ISSUE brief

July 2012

Issue Briefs are designed for practitioners with limited time and a need to know about the latest industry-based knowledge.

Using Social Media to Market and Promote Public Safety Projects

By Benjamin R. Krauss, PMP
SEARCH

Social media is the use of websites and other online means of communication by groups of people to share information and to develop social and professional contacts, as defined by Dictionary.com. Social media sites allow users to become content providers and publishers, rather than just content consumers as in the past.

The ability to publish content and participate in interactive dialogue online affords project managers a new, innovative channel for providing certain kinds of project information to their stakeholders, such as public safety first responders, governmental representatives at all levels, and the public. These practical, user-friendly social media tools are cost effective and provide broad-based communication to internal and external audiences.

This Issue Brief will describe at a high level:

- Free social media tools
- How social media can be used to market and promote public safety projects
- How these tools can increase communication and decrease risk
- Benefits and limitations of these tools

The goal of this *Issue Brief* is to provide an overview of several free social media tools and summarize how they can be used to market and promote public safety projects. The target audience for this *Issue Brief* is public safety personnel (e.g., police, fire, emergency medical services [EMS], and emergency communications) who may have a project management role.

COPS
COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

SEARCH

Consider this scenario:

Dozens of small and rural law enforcement, fire, and EMS agencies decide to pool their resources to plan, manage, and implement a regional records management system (RMS). A primary objective of this regional RMS effort is to increase information sharing using interoperable communications methods while balancing limited funding and other resources.

Significant budgetary constraints result in personnel reductions, increased workloads for existing staff, and limited funding for ongoing operations and projects such as a regional RMS. Budgets have been cut, and the law enforcement, fire, and EMS agencies cannot afford to travel to meetings to market and promote this regional system. At the same time, the public is demanding increased transparency and accountability with the resources that are used.

Luckily, these agencies can take advantage of free social media tools to support effective project marketing, promotion, and timely communication, as well as reduce the risk of inaccurate and delayed information dissemination.

Free Social Media Tools

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking service and website with more than 845 million monthly active users.[1] The site allows users to post messages, photographs, and other files for other users to consume, and it supports user-defined controls over the visibility of these items. Central to Facebook is the concept of "friends"—once two users are friends, they have much greater access to one another's information and a direct method of exchanging messages. Facebook also supports a "groups" feature[2] that allows several users to come together in a private area to discuss common issues or events.

A project manager can develop a project-specific Facebook page for marketing purposes, highlighting activities, possibly offering a "Tip of the Week," and providing status updates, all of which could be posted to the site to keep interested parties informed. Other Facebook users can "like" this page; and any updates posted to the page will appear on the users' Facebook news feeds.

Given the sometimes sensitive nature of project information, it is useful to have tools for controlling access—and Facebook provides such tools, using privacy settings that restrict access to only the administrator's "friends" or specifically invited friends. Despite the presence of privacy and access-control features, it is prudent to exercise caution when creating pages in case the information gets out to an unintended audience.

The COPS Office uses this tool for timely information dissemination,[3] and the City of Cottage Grove (Minnesota) Police Department used Facebook to post Public Safety/City Hall Project Update information.[4]

Referring back to the RMS interoperability scenario, there are several free marketing tools that enhance project communication. Facebook could be used to highlight major project milestones, such as end users' completing an onsite product demonstration assessment: e.g. "The selected RMS vendor's system offered all the functionality we needed in the field, and it was easy to use."

1. "Fact Sheet," http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22.
2. See "Groups," www.facebook.com/about/groups.
3. See "COPS," Facebook, www.facebook.com/DOJCOPS.
4. See "Public Safety/City Hall Project Update," Cottage Grove Minnesota Police Department, Facebook, August 29, 2011, www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=267276553301717.

YouTube

YouTube is a video-sharing website on which users can upload, view, and share videos.[5] YouTube makes it possible for anyone with an Internet connection to post a video that a worldwide audience could watch within a few minutes. According to YouTube, the site receives more than 3 billion views per day.[6]

A project manager can use YouTube to post brief informational videos that announce significant project milestones, highlight important features, promote overall project objectives, seek user feedback, and even provide training. For example, the Georgia Interoperability Network (GIN) developed a video[7] and posted it to YouTube to promote the operation and benefits of their public safety radio network. Tennessee uses YouTube to share information about its interoperability projects,[8] and several other public safety product vendors use YouTube to market their products.

As a communication format, video often has a greater potential to attract a stakeholder's attention than more traditional formats, such as e-mail or posting a status report to a project website. In situations where a stakeholder would benefit more from seeing how something would work than reading a description about it, a brief demonstration video can be very effective. Videos delivered via YouTube can also assist in delivering presentations or messages where visual delivery is important but budgetary or logistical concerns preclude stakeholder travel.

