

Taking Social Media Public: Social Media for Successful Citizen Relationship Management

By Tish Falco, Social Media Center of Excellence Leader



Social media offers government agencies new opportunities to improve the quality and efficiency of their interactions with constituents. In the late 1990s, the private sector began embracing social media as a way to listen to and engage their customers to create repeat business, increase customer loyalty, and improve customer satisfaction. Social media is a powerful tool to reach a wide and more diverse customer base, listen to what customers are saying about a company's brands and products, and engage the customer in developing new ideas. The public sector is catching up. In 2009, the Obama Administration mandated in a legislative memorandum that the public sector needs to use social media as a way to engage the citizen and collaborate across government agencies. Some public sector agencies are already using social media to promote programs and services to the citizen, inform the citizen of key healthcare issues, resolve critical citizen issues, or change policies to make them more user-friendly. Other public sector agencies will soon follow and are exploring new ways to adopt and implement social media. As the wave of social media sweeps across the public sector, it will be integral for each agency to understand and develop a social media strategy that is incorporated into existing processes and in combination with existing technology, particularly where there are citizen touchpoints. Without adopting this comprehensive approach, there is a risk of cybersecurity threats, negative publicity, and lack of citizen insight to provide effective products and services to the public. There's more to social media than hype. It offers excellent tools to better understand and connect with the citizen population.

Social Media – A Reality, No Longer a Phenomenon

Social media, which was a new phenomenon just a few years ago, has now become a common reality. In this digital age, with the availability of the internet at people's fingertips – at their desktop or on their phone – people can connect more easily - on the go and in real-time through various forms of social media. People are using social media channels to not only communicate with their friends and family about their every day lives, but to talk to other people about their customer experience with companies and organizations. Customers can now blog, post messages on Facebook, podcast, or twitter about their customer experience and reach a wide array of other customers, or potential customers, to promote positive or negative word-of-mouth advertising. Social media channels have become a quick and easy way for customers to talk about what is on their mind in real-time.

Customers Want to Engage with Companies Using Social Media¹

2010 survey results from consumers and employees show that:

- 62% of respondents trust information they receive from their social network
- 80% of respondents believe that companies should track social media sites to understand what is being said about them
- 58% of consumers state that regular communication with a company through social media improves their loyalty

Many private sector companies now realize that social media is a reality that can influence the outcome of customers' decisions about doing business with them. Companies can no longer ignore social media and have incorporated this channel into their overall customer relationship management (CRM) strategies and initiatives. The private sector realizes that social media is another way to listen and respond to their customer base more quickly than other traditional forms of communication such as direct mail, email or telephone. Organizations can market programs, products, and services to customers and quickly track feedback as a means to tailor or develop new products and services as well as shape outreach activities more readily than before. Companies track real-time feed discussions and utilize customized keyword searches across multiple social media channels to analyze and react to consumer needs

and trends. Gatorade, for example, launched a “Mission Control Center” to find out what customers thought of their brand and products by engaging the masses while carefully monitoring their own marketing efforts. Social media becomes an additional and immediate channel that can be integrated in understanding the needs and expectations of the customer. Companies have found that customer satisfaction and loyalty has increased because the “voice of the customer” is being tracked through the non-traditional methods – social media. Starbucks has over 5.2 million Facebook fans participating in their online community, allowing customers to provide feedback regarding their experience as well as give input on potential new products.² By reviewing and analyzing consumer comments for trends and responding quickly to consumer problems when they arise, companies have the power to build more personal and loyal customer relationships and expand their customer base. These loyal customers are then leveraged as ambassadors, or influencers, to promote products or services across the customer base.

Embracing Social Media in the Public Sector

Although the private sector is at the forefront of channeling the voice of the customer through social media, the public sector is catching up. There are various public sector efforts to start leveraging social media to improve the citizen experience, promoting greater collaboration, transparency, and accessibility. The public sector is using social media to make the government more accessible to citizens by engaging them in interactive dialogs in order to tailor and develop new programs and services, enhance marketing campaigns and outreach activities, and help them solve everyday problems.

