those that do make it publicly available, do so by posting the policy on the social media network, their agency website, or both.

While 348 respondents indicated that they do have a published social media policy, only 266 of them say that they use the published policy to manage public comments on their social media posts. A sizable chunk (27%) claim to simply use their best judgement to moderate content, while 8.8% consult with their legal teams. 14% don't do any comment moderation at all, leaving all posts and comments as is. The remainder use some combination of the above practices, don't allow comments (which is not possible on some social media networks), or, as one commenter put it,

“ ”

“Keep the good and the bad. Delete the ugly.”

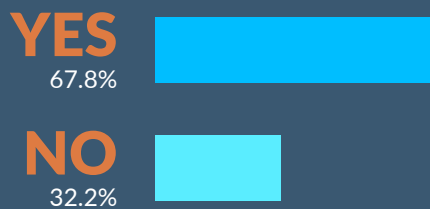
Internal Social Media Policy



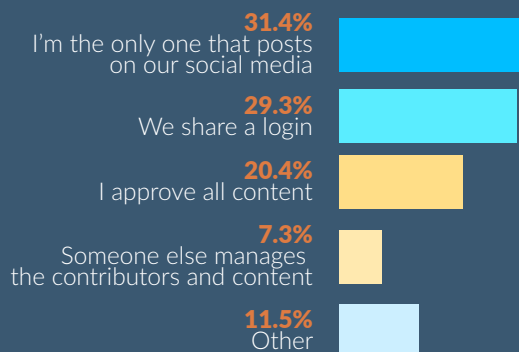
68% of respondents indicated that they do have a **formal policy in place that governs these contributors**. Typically these policies provide guidance on tone, official representation, approved topics, and purpose. Given that one of the most common reasons given for using social media was **improving customer service and building trust**, it was surprising that nearly half of respondents don't have a policy around responding to comments, and **only two-thirds of those that do are staffed to meet these**



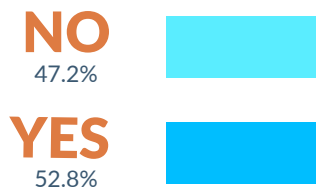
DOES YOUR AGENCY HAVE A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR INTERNAL CONTRIBUTORS?



FOR THOSE WITHOUT AN INTERNAL POLICY, HOW DO YOU MANAGE CONTRIBUTORS?



DO YOU HAVE A GOAL OR MANDATE ON HOW QUICKLY YOU RESPOND TO COMMENTS FROM YOUR COMMUNITY?



ARE YOU STAFFED TO MEET THESE GOALS?



External Social Media Policy



(((

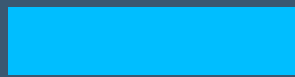
We have team discussions and stay consistent. Legal advice is available if needed.

(((

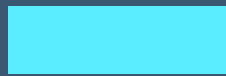
We advocate the right to free speech. When content is stated as fact but isn't, or when it's deemed offensive, threatening, degrading or harmful to an individual or group, we typically issue a warning and hide it.

DO YOU HAVE A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS, E.G. **ONE THAT GOVERNS ACCEPTABLE USE OR COMMENT MODERATION?**

YES
58.7%

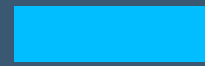


NO
41.3%



IS THAT POLICY
PUBLICLY AVAILABLE?

36.8%
Yes, it's posted on the appropriate network



26.4%
Yes, it's both on our website and on the appropriate network



24.4%
Yes, it's on our website



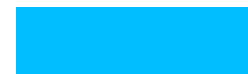
12.4%
No



HOW DO YOU MANAGE
PUBLIC COMMENTS ON YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA?



44.9%
We use our social media policy to guide us



27.7%
We use our best judgment



14.3%
We don't – anything posted stays on our page



8.8%
We consult with legal support



4.4%
Other



RESPONSIVENESS

Many of the individuals interviewed after taking the survey cited customer service and providing accurate information as primary drivers for having an official presence on social media. However, when asked, “Do you have a goal or mandate on how quickly you respond to comments from your community?” only 52.8% said yes. Those who said that this was a goal or mandate were then asked if they were staffed to meet those goals, and only 65.2% said yes.