As with Facebook, it is important to understand YouTube's access controls. The site allows users to make videos "public" (viewable to anyone on the Internet), "unlisted" (viewable to anyone on the Internet with a link—basically, an access code), or "private" (viewable only to users explicitly authorized by the video's owner). The prudent YouTube user will not post sensitive or potentially embarrassing content to the site, regardless of the access setting.

Continuing with the RMS scenario, YouTube could be used to post just-in-time training. For example, several new software features like the ability to illustrate geographic mapping of crime could be recorded, narrated, and posted to YouTube in support of in-service training.

5. "YouTube," Wikipedia, last modified April 27, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YouTube.
6. "Press Room," accessed April 26, 2012, www.youtube.com/t/press.
7. See "GIN Awareness Video," updated June 19, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dR6pDgO6xQ.
8. See "The Interoperability Continuum Official Movie Trailer," uploaded December 8, 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dE2fuxBTbg.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a business-related social networking site with more than 120 million registered users[9] in more than 200 countries.[10] On LinkedIn, users invite other users to "connect," based on some common interest or professional relationship. Once a user accepts an invitation, the two users are connected, which allows them to receive information about one another, send one another messages, and recommend one another to other users.

LinkedIn also supports a concept of "groups" that can form around issues, projects, or other associations among users. Once a user is a member of a group, the user can send and receive messages to and from the group, allowing the focused, efficient exchange of information among users with a common purpose.

If the target stakeholders are all members of (or are willing to join) LinkedIn, the project manager can form a group for the project, allowing dissemination of status updates, discussions about features, and other conversations among stakeholders. LinkedIn allows the group owner to control who joins the group, by explicitly inviting other users and approving outside requests to join. This helps ensure that information goes out only to the users who are authorized to receive it.

Several national initiatives in the justice and public safety community use LinkedIn for stakeholder communications. For example, the U.S. Department of Justice, Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative (Global) maintains a group for its advisory committee.[11] Similarly, the National Information Exchange Model initiative maintains a group that has frequent, active discussions about features and projects using NIEM.[12] SEARCH[13] also uses LinkedIn as an important tool to inform members of the justice community about current technical assistance, training offerings, and publications.[14]

Members of an RMS project team could post their professional profiles to LinkedIn, noting their professional experience and abilities so that other team members could see how their skillsets fit within their assigned project roles and responsibilities. The project manager could start a private ("members only") group for the project, invite all the stakeholders to join, and then use the group for discussions and dissemination of project news.

9. "What is LinkedIn?" http://learn.linkedin.com/what-is-linkedin/.

10. "LinkedIn," Wikipedia, last modified April 19, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LinkedIn.

11. See "U.S. DOJ's Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative…," Linked in, www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=2304837. (This web page is viewable only to group members.)

12. See "National Information Exchange Model (NIEM)," Linked in, www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=1903175. (This web page is viewable only to group members.)

13. See "SEARCH," www.search.org.

14. See "SEARCH, The National Consortium for Justice Information and...," Linked in, www.linkedin.com/groups/SEARCH-National-Consortium-Justice-Information-3251705.

Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters, informally known as "tweets." As of 2012, Twitter has more than 300 million users, generating more than 300 million tweets and handling more than 1.6 billion search queries per day.[15]

It is important to note that Twitter is not private. Any Twitter user can follow the tweets of any other user. It is also important to note that Twitter posts are not private by default. All of a user's tweets are available on the Twitter website for anyone on the Internet to see—whether a Twitter user or not.

Twitter also supports the concept of "hash tags," which are simply key words or terms preceded by a hash sign (#). When hash tags appear in a Twitter post, Twitter applications will hyperlink the hash tag to other posts that use the same tag. This is a very effective way of linking disparate tweets into a single list.

A project manager can use Twitter to share short bursts of information, such as meeting highlights or project milestones. Hash tags, used consistently by stakeholders, can support a simple form of threaded discussion and can make finding posts on a topic much easier. Tweets can also include embedded links to a project website or Facebook page. Similar to other social media resources already discussed, users can choose to make pages private so that only those following an account can see the tweets. The same privacy risks also exist, but the option is there.

Several federal information-sharing initiatives and agencies use Twitter to communicate about project objectives, relevant news items, and events; these include the Office of the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment (PM-ISE),[16] the U.S. Department of Justice,[17] and the NIEM Program.[18]

Once an RMS implementation has been completed, Twitter messages could be sent out to operational personnel to remind them of key user functions. This tool can be used to market the ongoing value and utility of the RMS to operational users.

