PREPARING SCOTLAND

Warning and Informing Scotland

USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN EMERGENCIES

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SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN EMERGENCIES

Events locally and across the world have underlined the value of using social media to improve emergency preparedness, response and recovery.

Increasingly, people are turning to social media during emergencies. This enables them to obtain up-to-date information as well as give feedback and share content with others. These developments have significantly altered the flow and availability of information during an emergency.

Developing a social media profile is essential for responders. When used effectively, social media platforms facilitate quick and direct contact with the public and stakeholders, with opportunities to engage in two-way communication with your audience.

This guidance provides responders with information on the tools and techniques that are available along with advice on how these can be deployed to optimise communications and engagement activities. It also describes some of the challenges when using social media in an emergency situation.

INCREASING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

A social media presence will significantly enhance your communications strategy before, during and after an emergency. Greater situational awareness can also be achieved through engagement with this medium.

In order to build an effective social media presence, responders should adopt a structured approach starting with monitoring as a means of developing experience, knowledge and understanding.

An effective social media strategy will incorporate the critical elements of:

Listening – Talking – Engaging – Sustaining

Listening

- What are people talking about?
- What is being said about your organisation/subject matter?
- Who is your audience?
- Where is your audience?

Talking

- Promote and introduce your organisation/subject matter
- Provide information that will be helpful
- Target influential individuals/audiences

Engaging

❚ Develop and encourage two-way conversations

❚ Talk with supporters and critics

❚ Create a growing network using content that can be shared

Sustaining

❚ Keep dialogue going to be well positioned in an emergency

❚ Commit necessary resources to maintain momentum

❚ Turn followers into advocates who speak for you

The section below will show you how you can achieve the above.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Social media can generally be categorised as social networks, blogging/micro-blogging services, video and picture sharing platforms and other crowd-based services. Information on the main social media platforms is available in Annex 1.

Training in how to use social media techniques is highly recommended.

During an event, people will use different social media channels for different purposes. Some may need information because they live close to an emergency, whereas others may just want to help. People will use social media either passively or actively.

Social media comprises a range of communication tools and new ones are emerging all the time. Responders should be aware of which social media platform is used most by their target audience and adopt an audience-based approach. We advise that you speak to organisations similar to your own, and partner organisations, to draw on their experience and help build your understanding.

Responders are best placed to determine which social media platforms they should use, and how they should use them, based on their intended level of activity and engagement. There are recommended social media platforms for each level of engagement. These are set out in Annex 1.

Challenges

Social media presents challenges as well as opportunities. One of the biggest challenges is keeping up with the pace of developments.

Other challenges can include:

❚ the level of information that needs to be monitored, filtered and evaluated

❚ the public expectation to engage in a dialogue through social media platforms

❚ the need to counteract rumours and misinformation, which can spread rapidly during an emergency

CO-ORDINATING A MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSE

Co-ordination is essential to effective communication and an emergency situation requires different responders to work together. It is important to have a structure in place to manage all the communications functions, including social media.

The Public Communication Group (PCG) will be responsible for developing a multi-agency emergency communications function, with a clear strategy for social media communications and engagement.

A key role of the PCG or media relations team will be to carry out local exercises before an emergency, to ensure the public communications response will be as effective and efficient as possible.

Further information about this is available in Warning and Informing Scotland.

GETTING STARTED

Many responders have already developed effective frameworks, within which use of social media is well defined. Those practitioners have offered the following practical tips to assist others in developing a social media presence.

Top tips
- Develop a clear policy for your organisation's use of social media and communicate it clearly at the point of public use as well as to staff

- Always encourage members of the public to use 999 to call for help in an emergency

- Use social media to complement existing communications channels, not as a substitute for them

- Use social media as part of a community resilience building strategy to assist individuals and communities to prepare for, deal with and recover from emergencies

- Use micro-blogging and social network platforms which are likely to access the largest audience

- Routinely monitor social media channels but do not guarantee to reply to direct messages, comments or questions

- Only re-broadcast information and advice from trusted partners, official or verified sources

- Always counteract inaccurate or misleading information at the earliest opportunity

- Discourage use of abusive, racist or otherwise offensive language or material

- Establish arrangements for drafting, clearing and releasing information in an emergency situation

- Use consistent logos and themes when designing social media sites

GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE

Where necessary, the lead responder during any incident will activate the multi-agency communication response in accordance with the roles and responsibilities outlined in Warning and Informing Scotland.

During a large-scale emergency, a lead responder is neither expected nor likely to be able to handle the volume of social media traffic in isolation. The lead responder should make arrangements for effective partnership working.

