Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media

A survey by Cogitamus for the NHS Confederation
August 2012
Contents

Preface by Mike Farrar, NHS Confederation

Commentary by Joe McCrea, Cogitamus Ltd

Introduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section One</th>
<th>Social Media in context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section Two</td>
<td>From broadcaster to communitarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Three</td>
<td>The ‘Four Musketeers’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Four</td>
<td>Thought Leadership and the challenge of implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Five</td>
<td>The best of times, the worst of times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

It has always being at the heart of the NHS Confederation’s mission to provide a voice for the NHS. And being the only organisation that represents the whole of the NHS has meant us being able to provide a strong voice. But I believe we need to go further. Much further.

In these times of unprecedented challenge and change for the NHS, I believe it’s not enough simply to be speak for the NHS. We also need to listen. To learn. To engage.

Social media is transforming the way ordinary people and organisations engage with one another, communicate with one another and learn from one another. We need to harness social media to deepen relationships and understanding between all parts of the NHS. And we need to harness social media to deepen relationships and understanding between the NHS and the wider world.

That means engaging with decision-makers. With policymakers. With opinion formers. And most importantly with our members, with NHS users on the ground and their local and national representatives.

So over the coming weeks and months, we will be rolling out a series of social media channels and platforms where we can engage with the wider world and they can engage with us. Twitter. LinkedIn. Youtube. Facebook. Slideshare. We will be using all of these platforms and more.

And we want our members to come with us as we go on this social media journey. So we will be developing thought leadership and guidance that our members can use if they wish to harness social media to enhance their own engagement with their own local communities.

And we’re beginning with this Report. Why have we decided to do this? Because it’s the future. And it’s right. And it’s a vital tool to help us drive change in the NHS.

A few weeks ago, we picked up on a conversation that had taken place many miles apart from us and a few days previously in Taunton between users of NHS social media. They said “Why isn’t the Confederation doing more with social media? Surely it should be part of their leadership role.”

What they didn’t know was we were thinking the same thing at the same time. So to our members in Taunton. We say: “We’re listening to you and we’re responding to you”.

And that - in a nutshell - listening and responding - is the essence of good social media.

I hope you enjoy this Report and am sincerely grateful to Joe McCrea, Cogitamus Health Director, for his assistance and expertise in producing it.

Mike Farrar
Chief Executive, NHS Confederation.
Interest across the public sector in the potential for Social Media is growing exponentially. Organisations big and small, national and local, responsible for policy making and for delivery on the ground, are all seeking to understand what ‘social media’ is and what it can do for them and their service users, stakeholders and influencers.

Many have already ‘dipped their toe in the water’; a few are more advanced in their understanding and practice. The majority are still hesitant, unsure what it means and even more unsure about how to go about developing and implementing an effective and efficient social media capability in their own organisation.

New research published in July 2012 by OFCOM shows that social media is here to stay and is being adopted in increasingly large amounts, particularly amongst 19-24 year olds – a notoriously difficult to reach social group for many public sector organisations.

According to OFCOM, social networking is used daily to communicate by about one third (32%) of adults and is the biggest claimed increase in communication methods used in the past two years among 16-24 year olds (31% net claimed increase).

This Report is designed to help those public sector organisations in preparing for their social media journey, to act as an introductory guide to the leading tools in the marketplace, and importantly to provide some insight from those existing social media practitioners that have been addressing the challenge in recent years.

It’s often said that we learn as much from our mistakes as from our successes, so I am most grateful to participants for sharing with us their pitfalls and experience of what doesn’t work as much as their successes and what does.

To those about to set out on their social media journey, I would like to offer our best wishes and good luck. If you would like to contact us in future with your own successes, lessons-learned or questions, we’d love to hear from you.

Who knows, if you contact me via Twitter or LinkedIn, I might even reply.

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INTRODUCTION

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
This Report contains the results of a research exercise conducted by Cogitamus Ltd for the NHS Confederation during April to June 2012, seeking to understand how social media is currently being used and deployed primarily within the health sector, but also incorporating perspectives from other public sector, membership and media organisations.

The exercise consisted of an online survey asking respondents details of:

- social media tools currently being used by individuals and the organisation, both for corporate and personal purposes;
- the frequency with which they currently use social media for a range of business purposes, and the degree to which they plan to develop this range in the future; and
- examples both from within their organisation and beyond of where social media has been used well or badly.

The online survey was complemented by extended one-to-one interviews with a range of leading social market practitioners in the public, health and media sectors.

Participants were offered the choice as to whether or not they wished their individual responses to be anonymised or publicly attributed to their own organisation. Respondents were evenly split between those who wished to remain anonymous or attributable. We have therefore chosen to treat all responses as non-attributable, in the interests of fairness to all.

In total, 25 organisations took part in the exercise. These included:

- the Department of Health;
- the NHS Confederation;
- NHS Employers;
- NHS London;
- nhssm.org (nhs social media outlet);
- East and North Herts NHS Trust;
- Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust;
- 2gether NHS FT;
- South Central Ambulance NHS Foundation Trust;
- University College London Hospitals;
- the General Pharmaceutical Council;
- Health Service Journal;
- the British Medical Association;
- the Kings Fund;
- the Confederation of British Industry;
- the Department for Innovation, Business and Skills;
- the Met Office;
- the Innovation Unit (education think tank);
- the New Statesman;
- Q Magazine; and
- Warp Films.
The outputs from this exercise have been grouped into five Sections. Each Section summarises key themes and findings in the relevant area. Interspersed throughout the Report are comments, observations and insights from survey and interview participants. These are coded thus:

“Interviewee observation or comment”

Interviewee’s example of their social media implementation

Survey respondent’s example of best practice in social media

Survey respondent’s example of poor practice in social media

This Report is being published by Cogitamus and made available by the NHS Confederation as part of its mission to provide guidance, assistance and thought leadership to its members and the wider NHS in its understanding and successful exploitation of social media.

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
SECTION ONE: SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONTEXT

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
Before considering the detail of what survey respondents and interviewees told us as part of our research, it would be helpful to take a step back and look at social media in its broader context.

“Social Media” is not new

Whilst the specific term “social media” may be new, its aims, purported benefits and proposed delivery strategies are anything but.

At the most fundamental level “social media” purports to deliver a more modern, more rapid, more convenient, more effective and more engaging set of tools and behaviours to enable individuals and organisations to more quickly and conveniently communicate with one another and more fully engage with each other’s point of view and perspectives.

It promises to do this primarily by harnessing the benefits of newly-emerged technology and new communications platforms which are already being adopted by individuals in the wider world for purposes far outwith the specific needs of any single organisation seeking to develop a “social media” capacity.

Proponents of social media seek to demonstrate the benefits and value for money deliverables to organisations willing to seriously invest in its operation, often on the back of highly significant investment by others in communications infrastructure, tools and services.

This is nothing new. A similar set of arguments and exhortations were no doubt made:

- in Ancient China for using communications towers on the Great Wall;
- by Johannes Gutenberg in 1440;
- by Roman proponents of signal flags and fire beacons;
- by native american smoke signallers at the end of the 18th Century;
- by Edwin Morse in 1836;
- by the Pony Express in 1860;
- by telephone enthusiasts following Bell’s successful patents application in 1876;
- by fans of Edison’s radio in 1891;
- at the World Fair in 1900 where the word ‘television’ was first used;
- in 1946 when Bell Labs demonstrated the first mobile phone call from a set installed in a car;
- in 1962 by American computer scientist JCR Licklider proposing an “intergalatic computer network”;
- in 1971 when the first ARPANET e-mail was sent; and
- by Steve Jobs at virtually any presentation he ever made over a period of 40 years.