Blogs and RSS

A "blog" (short for "web log") is a topic-focused website in which a content provider posts articles for subscribed users to consume. Subscribers receive notification of articles via RSS (really simple syndication) feeds, either via software installed on a computer or device, or via an aggregator website such as Google Reader. Many news sites and organizational public affairs offices use blogging technology and RSS to stream news items and press releases to stakeholders and the general public. Blogging capabilities are freely available via Internet services such as BlogSpot or occasionally available on internal government websites.

Project managers can maintain blogs for their projects, using articles to communicate more involved or in-depth topics than are appropriate for Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter. For example, if a new agency joins a multiagency initiative, an article profiling the agency or its executive champion can help integrate the new agency into the project. Or if the project steering committee approves a set of new features for the next version of a critical shared system, a blog post by the project manager can describe the new features in some detail.

In addition to RSS, many blog authors use cross-posting to Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn to publicize the new article. As these new channels grow in popularity, older technologies such as RSS are less likely to reach the full intended audience, so a combination of social media channels is generally the most effective approach.

Several federal agencies use blogs to communicate with their stakeholders about national initiatives. The U.S. Department of Justice[19] and PM-ISE[20] are two examples.

15. "Twitter," Wikipedia, last modified April 27, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter.
16. See "ISE (@shareandprotect)," Twitter, https://twitter.com/#!/shareandprotect.
17. See "The Justice Dept (@TheJusticeDept)," Twitter, http://twitter.com/#!/TheJusticeDept.
18. See "Donna Roy (@NIEMExecDir)," Twitter, http://twitter.com/#!/niemexecdir.
19. See "The Justice Blog," http://blogs.justice.gov/.
20. See "ISE Blog," http://ise.gov/blog.

Project Marketing and Promotion Using Social Media

There are four main considerations when using social media as part of a project's communications strategy:

- With whom do you need to communicate?
- What information do you need to communicate?
- How often do you need to communicate?
- What methods of communications should be employed?

With whom do you need to communicate? Consider all project stakeholders—people who will benefit from the project's outcomes and who can impact the project's success. Stakeholders include field users (e.g., police, fire, and EMS), support staff (e.g., records and information technology), participants in the project's governance structure (e.g, executive sponsors, project management staff, funders, and oversight bodies), and the public. In the absence of managed communication, information is often created and disseminated to fill any real or perceived information vacuum. Social media tools provide yet another communication channel to reach this array of internal and external stakeholders.

What information do you need to communicate? Social media tools allow the project manager to disseminate information about the project's schedule, budget, and outcomes. This can help assure the public that tax dollars are being well spent and assure other stakeholders (e.g., end users and executives) that the project is progressing.

How often do you need to communicate? A project manager can update Facebook and LinkedIn groups whenever there are significant project events (milestones) to report. Tools like Twitter, with its 140-character limit, can be used to make frequent activity updates, and the frequency of communication can be adjusted to match the information needs of each stakeholder group.

What methods of communications should be employed? While developing the project communications plan, the project manager, project team, and stakeholders should determine which methods of communications should be employed. Factors to consider when making this decision include how much information stakeholders need; how much time the various methods of communications will take; and the number of stakeholders who have access to, and comfort using, the communications method. Social media is well-suited as a communications tool because it is easy to use, easy to update, and widely accessible.

Bill Schrier, the chief technology officer for the City of Seattle, has led the effort to use Twitter, Facebook, and blogs to increase civic engagement. The City of Seattle won a Best of the Web 2011 award; Best of the Web[21] recognizes outstanding government portals and websites based on innovation, functionality, and efficiency.[22] Mr. Schrier uses Twitter to post timely and ongoing information regarding technology projects and issues in Seattle on the city's website.[23]

Key Points to Remember

- Have a designated person manage the social media content postings.
- Commit to updating the content regularly.
- Use social media to complement your website presence.
- Respond to social media postings (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) in a timely manner.
- Develop and enforce policy regarding social media use.

Benefits

Social media tools bring many benefits to the project manager's toolbox. These include:

- Low cost
- Scope of reach
- Two-way communication

Low cost: A significant benefit of the social media tools mentioned in this brief is that they are available for free. The primary cost is the personnel time needed to use them.

Scope of reach: Online-accessible social media tools provide a broad geographic and demographic scope of reach, using a network (the Internet) and software (a web browser) that virtually every computer user already possesses. Thus, with few exceptions, any project stakeholder is already able to communicate using these tools. Because project marketing and communication are widely recognized as critical to project success, having a mechanism to reach the entire project stakeholder community is important.

Two-way communication: The fact that communication is a two-way process is often forgotten. Communication is not simply dispensing information. Social media tools are designed for interactive dialogue between the sender and receiver. For instance, discussions that take place on LinkedIn and Facebook are accessible to all stakeholders—from the project manager and internal project team, to

21. See "About Us," http://bestoftheweb.com/about/.

22. See "Surveys and Awards," Center for Digital Government, www.centerdigitalgov.com/survey/88.

23. See "Seattle.gov," www.seattle.gov.

users and executive sponsors, to interested members of the general public. The tools allow anyone to post content as well as read it, allowing a true exchange to take place.

