MECKLENBURG COUNTY

Social Media Strategy

Note: This strategy was prepared by team members representing the Office of Strategic Organizational Improvement, Information Services & Technology and Public Service & Information for inclusion in the County's eGovernment Strategic Plan.

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I.   Introduction

Public sector internet strategy has largely been driven by the pursuit of a single point of contact for citizens. Government information and services are provided "online" via websites under the tight control, often with the information managed by an individual agency or department. The only electronic access channel for the public is that agency's website.

However, public use of the internet is shifting to an environment of personal choice for the channel, device and interaction modes that suit the individual's specific needs and preferences. Gartner, a leading information technology research firm, asserts "traditional government content and services are unlikely to entice citizens accustomed to compelling content and services from private providers and to community interaction."

The popularity of social media services such as FaceBook is an example of the shift in internet use. The purpose of this document is to articulate Mecklenburg County's strategy for adapting to new public expectations and ensure alignment the corporate communication goals. The use of social media by individual employees, both internally or externally, is not in the scope of this document and should be governed by the standards and guidelines of the County's Internet Security Policy and Employee Handbook.

II.   Social Media Defined

Social media or **Web 2.0** describes the online tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media itself, thus facilitating conversations and interaction online between groups of people. These tools include blogs, message boards, podcasts, micro blogs, lifestreams, bookmarks, networks, communities, wikis, and vlogs.[1]

Examples [2]

Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures, video, rating and bookmarking.

Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing, and voice over IP, to name a few. Many of these social media services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms like Mybloglog and Plaxo.

Examples of social media software applications include:

Communication: **Blogs:** Blogger, LiveJournal, Open Diary, TypePad, WordPress, Vox,
Micro-blogging / Presence applications: Twitter, Plurk, Jaiku, fmylife
Social networking: Bebo, Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Orkut,
Social network aggregation: NutshellMail, FriendFeed

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[1] http://www.webpronews.com/blogtalk/2007/06/29/the-definition-of-social-media
[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

	Events: Upcoming, Eventful, Meetup.com
Collaboration:	**Wikis**: Wikipedia, PBwiki, wetpaint **Social bookmarking** (or social tagging)[2]: Delicious, StumbleUpon, **Social news:** Digg, Mixx, Reddit, NowPublic **Opinion sites**: epinions, Yelp
Multimedia:	**Photo sharing:** Flickr, Zooomr, Photobucket, SmugMug **Video sharing:** YouTube, Vimeo, sevenload **Livecasting:** Ustream.tv, Justin.tv, Stickam **Audio and Music Sharing:** imeem, The Hype Machine, Last.fm,
Reviews & Opinions:	**Product Reviews**: epinions.com, MouthShut.com **Q&A**: Yahoo! Answers, WikiAnswers
Entertainment:	**Media & Entertainment Platforms**: Cisco Eos **Virtual worlds:** Second Life, The Sims Online, Forterra **Game sharing**: Miniclip, Kongregate

III.   Strategic Alignment

Social Media can be utilized to support Mecklenburg County's Community & Corporate Scorecard strategies for increasing citizen awareness, enhancing citizen involvement and increasing employee access to information. The fundamental approach is to leverage social media tools to drive awareness and involvement and direct the public back to County sources.

Mecklenburg County's Community & Corporate Scorecard Strategies

Increase Citizen Awareness of County Responsibilities, Services and Results
Strategy: Educate and inform residents about the County's responsibilities, services and results
Measure(s): Public Awareness Index

Enhance Citizen Involvement
Strategy: Seek citizen participation in policy development and decision-making
Measure(s):   Advisory Committee Diversity
Citizen Satisfaction w/ Input
Opportunities

Increase Employee Access to Information
Strategies: 1) Ensure Supervisors provide employees with enough information to do their jobs well; 2) Streamline processes and/or maximize the use of technology to make job-relevant information easily accessible through self-service
Measure(s):   Employee Satisfaction
Rating: Efficient Access to
Needed Information

IV. Business and Technical Strategies

This document references "business strategy" and "technical strategy." Business strategy refers to how a desired outcome is achieved. Technical strategy is the program or function deployed to achieve a desired outcome.