And most, if not all, of them were true.
However it is also true that, over the years, there have been plenty of IT-based movements, management theories and fads that have promised big results, but delivered far less.

The most recent example of this phenomenon was the turn-of-the-century vogue for “knowledge management.” The promise of knowledge management was to “enable organisations to know what we know”. Many organisations’ experience of implementing knowledge management programs did yield some useful insights, most notably the potential for virtual web-based communities of interest and communities of practice (insights which can be harvested today to inform and support successful social media-based activities).

But the overall end result of the knowledge management movement was an entire self referencing industry of “KM” experts, many of which were fairly closely aligned with associated IT vendors, but far divorced from core organisational priorities or outcomes and therefore increasingly irrelevant.

If public sector organisations are to reap the undoubted rewards on offer by the intelligent exploitation of social media, but avoid expensive cul de sacs, they need to be able to explicitly align their use of social media with their core mission and drivers.

The changing nature of communications

In the late 1990s and early days of the 21st Century, increasing maturity of the Internet and web-based tools transformed the way in which government and public sector organisations undertook press, public and stakeholder communications.

It might be hard for some to believe, but in 1997 the Department of Health used stand-alone PC computers to produce its press releases which were then saved on individual hard drives, printed off, faxed to media outlets and stored in hardcopy in a cupboard in Richmond House.

If anybody internally within the Department of Health wished to find out what the Department had said about a topic previously, the advice given was “speak to Pam, she’s the girl with the key to the cupboard.” Presumably, anyone who did not work for the Department would have to rely on their own internal paper records of press releases previously issued. The idea that anybody, internally or externally, would wish to access or research this material out of “normal office hours” was simply dismissed out of hand.
Two major factors rendered these practices obsolete. The first factor was the advent of round the clock media coverage and news outlets, initially trailblazed by Sky News, but followed thereafter by BBC and ITV. This meant that in media terms there was no such thing as “out of office hours”. The second factor was a development of the Internet as a mature and robust platform for producing, communicating and sharing material.

Within a very rapid period of time, the idea that the Department of Health would not have a web presence, including press releases and briefing material was simply absurd.

So what had seemed unnecessary or unreasonable in 1997 had become mainstream, essential and taken for granted within less than 5 years.

It’s important to understand that the combination of these 2 factors was not simply a result of activity by the media, or indeed IT companies. Instead, 24-hour news and increasing use of the web as a communications platform acted as Siamese twins, both of which were responding in actual fact to changing consumer behaviour, as more and more people hooked up to the Internet and began to use it in their private lives.

The advent of Web 2.0

In the early part of this Century, the Internet underwent a second transformation, which was dubbed Web 2.0. This was a similar communications revolution to the initial introduction of the Internet and it was driven by similar forces.

Firstly, the widespread adoption of broadband meant that the amount, quality and range of material that ordinary consumers were able to access by their computer or increasingly mobile device exploded.

Now it was not simply a case of being able to access large amounts of text. Video, audio, animation and gaming material were being consumed in increasing amounts by millions of people - many of whom were doing so using real-time collaboration. At the same time, the increasing use of blogs and wikis were turning the web into a forum for collaboration, rather than consumption.

This culminated in a famous Time Magazine front page article on Christmas Day 2006 heralding “Time’s Person of the Year (You)” explaining:

“It's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people’s network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world but also change the way the world changes.”

So, a website that simply allowed people to read and download press releases, statements, documents and other broadly text-based material was already becoming obsolete by 2006 and certainly is obsolete now.
The initial Web 2.0 transformation was not simply a transformation in capacity to receive higher quality and more value added material. It also marked a transformation in the relationship between consumers and producers. In the commercial world, this meant the rise of web-based customer relationship management, product support and interaction.

In the media world, this was first heralded by the development of fairly simple capacities, for example the ability to register with a news organisation and, by doing so, submit and exchange comments and responses on a particular news item or broadcast.

Of course, a news organisation thriving on ratings taking the leap of faith to facilitate public comment about a news item is less daunting than a public organisation, government department or indeed membership organisation taking the same steps and facilitating online comment about its own policies and activities. For that reason, it is not surprising that similar capabilities are not yet common practice among such latter types of organisations. But it is absolutely inevitable that they will have to become common practice by such organisations in future if they are not rapidly to appear obsolete, defensive or uncommunicative.

The permanence of the social media revolution

Interviewees and survey respondents made clear their view that the communications revolution being ushered in by social media is significant and permanent.

“I don’t think this is going to go away. The numbers of people using it are massive and, whilst they might not be doing very much each, collectively it’s very powerful and that isn’t going to go away. The tools will change, but the dynamic won’t go away.”

The advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube have upped the game in terms of the ways in which organisations interact with their members, stakeholders, users and the wider world. Simply talking at people is now obsolete. We have now moved into a world of instant comment, peer-to-peer communication, dynamic reputation management and constant interactive stakeholder management.
Our respondents told us that if organisations are to extract the maximum benefit from this revolution, social media needs to be embraced as something which impacts on the entirety of operations, not simply pigeon-holed as a ‘comms activity’.

"Social Media blurs the line between PR, journalism, customer service and interaction, branding...all of these things start to mesh into one. It has to be more than a little department as part of what you do. To do it successfully, you have to seed it through everything you do."

Our respondents are clear that social media is genuinely opening up new opportunities in new areas, including the ability of organisations to tap into the reality of their operations on the ground, or conduct more powerful research.

"There’s a sort of network of organisations which goes beyond the pure research relationship. But on research, if you took social media away, you’d lose a really important and useful research tool, because there is a certain amount of self-selection and there’s some stuff that gets lost, but you’d lose an awful lot more useful stuff, particularly through the amplification process."

They were also clear that successfully implementing and using social media also requires the adoption of new skills and attitudes, particularly senior managers being asked to establish and maintain a social media presence.

"You have to treat people with presumed confidence and they have to be genuine. That is why our policies on this are about authenticity. It’s not about having the ‘face’ and people doing it on their behalf. Our advice to senior management is that the key to being active is how genuine you are. Users of social media are very savvy to it not being the real person. So if you had a senior manager’s twitter channel being drafted by a press officer, that would be spotted straight away."

These 3 drivers – blurring of organisational boundaries and operations, transformation of research and intelligence gathering, new skills and behaviours – taken together demand that organisations fundamentally change the ways in which they interact with their networks and outside world.

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
But they need to do so – and be seen to do so - genuinely in an effort to harness and support communities of individuals, rather than as a cynical exercise, simply looking to push a centralised message more widely and with greater effort.

"If you do social media and you simply do it as a top-down exercise, you may as well not do it at all. But if you treat it as a conversation, that’s where the value of it is, because you can don’t just get into the individual examples of individuals’ hopes, fears and ideas, but to everyone else watching that conversation, you’re seen to do it and show that you care.”

In short, to succeed in the new world of social media, organisations need to change from being broadcasters to being communitarians.

The emerging landscape – a view from OFCOM

Just as the research exercise underpinning this Report was being completed, OFCOM published its latest Report on the Communications Market 2012.