This could include:

▮ Agreeing and publicising an incident-related #hashtag which can be used as a single authoritative source

▮ Agreeing retweeting arrangements to maximise coverage

▮ Jointly communicating key messages

▮ Monitoring related trends and #hashtags

▮ Producing and maintaining a #hashtag bank

▮ Correcting misinformation

Social media channels can help to inform people about risks in their area together with additional information such as impact, likelihood or precautions to take.

Community Risk Registers (CRRs) set out the likelihood and potential impact of a range of hazards occurring in specific areas and provide the basis for emergency planning at local level. Using social media to build risk awareness and provide advice on preparedness ahead of an event will give you the opportunity to raise the online profile of your organisation, whilst providing sound advice to members of the public (e.g. on the Ready Scotland website).

Building and engaging your audience during an emergency requires a strategy based on the following:

▮ Ensure staff have the necessary social media skills ahead of time

▮ Regularly maintain social media sites

▮ Be creative – learn from good practice

▮ Ensure your channels are dynamic, interactive and responsive

▮ Make official websites the first port of call for users seeking information

▮ Incorporate social media in everyday processes

▮ Keep the number of technologies used to a manageable level

▮ Vary types of social media to reach your target audience

▮ Use social media to dispel rumour and challenge misinformation

- Keep messages simple – social media content should be concise, informal and jargon-free

- Link Twitter and Facebook output

- Link social media output to the full information published on the authoritative website

Management considerations

- Build resilience into the management of social media activity

- Harness top down support for social media activity

- Consider engaging a social media expert

- Understand issues relating to retrieval, recording and retention of social media messaging

- Create 'dark' web pages that can be made live with relevant information in the event of an emergency

- Regularly evaluate social media engagement

- Include social media in public communication related business continuity plans

- Understand and use indicators to know when to give social media communication higher priority

- Make your corporate social media policy clear, consistent and visible on sites where your organisation has a presence

- Establish a clear internal policy on use of social media with clear ownership and monitoring

- Use appropriate existing official accounts with an audience base rather than creating new ones

- Consider the allocation of resources, especially if you are using social media as a two-way communication channel

Optimising profile

- Use content management applications to connect various social media platforms

- Investigate the use of social media by partners and connect where possible to increase overall effectiveness and reach

- Consider accessibility issues to allow use by people with disabilities

- Be aware of popular online places which communities regularly use so they can be accessed in an emergency

- If you use Google Translate for simple messaging to minority communities, ensure that translations are checked by a competent (preferably first language) speaker of the target language

- Aim to always increase your 'following'

- Build your audience by getting authoritative users to retweet

- Understand the local social media audience as it can be unique

- Target specific audiences by posting your message (if possible) on relevant Facebook pages

Some other examples of best practice during an event include:

- Linking traditional, online and social media output to maximise audience

- Using a small number of common hashtags

- Ensuring information sent out is machine readable and not in pdf format

- Recruiting trusted digital volunteers to assist in monitoring social media sites

- Preparing responses to predictable questions in advance to save time and effort

Informing and advising – After an Emergency

In the aftermath of a significant event and as responders begin to focus more on the recovery period, social media services can also be used as part of the public communication strategy to:

- Assist post-incident investigations (reconstructing an event, identification of witnesses and key individuals)

- Co-ordinate post-incident actions, such as clean-ups or donation giving

- Evaluate agency actions during recent events, by mining opinions expressed by users or by setting up social media surveys

- Signpost where to get help in the recovery phase

Post-event best practice includes:

- Maintaining sites after the event

- Measuring effectiveness of social media against pre-defined aims and objectives

- Measuring quality and quantity of following in terms of influential users

- Utilising web analytics and tracker applications to analyse effectiveness of relevant social media activity

- Producing reports summarising both quantitative and qualitative data

For examples of good practice that are continually updated, please go to
www.readyscotland.org/social-media-space/social-media-good-practice/

If you have good examples of your own, please email details to readyscotland@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

ANNEX 1: SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS/TOOLS

■ **Social networks**, for example Facebook, MySpace, Google+ and LinkedIn, allow you to establish an online presence that can be public, semi-public, professional or private. Users can share and disseminate content with a restricted audience or the wider public. Facebook is advised for general promotion, appeals and reputation/image building.

■ **Micro-blogs**, for example Twitter, are social media sites that allow users to send character-restricted messages out to a network of users, increasingly through mobile devices. Users can also view content online and through email. Shared content can include the use of pictures and video. Twitter is now widely used during emergencies across the world, for warning and informing in real time.