The survey did not ask those who did not have a mandate if lack of staffing to support it was a reason, but the responses given during the individual interviews would indicate that this is the case. Katie Grant, Digital Media Coordinator for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources said that their agency intends to answer questions within four hours, but this is only possible during normal business hours. She followed up with,

“ ”
“In a perfect world, we’d have someone on call every weekend.”

MEASURING SUCCESS

While the data and interviews suggest there is wide-spread belief that social media is now a necessary part of public sector communication, **less than half (47.9%) of the agencies surveyed have an established process for assessing their social media’s effectiveness.** For those who do track key metrics, there was no silver bullet amongst the choices given for determining what’s really working.

83.8% track Likes and Reactions, followed closely by Reach and Impressions/Views (71.5% and 71.1% respectively). Next on the list were Follows and Shares (68.3% and 66.9%). “Engagement” topped the write-in option, but that is really a hybrid metric that incorporates most or all of the choices given. The full list of metrics tracked are on the following page.

Measuring Success



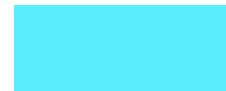
While the data and interviews suggest there is a wide-spread belief that **social media is now a necessary part of public sector communication.**



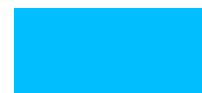
Less than half (47.9%) of the agencies surveyed have an established process for assessing their social media's effectiveness. **What about you?**

DO YOU HAVE A PROCESS FOR
EVALUATING YOUR AGENCY'S
SUCCESS ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

NO
52.1%



YES
47.9%



WHAT ARE THE KEY METRICS YOU TRACK
TO EVALUATE THAT SUCCESS?

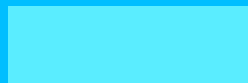
238
Likes/Reaction



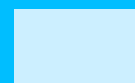
190
Shares



203
Reach



156
Comments



202
Impressions/Views



21
Other



194
Follows



RESOURCES FOR COMMUNICATORS

In the early years of public sector use of social media, many of those who ran Facebook, Twitter, etc. for their agencies felt very alone. There were few resources, and even fewer communities and professional organizations who “got it.”

Fortunately, now that the public sector has learned to embrace social media, numerous professional organizations, conferences, service providers, and peers are there to share knowledge and best practices.

Here’s a list of organizations, events, and other resources to help you strengthen your social media game:

- Florida Law Enforcement Public Information Office Association (FLEPIOA)
- Washington State Association of Sheriffs & Police Chiefs (WASPC)
- Social Media Internet & Law Enforcement (SMILE)
- International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)
- Local and State PIO networking groups
- Social Media Today
- National Information Officers Association (NIOA)
- Government Social Media Community Facebook group
- International City Managers Association (ICMA)
- National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) (or similar)
- NEOLA
- The National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA)
- National Association of Government Web Professionals (NAGW)
- City-County Communications & Marketing Association (3CMA)
- International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC)
- American Association of School Administrators (AASA)
- The Association of Local Government Information Management (ALGIM)
- Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL)
- ArchiveSocial webinars and resources
- Government Social Media Conference (GSMCON)
- Texas Association of Municipal Information Officers (TAMIO)
- California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO)



SOCIAL MEDIA & PUBLIC RECORD LAW

Central to this section is the question regarding whether or not the responders believe that their agency considers social media a matter of public record. This question was asked via a 1/10 Likert scale.

“ ”

When asked how strong the belief is in their agency that social media is a public record, 61% rated it a 10 out of 10.

The average rating across all respondents was an enthusiastic 8.7. While the agencies may have varying degrees of success creating and managing their social media, this outcome reveals that an overwhelming majority strongly value their commitments to social media and view content as subject to public record.

Three-quarters of the responding agencies have received at least one public records request. Of those, **25% have received a public records request that specifically included social media content.** In truth, this number may be higher. For one, 12.7% weren't sure if social media was specifically included. Furthermore, broadly worded requests that ask for “all communications” on a given subject may not have been included with these results.

Of those that received a public record request for social media, a majority (65%) were using archiving software to preserve social media content. 25% were not and continue to operate without any automated social media record keeping, and 10% have since begun using software to archive content.