The OFCOM research shows:
- the average consumer now spends 90 minutes a week on social networking sites;
- in 2012 50% of adults used the internet to access social networking sites, 15% read or browsed Twitter and 9% posted a message on Twitter;
- Looking at the overall ways in which people communicate with friends and family on a daily basis, 68% use any text-based methods and 63% use any voice-based services;
- The biggest claimed increase in communication methods used in the past two years among 16-24 year olds is social networking (31% net claimed increase), followed by text messaging (+ 23%) and instant messaging (+12%);
- Social networking is used daily to communicate by about one third (32%) of adults;
Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media

- Twitter (+24%) and LinkedIn (+14%) both increased their unique audience between March 2011 and March 2012;
- LinkedIn (14.8% unduplicated) and Friends Reunited (13.9% unduplicated) both have explicitly specialised target audiences, whether that is professional communities or those with an interest in nostalgia and genealogy;
- Facebook is the most popular social networking site in the UK, with a unique audience for March 2012 of 25.7 million. In that month, 64% of the entire online audience went on Facebook. Twitter is next with (6.2 million unique visitors per month), and LinkedIn (4.0 million);
- YouTube is the most significant player among video-sharing sites, averaging 19.8 million unique visitors per month between March 2011 and March 2012. This is far more than either of its closest competitors; and
- YouTube accounts for over twenty times more videos watched online than the next largest platform for such content. VEVO, Perform Sports and the BBC sites combined make up less than a tenth of its total.
SECTION TWO: FROM BROADCASTERS TO COMMUNITARIANS

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
Our respondents believe it simply is no longer good enough for organisations to be able to broadcast material, or simply speak at people, no matter how many different platforms or tools are used to do so. The test of an organisation is now the degree to which it genuinely is prepared and able to operate as a member and facilitator of communities of individuals and other organisations in its sphere of operation, influence and delivery.

“At the heart of the successful operation of these communities lies a fundamental shift away from one-way transmission, dissemination or management of material. In future, organisations will need to engage in conversations, interaction and response.

“The value of replying to people is enormous, because (a) it gets a conversation going, (b) it shows you value them, (c) it gives you a sense of what they think - you’re doing your live market research there and then.”

“The essentials for success as a social media communitarian organisation are:

- recognise the impossibility and futility of trying to use online spaces to ‘create’ communities that do not hitherto exist in real life;
- instead, identify, enable and actively support existing real-life communities of interest and communities of practice (either between individuals, organisations or both);
- appreciate the importance of relationships of trust and reciprocity in enabling and sustaining these communities - ie ‘always be responsive’ and ‘always be true’;

“I think what we’ll start to see is an interest and resurgence in traditional social media. So wind the web right back and come back to ‘forums’, ‘communities’, ‘comments on websites’. I think that’s probably where the value is for most organisations.”

“Someone tweeted Virgin last year and said “We’re getting married next year, can we get married on one of your planes?” - and very quickly, someone was able to tweet back and say - “I’ve been in touch with somebody and, yes you can. Get in touch with this e-mail and we’ll see what we can do. Let us know how it went and stay in touch on Twitter.” Now that was brilliant not just for the people who wanted to get married on that plane, but for everyone else because they now know that Virgin Atlantic cares about them as individuals, not just as a mass demographic.”
The crucial mistake to avoid, according to our survey participants, is not to try to use social media to “create” or “invent” communities of individuals. Communities exist out there already. The power of social media derives from its ability to tap into these communities and genuinely to enhance their ability to communicate and collaborate. Efforts to use social media to force new communities into existence are rarely successful.

“We used to try to create our own online network for people who had come on our courses and the reality was that no-one was really using them. They said they wanted to, but our head of digital said to me at the time “All the evidence says, go to where the people are, don’t set up new networks, go to where they are.” So even though they say they want their own network, the reality is they forget their username or login etc, so we go to where they are, go to LinkedIn, go to Facebook, go to Twitter and don’t be frightened as an organisation about what the brand of Facebook or Twitter says about you now, because actually they’re moving on quite a lot. So we’re setting up groups on LinkedIn, saying “here’s a group for your intake, and we will feed it regularly with information, but it’s not a burden on our back and we let it have its own life.”

Fortunately for public sector organisations, moving from a broadcaster to a communitarian approach need not be as dramatic an upheaval as might be feared. This is because a large part of the way in which the public sector currently organises its activities is, in fact, a community-based approach. It simply is not articulated in community-based language.

There are broadly 2 types of communities - Communities of Practice and Communities of Interest. Communities of Practice broadly equate to existing organisational structures or work area, for example an ambulance service network or clinical commissioning groups. Communities of Interest are more closely aligned with specific policy imperatives or professional disciplines, for example QIPP or social care policy.

- speed of response and authenticity of voice will very quickly be accurately perceived by community members - offering no response or bland automatically generated responses will quickly destroy the community;
- ensure there is genuine added-value to members of the community by their active participation; and
- constantly celebrate successes and contributions from community members to further deepen relationships and community identity.
Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media

“Almost anything than you can classify as an "attempt" to use social media is immediately a failure: social media work best when they are built upon communities which already exist and are a continuous part of the organisation’s activity. Intervening artificially into that eco-system or trying to create one from scratch is rarely successful. Some of our most lacklustre social experiences have also come when we have tried to use social media as one-way marketing tools, for example when we decided to self-distribute the Shane Meadows film LE DONK AND SCOR-SAY-ZEE. Although Shane has a big on-line following, what they value is an interactive relationship with him and the brand, not simply being asked to buy DVDs.”

It is important not to confuse avoiding creating new communities – which is rarely possible - with creating new spaces within which existing communities of individuals can better interact – which is where social media can have a significant impact. By using a range of social media tools, organisations can create new and compelling online spaces to tap into, harness and enhance these existing communities of individuals.

But amongst all the options open to them, there has to be a reason for these existing communities of individuals to want to participate in specific social media sites and deployments.

Some types of reason and benefit may include:

- By participating in this social media community, I can get access more quickly and more easily to vital bits of information and knowledge which I need;
- By participating in this social media community, I am able to significantly enhance the visibility, reputation and success of my own particular project;
- By participating in this social media community, I am able to keep abreast of the latest opportunities for my work within its larger context;
- By participating in this social media community, I am able to get access to the latest tools and templates that I need to further develop my skills and knowledge;
- Without participating in this social media community, I run the risk of missing the boat when it comes to the important developments in my area of interest and expertise; or
- By participating in this social media community, I make contact with, and benefit from, a group of individuals who have experience, skills and knowledge that I need.
The intelligent use of social media is ideally suited to driving the recognition by community members of these benefits and, crucially, to delivering those benefits efficiently and effectively. This is particularly the case with Communities of Interest, whose lifeblood is dialogue, conversations, debate and intelligent enquiry. It also can enhance an organisation’s ability to communicate with groups and individuals whom hitherto it has not been able to reach effectively.

Twitter is a conversation. It is NOT ‘I am an important person, I have just had a meeting with someone. I have just done a presentation, here it is’. That’s not Twitter. Twitter is a conversation. There are a good number of senior people out there in leadership roles who understand that Twitter is a conversation. And it’s fantastic. It’s like I have the senior people sitting next to me in my room and I can ask them a question and they can respond.”

The benefits are not confined simply to organisations enhancing their corporate reach or influence. Experienced social media practitioners told us that it can have a direct and significant benefit to the individuals participating themselves. The investment of engaging in conversations and building mutual relationships and conversations, can deliver real tangible results.

“We tend to think of ourselves as working as a Community of Practice, whatever that means in any different project, but basically a lot of people doing the same sort of work. If we can connect them up, they can properly connect with one another and build up a body of knowledge together. Beyond that, in the public sector, the core work is enhanced by the ‘on behalf of’ concept. In other words, a bunch of 10 sites doing something is interesting, but if they feel they’re doing it on behalf of a wider constituency, that is a highly motivating thing. That’s what we’re doing in New York, for example, 25 sites innovating on behalf of the whole system.”
Survey respondents and interviewees told us that, compared with traditional forms of interaction and consultation, which can sometimes be little more than forums for organisations to restate fixed positions or simply talk “at” each other, there appears to be something embedded in the culture of social media that encourages a more conciliatory and positive approach.