The Public Sector is Embracing Social Media to Talk to Citizens³

In a survey conducted with various government agencies at the state, local, and federal level:

- 51% of participants are using or discussing using social media to interface with the public
 - 48% of participants are using or discussing using social media to interface with the public and within the organization
 - 71% indicated that the top benefit of using social media was to share information across more channels and provide better service delivery
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Recognizing the importance of social media, President Obama called for the establishment of “a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration” in a January 21, 2009 memorandum from the Office of Management of Budget, entitled “Transparency and Open Government.”⁴ Over the last twelve months, the Obama Administration has recognized and underscored the importance of social media in government through several directives emphasizing and mirroring private sector CRM initiatives to actively engage citizens and gain feedback as well as facilitate collaboration across fragmented agencies to discourage inefficient agency processes and services for citizens in several directives. The memorandum invites agencies to harness new technologies in order to share more information with the public, to increase public engagement and feedback, and to improve cooperation between the private sector, non-profits, citizens, and government agencies. The government’s strong support of social media’s role in government agencies combined with a strong legislative foundation has resulted in numerous entities pioneering and successfully integrating various social media channels into their existing platforms, as displayed in the table below.

Success Story Making Government More Transparent and Collaborative with Public Participation

The Australian Government – at both the local and federal levels – is a prime example of how government used social media to collaborate with citizens, allowing for a more open and transparent government.⁵ Taking these lessons learned, the U.S. Government can incorporate similar best practices.

- Over 200 government agencies have Twitter accounts, 50 agencies have blogs, and 30 agencies have YouTube accounts, and 20 agencies have Facebook pages.
- The Melbourne City Council used a collaborative Wiki platform to engage citizens in the creation of the 10-yr Future Melbourne Community Plan. The Wiki was so popular that there were 30,000 unique pages viewed over a four-day period.
- The Premier’s office in Victoria uses Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, blogs, and live chat technology to connect with citizens about key issues and services provided.

Case Studies of Social Media in the Public Sector

Organization	Challenge	Solution	Benefits
 <p>Navy Federal Credit Union</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inability to easily monitor social media sites to collect and analyze customer needs and sentiment ▪ Lack of insight into customer inquiries and issues via social media channels ▪ Increased customer inquiry volume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Integrated Cloud Social Media Monitoring software into existing Help Desk platform ▪ Created a Help Desk that integrated social media to create incidents from Facebook & Twitter posts and identify/resolve customer problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provided ability to better allocate resources ▪ Decreased average email response time from 72 hrs to 18 hrs ▪ Provided true 360-degree view of customer in addition to contact center and email traffic
 <p>Transportation Security Administration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confusion around new or existing security measures ▪ Slow, traditional methods of managing public relations ▪ Lacked efficient means of communicating with the public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leveraged existing website infrastructure and social media software ▪ Employed Web 2.0 experts to handle design and implementation ▪ Crafted blog policy and created team to handle account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to educate the public, refute myths, and incorporate end-user feedback for process improvement ▪ Ability to respond quickly to defend public image ▪ Engaged citizens to change TSA airport policies
 <p>Centers For Disease Control and Prevention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outbreak of the H1N1 “swine flu” virus in 2009 caused concern to rapidly spread through the media ▪ CDC needed a way to quickly disseminate up-to-date information and respond to media updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed an array of social media offerings to provide real-time updates to the public (thru blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Podcasts) ▪ Engaged the public in two-way conversation ▪ Monitored online file sharing, blogging, and discussion groups to identify gaps and improve messaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Established a robust media presence and gained followers that continue to participate and engage with the CDC through social media today ▪ Informed/educated citizens on H1N1 prevention and help

Participation in social media initiatives is already changing the way the public interacts with government agencies. The earlier the public sector engages in using citizen-facing social media tools, the better prepared they will be to tailor marketing campaigns and develop services and products that truly benefit

the citizen and support collaboration versus isolation. The following table provides some real world commercial applications that the public sector can use social media to engage and collaborate with the citizen. The table outlines core social media capabilities and benefits within the public sector.