■ **Blogs**, for example WordPress and Blogspot, provide an audience with textual information. They allow a degree of interaction and the format has evolved allowing users to integrate other media formats, such as videos or photos.

■ **Audio, video and image sharing** – the video sharing website YouTube can be used to upload, view and share video content. More organisations are creating YouTube channels to share information, e.g. the Scottish Government channel. Flickr and Instagram allow users to upload, view and share photos and other digital images.

■ **Crowd-based platforms**, for example Crowdmap, provide a specific service. As well as being an important communication channel, crisis mapping enables users to visualise information related to a specific event. In most cases, the information is provided by the general public (crowd) and gathered using a platform. The platforms can integrate user-generated content from micro-blogs or social network sites. Responders can use them to disseminate information or to engage in two-way communication.

■ **Social media dashboards**, for example Tweetdeck, Hootsuite and Addictomatic, allow users to access different social media platforms from a single site, with a single log on. Dashboards can offer additional functionality such as RSS feed management, social media searches and analytics.

■ **Social bookmarking sites**, for example Delicious and StumbleUpon, enable you to store, organise, search and manage bookmarks of web pages on the internet with the help of metadata, typically in the form of tags that collectively and/or collaboratively become a folksonomy (also called social tagging). Users can add metadata in the form of keywords to share content.

WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS TO USE

Different social media platforms are recommended for different levels of engagement. The platforms do not necessarily change if an organisation operates at a higher level of engagement. The higher the level of engagement, the more a responder will be using social media platforms to their full potential and the more integrated they will be in their daily operations.

It is essential to communicate the purpose of your social media engagement to users (e.g. make clear if it is one-way or two-way communication). This helps to manage user expectations and allows the organisation to evolve at their chosen level.

This section introduces a five step social media engagement model which can be used to assess, evaluate and improve an organisation's social media activities. The model consists of three phases representing passive (one-way communication), active and pro-active engagement (both two-way communication) together with the associated levels of integration.
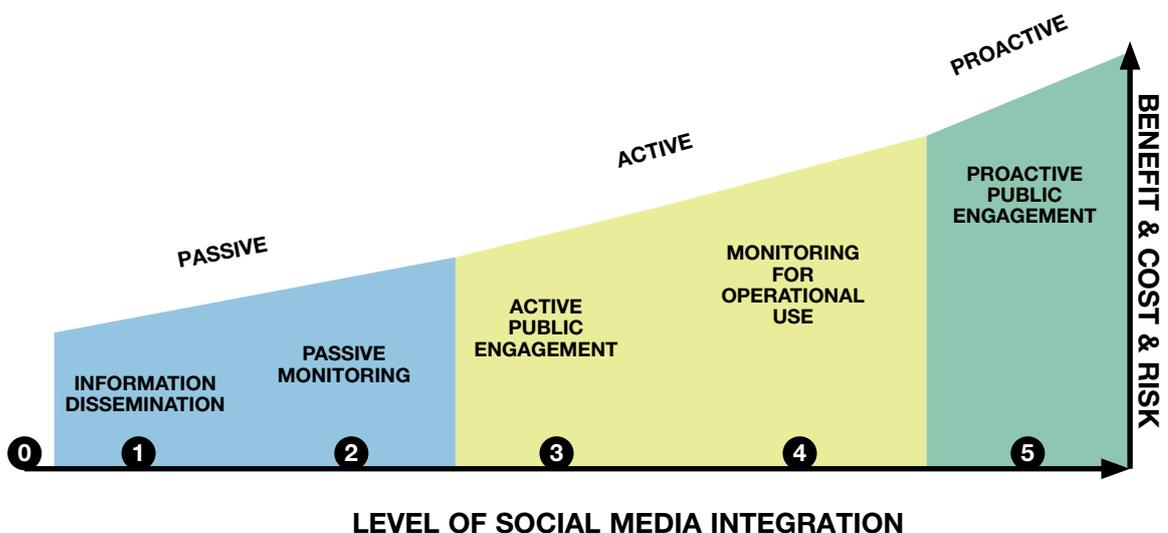
Passive Engagement with the Public (Levels 1 & 2)

This is the early adoption phase of social media platforms. At level 1, organisations disseminate information to the public using the basic features of social media platforms. This phase involves significantly lower cost and expertise.