“We did some analysis, so we know it’s a very mixed bunch of people who follow us. It’s not just members. It’s probably about 20 per cent who are members, but there’s quite a lot of stakeholder groups in there as well, with whom I think traditionally we weren’t so good at communicating. I think we’re better now. Four or five years ago I don’t think we were focussed very well on communicating with stakeholders, but now it is a very easy way of communicating with other stakeholder groups, so they now know what we’re saying and what our issues are.”

“Whenever I do digital engagement courses with senior personnel, one of the things they always say is how surprised they are with how constructive people are online and I’m often surprised by it. When you set the ground rules and the framework for an online conversation, people are generally observant of them. They have strong points they want to make, but they’re specific points on a specific topic in a specific framework and it is very rare you get someone coming in with a sweeping assumption that everything was bad about policy.”
“Twitter is really good for micro level information. It’s very good for asking questions of the hive mind. It has a cultural bias towards help. People want to offer their advice and expertise.”

Our survey also demonstrated that the move from a broadcaster approach to a communitarian approach is not simply a ‘nice to have’ aspiration. It is what is happening on the ground, and in particular it is a drive which is being actively appreciated and pursued by existing and experienced social media practitioners.

To demonstrate this, our survey asked participants to tell us the organisational purposes for which they are currently using social media, as well as the frequency with which they are using social media for each purpose. (Regularly, Fairly Regularly, Occasionally, Never) We also asked what they planned to do and with what frequency in the future.
We asked about 21 organisational purposes, which could be grouped into 3 broad categories - Broadcaster, Listener and Communitarian.

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<th>Broadcasting Activities</th>
<th>Listening Activities</th>
<th>Communitarian Activities</th>
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<td>Building brand/organisational presence</td>
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<td>Facilitating or enabling peer to peer communication and interaction internally in the organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating to the media</td>
<td>Gaining information/feedback from members or member organisations</td>
<td>Facilitating or enabling peer to peer communication and interaction between members</td>
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<td>Communicating to members or member organisations</td>
<td>Gaining information/feedback from stakeholders or external bodies</td>
<td>Facilitating or enabling peer to peer communication and interaction between customers and service users</td>
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<td>Communicating to stakeholders or external bodies</td>
<td>Gaining information/feedback from customers or service users</td>
<td>Facilitating or enabling peer to peer communication and interaction between the public and wider world</td>
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<td>Communicating to customers or service users</td>
<td>Gaining information/feedback from the public and wider world</td>
<td>Supporting or enhancing face to face meetings or events</td>
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<td>Communicating to the public and wider world</td>
<td>Online Polling or Opinion Mapping</td>
<td>Hosting or facilitating online meetings or events</td>
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<td>Livecasting/webcasting</td>
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<td>Facilitating interactive research or academic collaboration</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hosting or facilitating Communities of Practice or Communities of Interest</td>
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Current usage shows that at present the majority are regularly using social media for Broadcasting Activities, occasionally using social media for Listening Activities and not using social media for communitarian activities. (NB This is the current activity by the majority of social media practitioners – a minority of up to a quarter are fairly regularly using social media for communitarian activities)

Current majority use of social media for organisational purposes

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<td>Facilitating or enabling peer to peer communication and interaction between customers and service users</td>
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<td>Communicating to members or member organisations</td>
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<td>Gaining information/feedback from stakeholders or external bodies</td>
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<td>Communicating to stakeholders or external bodies</td>
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<td>Facilitating interactive research or academic collaboration</td>
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<td>Communicating to customers or service users</td>
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<td>Gaining information/feedback from the public and wider world</td>
<td>Hosting or facilitating Communities of Practice or Communities of Interest</td>
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<td>Communicating to the public and wider world</td>
<td>Online Polling or Opinion Mapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting or enhancing face to face meetings or events</td>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitating or enabling peer to peer communication and interaction between members</td>
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<td>Hosting or facilitating online meetings or events</td>
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The picture changes dramatically when the question is asked of future use. This shows that the majority of survey respondents are currently planning to use social media regularly in the future for ALL of the 21 activities apart from:

- Only fairly regularly “obtaining information/feedback from the media”; and
- Only occasionally “facilitating interactive research or academic collaboration”.

This is an important and significant finding, for 3 reasons:

- It demonstrates a certain and quantifiable future overall trend from a broadcasting to a communitarian approach;
- It shows that a minority of social media practitioners are already adopting a communitarian approach; and
- It shows that experience of using social media for primarily broadcasting functions is not sufficient for existing practitioners, hence plans being actively developed at present by the majority to move from a broadcasting to a communitarian approach.

Having established that this trend in behavior is now firmly underway, the question now becomes “which tools are being used to deliver the required outcomes”? At least at present, that answer is dominated by the “Four Musketeers” of social media – Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn.
SECTION THREE: THE ‘FOUR MUSKETEERS’

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
There are individual differences and nuances in the ways in which the organisations studied and interviewed as part of this survey use social media. Each organisation operates in a slightly different arena, with slightly different priorities, serving and addressing the needs of slightly different audiences.

This is true even if one looks at their individual use of the 4 pre-eminent social media platforms - Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Facebook.

However, our survey confirmed the current overall dominance of these platforms.

94% of respondents said their organisations used Twitter for corporate purposes, 67% used YouTube and LinkedIn, and 61% Facebook.

The nearest specific social media application was Flickr, coming in at 39 per cent.

Figure 1: Which of the following social media does your organisation use for corporate purposes?
The dominance of the Four Musketeers is even more pronounced when looking at the answers given by social media leads in the surveyed organisations to the question “Which social media do you use personally?”

This showed Twitter and LinkedIn running joint top at 94%, followed by Facebook at 77% and YouTube at 71%. The nearest social media applications after this were Wikipedia and Flickr at 47%.

The pre-eminence of LinkedIn over Facebook for senior personnel in the public sector, even for personal use, is important to appreciate. It is also borne out by readership analysis conducted by one of our interviewees, a major player in the health sector media.

“We are interested in people who have leadership roles, however broadly defined, in and around the health service. We don’t believe these people are really active on Facebook, or if they are, they use Facebook for other purposes, for their social life. We believe that, in business terms, they are active on Twitter and on LinkedIn and the research that we have most recently done appears to confirm that, of our audience, around half of them are on LinkedIn and, of that half, about 20 per cent were active on Twitter.”

Figure 2: Which social media do you use personally?
The apparent domination of the Four Musketeers is at its most pronounced when we asked social media leads to give us their view of which social media is used by other employees in their organisations in a personal capacity.

This produced a perfect 100% score for Twitter and LinkedIn, followed by 92% for Facebook and 77% for YouTube.

Interestingly, the gap between the Four Musketeers and the following pack was felt to be slightly smaller, with Flickr, Blogs and Online Forums all coming in at 62%.

Also interestingly, it was felt that by almost 1 in 4 organisations (23%) that their employees used social media for research and academic collaboration, whereas only 1 in 6 (17%) had said that their own organization currently used it for this purpose.

Organisations need to appreciate the different purposes that each of the Four Musketeers serve and whom if they are to use them efficiently and most effectively.

These 4 giants, effectively the Four Musketeers of social media, have come to dominate but coexist because they serve complementary purposes in different ways.