Limitations

Along with the benefits of using social media tools to support successful projects, there are several limitations. These include:

- Time needed to use these tools
- Primarily used as marketing tools
- Posted information available for all to see
- Public safety security policies

Time needed to use these tools: Effective communication takes time and effort. Using social media tools can reduce the time and effort required, but it will not eliminate them. These tools are highly interactive and as such can require a great deal of time and effort to manage the volume of incoming communication. The project manager or executive sponsor should assign someone the explicit responsibility for managing project communications, including use of social media tools. Many mid- to large-sized public safety agencies have public information officers (PIOs) or public communications divisions, which can often be of great assistance with using social media tools.

Primarily used as marketing tools: Social media tools are most useful for delivering general information about project status, events, and outcomes. They are not well-suited for communicating detailed structural information, such as schedules, budgets, or staffing plans. Specialized project management software is available, for purchase or in some cases for free, to support these specialized communication needs.[24]

Posted information available to for all to see: Even though most social media tools support access control to some extent, there is always a risk that information disseminated using these tools will be accessible to anyone on the Internet. It is prudent to consider this risk when developing and posting messages to social media sites. When in doubt, and whenever dealing with sensitive or confidential information, seriously consider using more secure mechanisms to communicate, such as virtual private networks (VPN) and organization Intranets. Given the wide dissemination of information on social media sites, professional tone, consistency of message, and neatness are of great importance because these factors can all impact the public perception of the project and its stakeholders.

Public safety security policies: Access to these sites may be limited by policy. Confirm your organization's social media policy before using these tools. If policies do not exist, your organization's management team should clearly define terms, conditions, protocol, and limits of social media use. For example, the City of Seattle has a comprehensive social media use policy.[25]

Conclusion

This *Issue Brief* was designed to provide an overview of social media tools, how they can be used for project marketing and promotion, and the benefits they can provide to your projects and stakeholders. Social media use by public safety to inform the public about incidents and for agency marketing continues to grow, while use as a project management tool is in its infancy. You may be the first to initate using social media in your agency or expand the current use of social media to communicate information and to market and promote your public safety project.

24. See "Free Project Management Tools," *Issue Brief*, vol. 11, July 2012, www.cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID=651.

25. See "Legislation, Policies, and Standards: City of Seattle Social Media Use Policy," last modified October 2, 2009, www.seattle.gov/pan/socialmediapolicy.htm.

Policy Development, Training, and Technical Assistance Resources

- **SEARCH, The National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics:** SEARCH offers technical assistance to local and state justice agencies to develop, manage, improve, acquire, and integrate their automated information systems. SEARCH works with individual justice agencies (such as a police department that is implementing a new RMS, or a court acquiring a new case management system), but also works with multidisciplinary groups of justice agencies to assist them in planning for and integrating their information systems at local, state, and regional levels. For more than two decades, SEARCH assistance programs have provided both on-site and in-house, no-cost technical assistance to justice agencies throughout the country. SEARCH staff has considerable experience in assisting with project management activities. See www.search.org/products.
- **U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office):** The COPS Office is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies. The community policing philosophy promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. The COPS Office does its work principally by sharing information and awarding grants to law enforcement agencies around the United States to hire and train community policing professionals, acquire and deploy cutting-edge crime-fighting technologies, and develop and test innovative policing strategies. See www.cops.usdoj.gov/.
- Stephens, Darrel W., Julia Hill, and Sheldon Greenberg. 2011. *Strategic Communication Practices: A Toolkit for Police Executives*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. www.cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID=632.
- Handelman, Stephen, and Joe Domanick. 2012. *Building Productive Relationships with the Media: Dealing with New Media Culture During Crisis Situations*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. www.cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID=643.

This *Issue Brief* is part of a series that SEARCH developed for the public safety/justice community in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice, COPS Office.

Questions, comments, or feedback: Please contact SEARCH at www.search.org/about/contact/.

This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement #2007-CK-WX-K002 by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s) or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

Captain Thomas W. Turner
Chairman, SEARCH

Ronald P. Hawley
Executive Director, SEARCH

Scott M. Came
Deputy Executive Director, SEARCH

COPS
COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
145 N Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20530
www.cops.usdoj.gov

© 2012 SEARCH Group, Inc. The U.S. Department of Justice reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use, and authorize others to use this publication for Federal Government purposes. This publication may be freely distributed and used for noncommercial and educational purposes.

The Internet references cited in this publication were valid as of the date of this publication. Given that URLs and websites are in constant flux, neither the author nor the COPS Office can vouch for their current validity.