Amongst all respondents to the survey, 45.7% use software to automatically archive social media content, 19.1% rely on the networks, 11% use screenshots or printouts, and the remaining 24% do not take any action to preserve their social media content.

Of those that do run archiving software, **87.4% surveyed use ArchiveSocial.** 4.3% of respondents use Pagefreezer, 4.3% use Smarsh, and the remaining 4% don't know or use other vendors including Brolly.

The majority of the respondents have used software for four years or less—34% for one to two years, 30% for three to four years and 19% for less than a year. 15.1% have used archiving programs for five years or more.



Social Media & Public Record Law

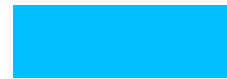


Most public records laws include all communications, “regardless of physical form,” which **includes social media.**



HAS YOUR AGENCY EVER
RECEIVED A **PUBLIC RECORDS
REQUEST?**

YES
74.9%



NO
17%



NOT SURE
8.1%



NEARLY **1 IN 4 RECORDS REQUESTS**
SPECIFICALLY REFERENCE SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

HOW DO YOU CURRENTLY
CAPTURE AND ARCHIVE YOUR
SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT?

45%
Archiving software



22.6%
Don't archive



19.1%
Rely on networks



13.3%
Screenshots, Other



WHAT SOFTWARE ARE
YOU ARCHIVING WITH?



87.4%
ArchiveSocial



4.3%
PageFreezer



4.3%
Smarsh



4%
Other



WHAT'S NEXT?

In speaking with public sector social media managers both as part of this survey, and during day-to-day support, one commonality is clear: **social media is a crucial part of modern communication**, but communication budgets are not often allocated to support this reality. Whether it is funding for staff, high-quality content, promotion, or the tools needed to manage the never-ending stream of information, many agencies are struggling to do more with less.

The two most commonly cited areas on which interviewees would spend additional funding are on producing high-quality videos and on staffing to respond to questions and comments.

Video is everywhere on social media, and it often does better at catching and holding attention than text and image-only posts. However, while off-the-cuff moments caught on a camera phone are great for family, and can even help to humanize police officers and other officials, agencies need to present a certain level of professionalism to maintain their authority in the long run.

A lot can be done to improve the quality of your video, including small investments in gimbals or portable mics, but even that budget has to come from somewhere. To really put together sharable and impactful content, agencies need to up their production values. **This means investment in not just the equipment to edit video and sound, but also in qualified staff.**

The other commonality amongst respondents is frustration with not being able to respond to the comments and questions coming in on social media. This is in large part due to the limited staff available to monitor social channels.




Our hope is that by elevating this issue as a commonality across agencies, there will be a greater understanding among those who control budgets that social media is not a fad, but rather **the primary way the world communicates now**. This report, in conjunction with your own metrics, can be used to start the conversation around funding communications budgets appropriately to make the most of social media.



WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

Please **share this report with your agency** and your peers, and use it to stir conversation around the importance of social media in modern communication. Take a close look at what channels your organization uses to reach the population you serve, and consider whether your communication budget is allocated based on actual reach and effectiveness or if traditional channels are getting more dollars simply because they are traditional.

You should also use this report as a way to evaluate your practices against the benchmark of your peers. As a good starting point, **here is a checklist of best practices** that you should consider adopting for your agency:

- ❑ **Internal Social Media Policy:** Create and distribute guidelines for your contributors regarding the purpose, tone, and appearance of your official social media pages.
- ❑ **External Social Media Policy:** Create and post official guidelines on acceptable use of your social media pages for the public.
[Need help getting started?](#) [Download our Social Media Policy Template.](#) 
- ❑ **Content Strategy:** Tailor your content to the platform and audience. Post often enough to stay relevant in news feeds. Introduce video and other multimedia content.
- ❑ **Responsiveness:** Create a service level agreement (SLA) regarding how quickly you respond to questions. Staff to meet these goals.
- ❑ **Measuring Success:** Determine the metrics that matter to meet your communication goals and start tracking them.
[Need help?](#) [Check out our Metrics Guide.](#) 
- ❑ **Compliance:** Archive your social media interactions to stay in compliance with your state's public records laws.
[Need a quick refresher](#) on how your state treats social media as public records?
[Check out this state specific resource map.](#) 



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