Figure 3: Which social media is used by your employees in a personal capacity?
Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisational Purpose/Outcomes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breaking News</td>
<td>Journalists and Commentariat, Think Tanks/Opinion Formers, Corporate Accounts/Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story and events monitoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instant comment and reaction</td>
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<td>Brand promotion</td>
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<td>Thematic conversations</td>
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<th>Organisational Purpose/Outcomes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>Brand Promotion</td>
<td>Professionals and Leaders, Corporates, Ground level staff, stakeholders and users</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer-to-Peer Professional Networking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managed Professional Communities of Practice and Interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polling/Opinion/Interactive Research</td>
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<td>Gathering Information/Feedback</td>
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<tr>
<th>Organisational Purpose/Outcomes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>Popular profile</td>
<td>Personal/Individuals’ profiles, Campaign Groups, Service Users</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand promotion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tapping into public debate/comments</td>
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<td>Platform for multi-media outputs</td>
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<th>Organisational Purpose/Outcomes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Promotion</td>
<td>Personal profiles and subscriptions, Professionals and Media organisations, Broadcasters and Opinion Formers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting live events</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Platform for multi-media outputs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campaigning/Opinion shaping</td>
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Twitter is the arena of instant comment, instant reaction and instant debate. In relation to public sector communications and engagement, it is the modern equivalent of the old news organisations’ newswires and public bodies’ rapid rebuttal, combined with the largest community bulletin board imaginable. The difference is that in times past access to these newswires and rapid rebuttal was confined to news organisations and outlets themselves. Now such capacity, material and activity takes place in real time before the entire world. Not only this, but reaction and rebuttal can be made instantly by any user or any commentator.

“We set up a Twitter account and simply started initially pumping stuff out as most people do and as followers grew, we now have about 15,000 followers, it’s now got more value in terms of putting information out there and seeing people’s reactions. So we can put out press statements and communicate to the media quickly. So for example, when we took our decision recently, that decision was taken at a Council meeting and the meeting finished and we knew we weren’t going to be able to hold that information whilst we scurried down to write a press release and issue that, so we announced the basic information on Twitter with more news to follow.”

The formidable speed and pervasiveness of Twitter amongst the media and specialist audiences is a powerful tool that organisations are using every day to to get breaking news into the public domain. Some organisations have already cottoned onto the danger that if they don’t tweet their own stories quickly, someone else will.
Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media

“Twitter is where the real conversation in the country takes place. It’s fast, it’s immediate. It’s not in any way mediated by editors or scheduling or waiting for the guy from the phone-in programme to get to your number. There’s nothing to stop you having your say.”

“The speed of Twitter is both an opportunity and a risk for public sector organisations. Being able to break news quickly can be a significant boost. But being on the receiving end of breaking news on Twitter can represent a serious burden and challenge.

“Twitter is much, much faster than the old PA wires. To give you an example, the Press Office have a Twitter Board up where they monitor certain people and they reckon that they have no more than 10 minutes to react if someone tweets something newsworthy. So if something comes out of the blue, they have 10 minutes to prepare for it.

For public sector organisations to succeed, the key to using Twitter is to be

- first to its own stories;
- fast to react to comment or criticism;
- incisive in its own comments on other material; and
- accurately and authoritatively in everything that it says and does.

“Twitter is where the real conversation in the country takes place. It’s fast, it’s immediate. It’s not in any way mediated by editors or scheduling or waiting for the guy from the phone-in programme to get to your number. There’s nothing to stop you having your say.”

The immediacy and pervasiveness of Twitter can be a weakness as well as a strength. Quite simply, tweets can have a very short shelf life and the sheer amount of people tweeting can prove overwhelming if a user wishes to find something tweeted even a couple of days ago.

“It’s a fantastic early warning system. To give you an example, I got a call to say, just to let you know our Chief Executive has just resigned. I said ‘thank you very much’. They asked ‘when do you think you can break the story?’ I said ‘I broke it 15 seconds ago’ because I was typing with one hand.”

The immediacy and pervasiveness of Twitter can be a weakness as well as a strength. Quite simply, tweets can have a very short shelf life and the sheer amount of people tweeting can prove overwhelming if a user wishes to find something tweeted even a couple of days ago.
This weakness can be countered by the intelligent use of ‘hashtags’. By organising the organisation’s Twitter presence under different hashtags, the masses of comments, replies and retweets can be given some structure and organisation. It also means that other Twitter users can be discerning in the strands of an organisation’s tweets they choose to receive and with which they choose to engage.

Also, by using different hashtags for different purposes, a range of ‘personalities’ can be given to different types of an organisation’s material and Twitter presence.

“We have a strategy that can separate out our clever and articulate people by their specialist subject, so we can develop and widen our reach by recognising that, whilst we have 2 or 3 people who might comment very generally and get engaged in sometimes quite close to the line debate, we much extend the reach if we have someone, for example, with a particular strength and audience in social care, or another in public health, with their own audience. We are careful to make sure we don’t duplicate in our corporate feed what those individuals do.”

This hashtag separation strategies definitely have delivered impact on the part of Twitter followers.

“You might have a main tweet account, which is your corporate account, but then others which fulfill a different purpose. If I was to look for an example of an organisation who’ve got it pretty right, I’d say they have a main Twitter account which distributes information about what they are doing and has loads of activity supporting what it’s doing. So they have the main account doing the dull boring stuff and then they have a number of personal accounts for individuals tweeting on a certain subject, where their personality comes through.

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
Whilst the primary purpose of Twitter is instant comment, reaction and real-time conversations, its usefulness is not confined to that.

For example, Twitter can be used not only to generate profile and awareness of corporate or individuals’ views and opinions, but also of corporate services that might be of use to Twitter followers.

“I also run library and information services. We have a separate Twitter feed for our library which is much more for people who want to be on top of everything that’s just come out. So, for example, DH have just published a new Report on this and it’s too much for people at a senior level to be on top of everything, but there are some people who do wish to be updated twice a day on, say, ONS statistics on something have just come out. And it draws people into our database, which already is we believe the largest database on healthcare management and policy in the country.”

Twitter is also being used by organisations and participants to support live events – either by tweeting in real time key points from presentation or discussions, or by responding in real time or shortly thereafter to tweets made by audience members or non-participants.

Some organisations have even organized pre-planned tweeting activity to coincide with specific events as they happen, to generate momentum and visibility amongst the media and commentariat.

Twitter plays most into Policy Analysis and Bringing People Together, because our interaction via events and Twitter is one the ways we have generated lots of interest. So we will livestream events and we will generate and have people prompted to tweet in about what’s being said and generate momentum during a day. So we try to find a point in time to generate momentum.”

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
This pre-planned Tweet activity does not necessarily need to be confined to live events. If intelligently used, it can also generate profile for publications or reports that otherwise not receive much coverage in the mainstream media due to competing news demands.

“We had a report on mental health recently, which is not an area we do lots and lots of stuff in and we wanted to get as much reach as possible. So we engaged with lots of mental health organisations and we said we want to go really hard on this day, this is what we want tweeted and we hit the bloggers, and we just made a nice buzz and noise on that day, much greater than if we’d just gone through the usual e-mail traffic.”

Twitter is also being used by organisations as a medium via which to conduct live webchats and conversations, often involving senior leaders, policymakers and decision takers.

“A few weeks ago we ran a Q&A on Twitter with our Minister, so people could ask him questions, we used the corporate account but tweeted photos of him with a laptop to show it was him responding. I know from previous ministerial online Q&As that we should be looking at a response once every 1-2 minutes and he did one every 2 and a half minutes which was good, I think we had around 150 questions in an hour, falling under maybe a dozen different themes, and I think he responded on about 9 of those themes.”

Part of the culture of Twitter is that many tweeters participate as much as individuals as they do holders of specific jobs or positions. Whilst this might be a perfect arrangement for a pop star, journalist or politician, some might argue it is not necessarily the case for people occupying senior positions in public sector organisations.