Level 1 – Information Dissemination	
Description	Using platforms only to disseminate information.
Advantages	Organisations can control dissemination of their content on the channel and decide what content should be shared and when.
	Information with the public can be shared instantaneously, increasing your audience.
	Potential to reach a wider audience than other broadcast channels.
Used for	Warning and informing the public
	Campaigning
	Community Engagement
Potential risks	If organisations establish themselves as a trusted source, an organisation's failure to maintain their channels may result in parts of the population being less informed.
Platforms	Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Linkedin, YouTube, Flickr

Level 2 – Passive Monitoring	
Description	Passive monitoring of social media content.
Advantages	Allows you to understand audience perceptions and opinions.
	Enables identification of key stakeholders/influencers in communities which can support message dissemination.
	Builds understanding of demographics for social media platforms.
Used for	Static monitoring for specific events to gather information and increase situational awareness.
	Evaluating impact of campaigns and messages.
	Assessing how your organisation is viewed by the public.
Potential risks	The purpose of social media engagement needs to be made clear to users, otherwise there could be a mismatch between their expectations and the service provided. This is a reputational risk.
Platforms	Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Google+, LinkedIn

Active Engagement with the Public (Levels 3 & 4)

This phase builds on the foundations of the passive phase. Organisations will know the audiences using social media platforms and have identified key stakeholders/influential individuals. They are aware of the demographics of social media audiences and are able to evaluate activities, such as campaigns and the impact of messages. Here social media is a two-way communications channel – dissemination and monitoring are no longer separate activities.

Level 3 – Active Public Engagement	
Description	Disseminating information and engaging in two-way communication with your audience (responding to questions, comments, etc).
Advantages	Makes an organisation more accessible and responsive to the public.
	Allows you to inform and shape public perceptions.
	Reducing the impact of misinformation through timely response to ill-informed comments.
Used for	Providing direct information/ advice for non-critical events.
	Seeking information from the public, e.g. eye-witness reports.
	Countering misinformation and rumours.
	Providing community reassurance.
Potential risks	It is essential to have clear guidelines on rules of engagement.
	Volume of information requests might be very high during certain situations so procedures need to be in place to deal with this.
Platforms	Twitter, Facebook, Google+ LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, Instagram

For the last two levels, social media is used daily and during standard operating procedures. Social media should be increasingly used collaboratively – there is more interaction with trusted sources at this level.

Level 4 – Active Social Media Monitoring	
Description	Gathering information from social media platforms which is analysed and used to support operations. Recommended level for category 1 responders.
Advantages	Near real-time monitoring of events using publicly shared information. Access to information from trusted sources which can increase situational awareness. Allows you to understand plans, actions and movements of groups of people.
Used for	Gaining early awareness of events/issues, in some cases before they have been officially reported or taken place, e.g. illicit street parties or riot-inciting messages. Information gathered can be used to reconstruct incidents and analyse accidents, such as fires, road traffic accidents, etc. This can also be used for post-event investigation.
Potential risks	Verification of information Potential misinformation Volume of potential information Dependence on information/technology to perform analysis Requires investment
Platforms	Twitter, Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, Yammer, YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, social tagging/social bookmarking

Level 5 – Pro-active Engagement	
Description	Full integration of social media into your daily operations.
Advantages	You receive validated information from trusted sources.
	Information received from platforms can be linked into other operational systems.
	Collaboration with partner agencies already established and easily activated.
Used for	An additional, or alternative to, emergency call systems.
	Obtaining information from public or volunteer organisations for increased situational awareness.
	Improved information sharing during emergencies.
	Updating the public about responder operations in real-time.
Potential risks	Increased reliance on social media platforms during incidents.
	Resilience of these channels cannot be guaranteed.
	Requires using social media on an inter-agency basis so other organisations (category 2 responders) need to be proficient in social media use.
Platforms	Twitter, Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, Yammer, YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, Social tagging/social bookmarking

ANNEX 2: TRAINING AND EXERCISING THE SOCIAL MEDIA FUNCTION

Category 1 responders are required to have plans in place to carry out local exercises to ensure their public communications arrangements are effective. A key component will be to practise and assess all communications functions, including social media. It is fundamental that responders test their social media strategy before an emergency.

It is recommended that social media good practice is included in local training programmes. The National Exercise Programme will also include events which enable public communications to be tested.

There are many external courses which offer social media training. The Social Media for Resilience Practitioners course on the Virtual Resilience Campus developed by the Scottish Resilience Development Service (ScoRDS), provides an overview of how social media tools can be used by resilience practitioners.

Also recommended is the FEMA online training course on social media in emergency management. Developed in the United States, it provides information on the common tools and techniques and a roadmap to build social media capability for use in emergencies.

Useful Links
Please go to www.readyscotland.org/social-media-space/social-media-useful-links/

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