Social Media Business Strategy: Use a systems-thinking approach that aligns with the County's corporate management of public information/communications, Media Relations Policy, and key strategies of the County's eGovernment Strategic Plan.

Corporate Management of Public Information/Communication

- An intentional, unified, consistent, understood and embraced method of planning, budgeting, implementing and evaluating public information/communications that is flexible in accommodating various and changing communications needs.

Media Relations Policy

- All proactive news media relations activities should be coordinated through the County's Public Service & Information Department (PS&I).

eGovernment Strategic Plan

- Deploy technology that facilitates collaboration
- Provide anytime, anywhere access to services.
- Expand communication and public engagement via the web.

Social Media Technical Strategy: Incorporate social media tools within the three courses of action for managing communications corporately:

- **Media Relations**: working with local news media on coverage of County services.
- **Direct/Citizen Communications**: communicating directly with residents through mass communication and targeted communications as appropriate.
- **Employee Communications**: communicating directly with employees, who serve as "ambassadors" of information with customers and others in the community.

Specific recommendations are:

- Provide governance of social media use through the structure and processes already established for the County's web site.

    - Use of social media in communicating both internally and externally needs to be considered just as important as other official content/material produced. External communication represents official County business and the same level of scrutiny should apply keeping in mind the importance of rapid response.

- Consider all official Mecklenburg County presences on social media sites an extension of the County's information networks requiring adherence to existing County policies regarding e-mail and internet use.

- Align use of Social Media tools and services with County goals and objectives or, in other words, have an outcome in mind. The County should not expend time and money on various social media platforms if there is little or no benefit.

- Manage risk at the outset. Before implementing any new social media tool, IST Information Security should be involved to ensure compliance with the latest security standards and practices.

- Start small using the predominant social media platforms: Twitter, FaceBook, YouTube, and Flickr.

- Be purposeful in the use of social media. Participation in social media provides an opportunity to refer conversations to County information. However, social media should cultivate a two-way communication and is not merely a mechanism to push information.

- Educate and communicate with employees and residents regarding the County's social media use.

- Be open to both positive and negative feedback. Any feedback can help make County business more effective and efficient.

- Adopt standards and best practices appropriate for each social media platform. For example, on its FaceBook pages, the County should reserve the right to modify or remove any messages or postings are abusive, obscene, and defamatory; in violation of the copyright, trademark right, or other intellectual property right of any third party; or inappropriate/incorrect, such as for commercial purposes or for organized political activity.

V.   Implementation Recommendations

- Implementation should be centrally coordinated with content locally managed.

  – This is important because the nature of social media requires rapid response and providing accurate information requires involvement of subject matter experts at the department level.

- Departmental social media pages must be linked to the County's corporate page for branding consistency and to capture of data associated with visitor activity.

- Govern employee access/use of use of social media (either internally or externally) by the applicable standards and guidelines in the Employee Handbook and Internet Security and Privacy policies.

- Employ social media tools internally to enhance communications within the organization.

VI.   Metrics

Begin tracking output measures and to establish baseline information. Examples:

- Number of visitors to County website originating from social media sites, tracked using http://bit.ly or another URL shortener

- Twitter: Number of visitors to County website
Number of re-tweets
Number of direct messages

- FaceBook: Use the Insights page to analyze fan interactions.

    - How users are interacting with the County page, broken down by wall posts, "likes," and comments
    - "Post Quality" shows how engaging the County posts are to fans
    - "Star Rating" compares the County's Post Quality to other pages of similar size.
    - "Fans Over Time" tracks when users unsubscribe
    - "Fan" statistics such as age, gender, location and languages

- YouTube: Number of views of County videos