Amongst our survey respondents and interviewees, the jury is most definitely out on this issue. As many people support the idea of leaders tweeting about their personal lives and think it is a benefit as oppose it.
What is not in dispute, however, is a clear consensus that participation in social media by senior leaders has to be genuine and wholehearted. This is particularly the case with Twitter. However, it can be the case that if Twitter is not the right arena for some leaders, other platforms may be more appropriate or comfortable for the individual concerned.

“I push at doors that are ajar. I’ve made the mistake of trying to push people to do it in the past and the results are terrible. Reluctant bloggers are bad bloggers. People have to be comfortable doing it. Some people are just not going to get on with Twitter. It has to suit your character and you have to be interested enough in how people respond to you. I haven’t found somebody I can’t find something useful for amongst the range of digital media out there. You can’t simply say, you’re now a senior manager, you must use this specific channel. You have to find what works.”

Reluctance on the part of participants is not the only health warning that should be attached to Twitter. There also has to be a recognition of the significant effort that needs to be made in successfully creating and maintaining a health Twitter feed.

“Having a lot of followers is important. You have to earn your followers by providing value, whether that’s by being amusing or providing useful information or providing opinion - which can be expressed in short 140 character bursts. Whatever you’re doing, you have to be creating interest.”

“A good Tweeter has to be doing it regularly. It’s a river where you get in, swim around a bit and get out. You don’t put it on a weekly ‘to do list’ and only do it once a week. Also you need people who tweet with personality, who are always up for a conversation. People who do it badly are people who only do it to put across corporate speak are dull beyond measure.”

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
It is also worth noting that, even amongst the most successful corporate users of Twitter, there is a recognition that its usefulness is particularly skewed towards certain organisations, in particular think tanks and policy units looking to engage with other opinion formers and commentators.

“Who really follows everything that a Twitter corporate account puts out? Twitter is only as good as your latest update, so what if your tweet happens to miss people’s refresh point. We have 33,000 followers, but if there’s one thing that gets my back up it’s when people say ‘we can put it out to our audience of 33,000 on Twitter’. We don’t have an audience of 33,000 on Twitter, we have 33,000 people who at any one time might see the odd tweet from us, which is very different. So going to the places where our audience are is absolutely key.”

“At the moment, Twitter feels to us like the be-all and end-all, but of course it is made for think tanks and media outlets. Twitter is made for breaking news and for thought leaders to say something funny and clever. So whilst I think we’ve done exceptionally well and been very clever in our use of it, it is made for think tanks who want to make a use of it.”

Perhaps the most striking comment of all about Twitter obtained either through the survey or interviews came from one of the most experienced social media practitioners in the public sector. It provides a useful sense-check for organisations tempted to see a Twitter account as being all that is needed for a successful social media strategy.

With this comment in mind, we now turn our attention to the one social media space where it is certain that public sector professionals congregate en masse – LinkedIn.

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the domain mainly of professionals engaging with professionals. It is the arena where CVs, qualifications, skills, experience and contacts are displayed, exchanged and sought-after. But increasingly it is also becoming the domain in which professional communities of interest and communities of practice can come together in online groups.

This is a crucial reality for public sector organisations to understand. Of all the social media platforms, it is LinkedIn where public sector professionals are most likely to be found in their professional capacity. It is the natural home for public sector organisations to develop and sustain their professional community-based social media activity.

Of particular interest, LinkedIn allows for the creation of semi-private LinkedIn Groups. Membership of these groups can be managed and controlled. This means that public sector organisations can effectively create a series of safe spaces where members can share material, debate and interact in a way that would not be possible in a purely public and uncontrolled environment such as Twitter. It also means that they can retain the ability to provide access to value-added material and content, as well as professional networking opportunities, possibly as a follow-on activity for alumni.

"Twitter is not our social medium of choice for leadership development. For this, we are developing LinkedIn and we are thinking about how we draw in our alumni. We have thousands of people coming through us over the years, so how do we draw them in and develop a relationship with those people over time and allow them also to form networks of their own, and build relationships that have been built on programmes and courses, without us having to create a completely separate network of activity and resource that."

These “safe spaces” could also be an ideal method by which organisations can request ground level intelligence and examples of activity and good practice from its member base in a controlled environment. The evidence and material that can be garnered in this way is precisely the type of material which can turn an abstract or theoretical policy analysis into a hard-hitting and dramatic story resonant with real life people facing real life challenges - particularly when deployed during media interviews, as part of the research base to inform policy reports and public affairs’ briefings or Q&A sessions.
Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media

Of course, the existence of these groups and their subject area can be seen by all LinkedIn users, whether members or not. In addition, LinkedIn users can see membership of groups by those with a secondary connection to themselves - i.e. onward connections of those to whom they are connected themselves. This means existing managed LinkedIn Groups can be marketed – and can self-market - to possible additional members.

Interviewees told us that although individuals in their organisations frequently have their own LinkedIn profiles, they often do not appreciate the potential for LinkedIn to be a social media platform available for exploitation and use by the organisations of which they are a member.

“There is enormous appetite around the organisation to be ‘doing something digital’. So very often in a typical day I get an e-mail or a call saying ‘we are launching x,y,z and I’d really like to do something about it online. They’ll probably already have their own ideas and sometimes they’re very good ideas because they know their audience, sometimes they’re not so good ideas and often I spend time saying “a blog is not good for this audience because...but a better idea might be connecting with them on LinkedIn.”

For those public sector organisations which have ongoing relationships or commercial interactions with the private sector or corporates, the latter’s presence on LinkedIn is an additional benefit.

“We have a big corporate partners scheme who also have their own big LinkedIn presence, as large corporates do, and they find it helpful to link across to our LinkedIn presence.”

The key to using LinkedIn or any other social media tool is to ensure that it fits with the organisation’s core aims and are designed with the ultimate end goal in mind.

“I think they are very useful tools, just as an Excel spreadsheet is a useful tool if used in the right place in the right way, and can be a pain in the backside if it’s used incorrectly. We need to align the tools with the organisation’s broad aims, so we can say broadly that places like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn allow people to engage with ideas and mould and discuss them and that aligns, so we can tick that box.”
It is fair to say that organisations’ appreciation of LinkedIn as a social media resource with widespread uses beyond simply professionals sharing CVs and contacts is not at as an advanced stage as the appreciation or use of Twitter. But it is definitely growing and developing.

“We are much more developed as to what we do on Twitter than we do on LinkedIn, although our LinkedIn user group is growing by hundreds of members a month. We want to use LinkedIn as a mini-forum for debate. Basically, to say ‘We’ve written about this, what do you think about it?’ But early days.”

“We haven’t really used LinkedIn up until now because it’s not where doctors go to look for jobs. But we’re increasingly aware that doctors are starting to go there.”

But it is also fair to say that there will still be much for organisations to learn about how best to design and harness LinkedIn groups.

“We’re still experimenting with LinkedIn discussion groups - it’s hard to know how to get the balance right between actively stimulating discussion and letting the group members get on with it themselves.”

“We have struggled to make groups on LinkedIn work so far because of lack of uptake but are still trying to build here.”

Having explored the professional domains of Twitter and LinkedIn, we now turn to the more personal domains of Facebook and YouTube.
Facebook

Facebook is the domestic and personal equivalent of LinkedIn and the almost ubiquitous of all social media platforms. Facebook users are more likely to be engaged in conversations and communities based around what is happening locally in their lives or their personal likes and dislikes, than they are about their professional lives or careers.

Whilst at first sight, therefore, it might be thought that Facebook should be a lower order priority for public sector organisations seeking to broaden the reach of their corporate communications activities, or support their professional membership, or to conduct active academic research, closer reflection would suggest otherwise. This is because a core part of the public sector challenge is to explain the complexity of reform and change - to the general public and service users.