Social Media Capabilities and Benefits in the Public Sector

Expand and Strengthen Marketing Campaigns	
Capability	Benefit
Expand marketing campaigns and promotions to your existing or a new customer base	Allows an organization to reach an existing or new customer base from the citizen population to promote products, services, and/or benefits available to them in real-time through an additional channel
Connect with your audience when, where, and how they want to be reached	Ability to connect with citizens in a targeted manner through social media channels they use in their everyday lives, on-the-go and in real-time
Build interactive communities to share ideas and information	Creating a collaborative forum to engage citizens in sharing ideas and disseminating information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance products, services and benefits with citizen input • allow for group collaboration among citizens to solve problems and share concerns or ideas • share information that will help citizens
Disseminate timely and relevant information	Ability to create targeted marketing campaigns, delivered in real-time based on a citizen's preference
Collect & Track Client Feedback	
Capability	Benefit
Track customer feedback across multiple digital channels in addition to existing customer feedback forums	In addition to other customer feedback forums, ability to listen to the customer and solve issues in a timely manner across various social media forums and on the web – blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube
Analyze data to understand customer needs/expectations and gauge customer satisfaction to quickly identify gaps and take action in real-time	Understand customer information in the social media channels to combine with other customer insight information (i.e. surveys, contact center, email, focus groups) to optimize how your agency enhances marketing campaigns, product/service development, and customer resolution
Simultaneously monitor multiple digital communication channels and other customer channels	Optimizes how your agency tracks and analyzes customer feedback across all customer touchpoints (i.e. social media and contact center), which can include process and technology integration
Enhance or Develop New Programs/Products/Services	
Capability	Benefit
Engage the customer to test and/or develop new programs, products, and/or services	Ability to engage the citizen in a real-time conversation on thoughts, views, and ideas on existing or new products/services as well as test out new ideas through an interactive group pilot
Mine blogs and other web sources to determine new service ideas	As citizens begin to use social media to talk about an agency's products/services, an agency can have the ability through analytics to search for these new ideas to better meet citizen needs and expectations
Engage in two-way conversations with your audience to build stronger customer relationships	As an agency starts to listen to the citizen and show that they are responding to their ideas, an agency will build a stronger trust and more personal relationship with citizens and positive word-of-mouth advertising, or publicity

Effectively Harnessing the Power of Social Media

With all the hype surrounding social media, it can be overwhelming for an agency to know how to begin, which tool to use, or where to go for help. With all the promotion and talk around social media every time we turn on the TV, our computers, or our phones or pass by an advertisement on the street, there is a sense of urgency to jump on the bandwagon and start using social media in our personal and professional lives. In order to truly harness the power of social media, it is important to not get caught up in the frenzy and examine how social media can best be incorporated into what your agency is doing in engaging and collaborating with the citizen. Before launching into the world of social media, the public sector needs to think of social media as just another method of interacting with citizens. Agencies need to think about how social media efforts, tools, and analytics integrate with other citizen-focused initiatives to maximize the benefits of social media. In taking this comprehensive approach, the public sector will be able to mitigate the risks associated with social media, utilize social media in a meaningful way, and develop a long-term strategy to engage the citizen. Following is a checklist in guiding your agency in engaging in social media:

- Develop a strategy to determine how to incorporate social media into your overall marketing and collaboration efforts to citizens
- Decide which social media forums to use to best reach your target audience
- Develop a communications plan that will guide you in shaping and delivering consistent and clear messages through various channels
- Figure out the resources you will need to support your social media efforts and if these resources should be internal or external
- Pinpoint which analytics and reporting tools you will need to optimize social media efforts and support your business case
- Develop a mitigation plan to manage cybersecurity, negative publicity, and other agency-specific risks
- Evaluate which social media technology tools will best support your agency needs and, where possible, integrate across other customer touchpoints
- Plan a pilot to test out your social media strategy and technology, identifying lessons learned for improvement

Taking the Next Step & Teaming with IBM

Over the next two years, there will be significant growth within the social media arena – particularly in marketing to, listening to, and engaging the customer, or citizen, within the public sector. Not only is social media a reality in engaging the citizen, it is a legislative mandate from the Obama Administration. In order to effectively harness the power of social media successfully and not give into the hype, it is important to develop a strategy and implementation plan that will position agencies to build that personal and trusting relationship with the citizen. Social media can help the public sector become closer to the citizen and respond to and understand their needs and expectations in real-time, particularly in this fast-paced digital age.

IBM's Global Business Service Public Sector Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practice is well positioned to help public sector agencies launch their social media channel initiatives. IBM offers a full-service practice dedicated to the success of its clients. As a global leader who is experienced in CRM and social media initiatives with public sector clients, we are well-positioned in the market to help you develop a strategy on how to implement social media and evaluate key process and technology changes or additions needed to address your agency's specific needs. IBM takes a holistic approach in working with our clients to develop and implement a strategy that supports process, technology, and organizational changes across the enterprise. Our methods provide world-leading differentiators for clients looking to effectively and efficiently increase customer engagement across channels and interactions, especially in the digital world.

For more information

To discuss how IBM can help your organization develop a strong and successful social media strategy and implementation, contact

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Please visit our "IBM Public Sector Consulting" Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/IBMPSC>.

Footnotes

- 1 Gonzalez-Wertz, Christine. "Going Digital: The connected, collaborative path forward." IBM Institute for Business Value. December, 2009.
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