

## **Executive Summary: Best Practices Study of Social Media Records Policies**

ACT-IAC Collaboration & Transformation (C&T) Shared Interest Group (SIG)

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Access the full report here: [www.actgov.org/SocialMediaRecords](http://www.actgov.org/SocialMediaRecords)

Government agencies are increasingly incorporating Web 2.0 collaborative technologies, also known as social media, such as wikis and blogs, in conducting agency business. Federal recordkeeping requirements include developing and implementing policies for Federal records and cover records from social media.

The purpose of this study is to build a discussion around the use of social media to help government and its citizens connect more closely, collaboratively, and openly. The study involved interviews at 10 agencies regarding records management processes addressing the use of social media. The C&T SIG sought to explore and identify government best practices of records policies for social media used to support agency missions. The team found that active use of social media tools has identified some challenges for recordkeeping, but also has allowed some best practices to surface which agencies are following or need to follow to address the challenges.

The Government Advisory Panel (GAP) of the C&T SIG had discussions on Federal agency challenges in adopting Web 2.0 -- social media. The SIG has undertaken this study, sponsored by the GAP and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), in particular, to engage subject matter experts from industry, as well as stakeholders within the government, in exploring agency policies regarding records management processes challenged by this new media use.

Most of the interviewed agencies use a majority of the commercially available social media tools and techniques to support their efforts.

Participating agencies included: DC Government (DC), Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA, FNS), Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary (DOD), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Interior, U.S. Geological Survey (DOI, USGS), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Government Accountability Office (GAO), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC).

### **Challenges from the Interviews**

- Challenge #1 -- Declaration: What is a social media record? Social media content is difficult to define as a record. Agencies are still grappling with records management for email, much less wikis and blogs. Somehow the social media content that is record material must be identified as such by system users if there is no automation support for records identification (largely absent from current social media applications). Social media systems do not generally lend themselves to handling system content as business records that may require separate handling and application of business rules.
- Challenge #2 -- Social Media Capture: The second challenge is that much of the social media content is in the public domain and, therefore, not under control of the agency causing difficulty in capturing content.

- Challenge #3 -- Social Media Metadata: Applying metadata to tag social media content for retrieval is difficult. Currently, all agencies interviewed are using manual methods of adding metadata for social media content.
- Challenge #4 -- Social Media Scheduling/ Disposition: As in Challenge #2, the lack of control of the content makes scheduling and disposition of records difficult.
- Challenge #5 -- Staffing and Education: Education is needed to implement a successful social media records policy.

### **Best Practices from the Interviews**

- Best Practice #1 -- Develop communications between social media team and records management: An active team should include records management staff, web managers, social media managers, information technology staff, and perhaps other relevant stakeholders is needed.
- Best Practice #2 -- Develop social media policies making use of resources for help: Agencies use multiple information resources when creating policy and implementing processes that model best practices in the use of social media with respect to recordkeeping.
- Best Practice #3 -- Define roles and responsibilities: A cross-organizational unit whose primary role is to aid in understanding and guiding agencies in the use of social media and records implications must include identification of roles and responsibilities.
- Best Practice #4 -- Implement records management for social media as part of enterprise content management: An enterprise content management system (ECMS) for records management should include social media and should have requirements for capturing, tagging with metadata, and scheduling the content.

### **Recommendations**

- Call to Vendors: The agencies are looking to the vendor community to provide the government the capability to configure the client or server to capture social media records without user intervention. A second suggestion is to provide a back-end solution where social media records are automatically tagged with metadata.
- Call to NARA: The agencies are looking to NARA for assistance in addressing the existing dilemma of social media records. The recent release of NARA Bulletin 2011-02 on Guidance on Managing Records in Web 2.0/Social Media Platforms is a big step in NARA providing assistance to agencies.

### **Conclusions**

When asked what they wanted in an ideal world, all agencies responded that they wanted a system which provides automatic metadata and content capture without human intervention. This would consist of an automated mechanism to identify, tag, create the metadata, and associate the data with the proper records schedule.

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