Another core part of the public sector challenge is to mobilise support for difficult decisions and change - particularly in the NHS. Whilst this might be seen as a task requiring engagement with senior decision-makers and local politicians, the reality is that these people’s ultimate attitudes and stances are in large part driven by the views of their local electors and constituencies.

If public sector organisations do not maintain a reasonable Facebook presence, they are leaving the field open to others to dominate this space and frame public discussion and debate in ways that might not align with their own insights and experience.

For example, increasingly it is Facebook communities and pages that are the vehicle used by local campaigners and users to mount and organise local and national campaigns against NHS change or other difficult reform decisions. If public sector organisations truly wish to engage and drive lasting and embedded attitudinal behaviour to change and reform in the public sector, it needs to be doing so within the arena of Facebook.

Facebook also allows the dissemination of a wide range of high quality communications media.

“For brands and institutions Facebook is very good at being interactive, but you can also push out much more varied material. You can push out sound, you can push out video, you can push out pictures, graphs. And you can use the virality of that - people liking it, putting it on their walls, sending it to their friends - to create a mass of interest around a subject.”
Some organisations we interviewed were already recognising the distinct nature of Facebook to produce material better suited to a personal audience, spending time browsing as part of their private lives, rather than simply porting across to Facebook material better suited to – or even initially created for – more professional environments such as Twitter or LinkedIn.

“We’re now using Facebook to a certain extent to publish different types of material. They’re not huge, about 3,000 members. We’re starting to look at that in a more strategic way, what we offer, and starting to differentiate with what we provide on Twitter, give it a role itself, seeing it more as a sort of magazine. So we’re using our News publication to provide content and starting to see something where we programme activity and do something on it at least every day of the week that’s different. So we normally have some big political issue on a Monday, something frivolous on a Friday. We’re also starting to bring in some interaction, asking questions. Before, we didn’t do any interaction, but now we are. So asking questions, trying to get people to supply stuff. We also put our campaign materials on Facebook so people can see those. We’re starting to get some interaction.”

“We created a little graphic, saying “I’ve voted, have you?” which appeared on people’s Timeline if they shared. I think we had about 60 shares of that, which isn’t massive but when you top up that most people have about 120 friends, in terms of reach it’s a worthwhile activity. So you get thousands of people and generally engage people who are likely to do something and I think that’s the value of social media to a certain extent. It’s not just about numbers, it’s about hitting engaged people.”

It is important to recognise, however, that not all successful Facebook strategies need deploy such a weekly level of resource. Many Facebook pages are not designed for constant and repeated updates throughout every working day, unlike expected social media activity via Twitter. Instead, many are designed to act more as an information and communications resource for the medium and long-term, rather than a constantly updated broadcast medium. They also can be an additional useful platform for drawing public attention to campaigns or issues about which they may have heard in the media.
What is more, Facebook members are likely to contain whole swathes of people who would not normally be exposed to traditional public sector marketing efforts, but who might have a keen interest as service users to a lot of the services which the public sector provides.

These users are also likely to comment on and debate issues and topics which they encounter – not simply by ‘liking’ a page, but by posting it on their timeline or forwarding it to their friends with their own commentary. As a research tool for taking the temperature of the general public, Facebook can therefore sometimes act as the ultimate focus group.

So it is highly likely that Facebook can offer public sector organisations a very high return on investment – and potential reach into hitherto untapped audiences - for the limited resource demands required to create and maintain a presence.

It is worth noting, however, that those interacting with social media (including Facebook) may tend to be a self-selecting group and not necessarily representative of the general population. For example, some sections of society who tend to be heavy users of the NHS and public services – including many elderly people – may be digitally excluded. See www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/understandingdigitalexclusion
YouTube

Of all the Four Musketeers of social media, YouTube represents the simplest opportunity for public sector organisations to significantly transform the reach and impact of much of their communications and presentational activity. It also represents a major opportunity for much greater exploitation of effort and activity carried out by middle and senior management, with little extra resource.

Senior personnel in public sector organisations spend a large proportion of their time preparing and delivering presentations - normally PowerPoint presentations. For years, the creation, production and delivery of such presentations has been a particularly inefficient use of senior managers’ time. In the first place, creating a presentation from scratch - even without allowing for any advanced features such as animations, speaker notes or soundtracks - can take anything up to a number of hours. The necessary time to create a presentation often far outweighs the number of people who actually see its contents delivered.

This is not to say that the activity of creating a presentation is inherently indefensible or without merit. Often, it is a very good way for a senior manager or senior policymaker to harness their thoughts and line of argument across a number of interacting complicated policy areas. Just as often, weeks or months after the presentation is actually delivered, the presenter may share it via e-mail with colleagues or correspondents.

Traditionally presentations, in the main, are delivered to seminars and conferences with a largely invited or private fee-paying audience. Where the conference is a privately arranged seminar, part of the attraction for fee payers is being able to gain exclusive access to such material. But this is not always the case and does not have to be the case in the majority of circumstances.

In some cases, particularly where the Speaker is not receiving a fee for their services, it would be perfectly reasonable for an organisation to reserve the right to make such presentations available to a wider audience at a later date. Where the conference is being hosted by major organisation and is a flagship conference, increasingly such proceedings will be either streamed live over the Internet or made available later as a download. For all activities, it is becoming an increasing habit amongst audiences to use Twitter to inform the wider world about comments and insights being delivered by speakers at events they are attending.
By harnessing social media platforms such as YouTube, the senior personnel have a golden opportunity to massively increase the audience reach for their existing and future presentations, thereby driving up the value, efficiency and impact of such material. And it need not involve significant extra effort or activity on the part of the presenter to prepare even the most basic presentations for such use.

Creating a soundtrack for a PowerPoint presentation can entail little more than the presenter running through the presentation in real-time while speaking into a microphone on a laptop or Mac. This in itself can be done simply as a dress rehearsal for the forthcoming presentation. Adding speaker notes to a presentation can either be done by the presenter as part and parcel of creating the initial presentation, or could be done by support staff at a later date directly from the soundtrack.

It is now a fairly basic feature built into modern versions both of PowerPoint and of Keynote to be able to convert presentations into a format that enables them to be viewed as movies and embedded in websites.

Organisations interviewed as part of this survey are quickly waking up to this opportunity.

“Whenever we see an engaging presentation that is doing the rounds in the organisation, we use people in the press office who have done journalism training, to do the voice-over, and produce nice looking material and put them up on YouTube and some of them are getting 2000-3000 views and that’s people who can’t make it easily to our events. You can do that so easily. We have a media suite here and you can go down and produce something really good in less than an hour. We can also use graphics and infographics now and people are getting more used to do that - just like broadcasters do, using a graphic rather than a table. But it takes a differing mindset for people who are used to working mainly with words to thinking about images, audio etc.”
Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media

“We started using video to get out doctors’ views to members, particularly on niche subjects that would never get into the broadcast media or visibility outside small numbers of doctors who might meet in the HQ. So it was starting to use it to get their presence out there and try to encourage a bit of interaction. So we started out doing simple stuff like e-mailing out members’ questions and getting doctors to answer them via video, dipping our toe in the water, for example through a YouTube channel that’s been up now for around 4 years and has around half a million views over that period.”

“We have one YouTube channel and we publicise stuff by an e-mail marketing campaign. We got 5000-6000 hits in one month on one YouTube campaign on that. Sometime we'll do something sophisticated, getting in external resource, other times we'll simply do internally. We’re getting better at it. Our early examples were a bit like a hostage video - white wall and rabbit headlights. But we’ve got someone who does video as part of their job now, so they can do editing for us, and we have used a former BBC producer to do stuff for us using a small media company. She produced a series of films for us around our NHS Reforms campaign, with doctors expressing their concerns. But sometimes it’s just about getting the personal face of someone communicating.”

Of course for flagship presentations, extra resources could be deployed from within the communications team to take the initial basic presentation and significantly add to its quality for a web audience.
Other social media platforms

Although this Report has focussed in detail on the Four Musketeers, it is worth stating that the number of social media platforms is proliferating at a rapid pace.

For example, Pinterest offers a different and compelling user experience, through the use of virtual pinboards, which could provide a dramatic way to communicate complex ideas and concepts. Storify is a tool which enables users to create storylines incorporating tweets, presentations, images, videos and other online material. Slideshare is a very easy alternative to YouTube.

Public sector organisations could end up wasting significant effort if they attempted to harness all of them at once. It would be worth investigating whether or not some of the other platforms provide a better ‘fit’ with what a specific organization wishes to achieve in a particular context.

Whatever specific combination of social media channels any organisation chooses to deploy, they will all remain underutilised or less effective if the organisation itself does not recognise and rise to the challenge of changing its internal culture and capacity for supporting social media.

It is important, therefore, as part of its social media journey, for the organisation to invest in developing its in-house capacity and culture to support its initial chosen platforms, whilst assessing the added-value that could be delivered at a later date by widening its social media base.

Making a reality of the social media vision, and associated culture and behavioural change, therefore requires thought leadership and robust implementation planning and execution.
SECTION FOUR: THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND THE CHALLENGE OF IMPLEMENTATION

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
One striking theme which emerged during interviews was a recognition by social media practitioners of the simplicity of the opportunity, but the significance of the cultural and organisational challenge.

“We forget that social media is simply a conversation that is ongoing. It’s no more than the conversation we have in the lift, in the canteen, walking round the park at lunchtime or in our meeting rooms. We’re just having it in an open and more collaborative manner. That requires a leap of faith amongst leaders to say ‘that’s ok’”

The biggest challenge we face is getting over that cultural barrier of allowing people to have their say. We are very good at trying to control what information people have and when they have it and when they give their view. So - our consultation period of 12 weeks is when you have your view. Outside of those start and finish dates, we’re deaf and if you’ve missed it, then tough. And social media doesn’t work like that.

“Our reputation is as a sort of lofty organisation and for younger people that can be quite a turn-off. So challenging people by putting out information in a more engaging and interesting fashion has got to be something we’ve got to do to keep members coming in. Because while the value of our brand as a respected, well-thought of organisation does play well in certain arenas, it can also play as pretty pompous, or authoritarian - telling people what to think and it fits with the change in public policy as being more about a relationship with users, we can’t just tell people what to think. It’s about how we engage our full members, not just our activists. And that’s a challenge for us, it’s a structural thing.

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
"Institutions have to be providing value of some sort. And that means abandoning lots of things that institutions have been used to doing for a very long time. That means abandoning spending lots of time planning a message and then cascading it down. You can’t say ‘today we’re going to launch this idea, and give it to these newspapers, and then manage the story as it rolls out over a number of days and then launch our next thing. You’ve got to be very reactive and you’ve got to allow autonomy to the people overseeing your Twitter feed - because you will need a dedicated person to do it - not just to say things into the void, but to get into conversations.”

“If you look at e-mail, you wouldn’t think of having someone in the organisation responsible for e-mail. So it needs to be everyone and that where it’s going. So, if you’re working on a project, you need to be thinking about that. There is expertise in the organisation to help you with it. But everyone needs to be thinking about it. So if you’re doing project based work, the question at least needs to be asked, is there a role for social media in this work. That’s the cultural change that needs to take place, that people need to be linked into the idea and, whilst they don’t necessarily need to do it themselves, they need to be thinking that there is outside help available that can deliver that creative angle to what they’re doing.”
“I think people need to actually see that this is happening, the rise of interaction, the rise of the mobile phone. We got some stats back from a Youtube campaign we ran and our Youtube stats showed that you were looking at 40 - 50 per cent of these things being watched on smartphones and that's a big change. That's our next challenge, that a lot of people now aren't desk-based. We're aware of that that's the future.”

“We have to produce content that is of high value - not just something that is interesting, but that they really want. We used to be able to get away with taking a piece of content over here and putting it over there, without adding any value to it. A think tank would publish a Report, a magazine would write a story about it and a member would read about it. Well now the member can just go to the think tank’s website and read the Report for themselves - disintermediated is the phrase.”

“If there is less financial resource in the system, you have to use other means to build up the total quantum resource. One of the other resources is users. So how do we utilise that resource, not in a patronising big society type of way, but in a way that actually works?... Social media gives you the architecture out of which you could grow community-based solutions - but then interconnecting those communities becomes part of the job.”

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
So how are the organisations surveyed and interviewed to inform this Report rising to the thought leadership and implementation challenge?

The answer is straightforward:
- allocate dedicated resource to support social media;
- understand your existing and potential social media audiences;
- integrate your social media activity across platforms, don’t have different strategies and disparate operations for each channel; and
- monitor and actively manage your performance.

“Up until now, we’ve tended to use different aspects of social media as different channels to communicate, but now it’s all about integration. That’s been the missing bit for us. We’ve driven stuff back to our website in the past, but going forward it will be about making the experience seamless, and using new stuff that we haven’t really done in the past, partly through technology but partly through fear.”

“We’re at the point where we’re reviewing everything we do about comms, so there will be a new structure that will bed in later this year. We did have an online communities editor based in our web team and that was great. She used to co-ordinate people. So she’d find the expert to answer stuff, so if it was media it would go across to the press office, if it was policy she’d find the right person to answer the question. But we’re in a middle of restructure and we haven’t replaced her, so at the moment it’s more of an ad hoc thing. I think if you’re going to do this seriously and grow, you need someone for whom that’s their sole job, because the problem we have is that it works fine until you’re really busy with other stuff and unless it’s someone’s defined role, it’s the first thing that gets dropped.”
“We used social media to analyse comments on the Listening Exercise. We analysed all the comments in the same way as we analysed the comments offline and the physical events people came to. We set targets both for quality and quantity. So we had some of the workstream leaders taking part in webchats and talking about specific themes to do with the listening exercise with their target audiences.”

“We put quite a lot of effort into analysing who’s following us and categorising people who are following us. It’s quite an arduous task, but on Twitter we categorise them all, we understand who follows them, we understand who our most influential and far-reach followers are, and we target through DM in advance of activities.”

“The KPIs that you could have - measurement-wise - are split between output and outcome. There are standard sorts of stuff - “How many tweets are you sending out each week? How many followers do you have? How many mentions? How many retweets? It’s all a little bit softly, softly, catchy monkey. We’ve found we get more retweets when we come in on the back of a national campaign. So linking across is important, so one KPI might be, is your tweeting matching what you’re saying on your home page and in your press releases? Then there are KPIs around monitoring, so you can have an easy one which is “have you monitored mentions of your organisation and have you responded to the mentions?” That’s an interesting one, because it shows a culture change, that we will monitor our social media presence and reinforce correct information and correct incorrect information. And over time, we can see that we’re getting better at getting involved in conversations.”
“The other thing that is crucial is evaluation, finding out how it goes. I think the time is passing when you could run an effective digital team and get away with simply doing lots of stuff and Directors and CEOs could simply say “yea, we’re on Facebook, we’re on Twitter”. Now it’s time for hard conversations about what’s working and what’s not. We do KPIs now. We take each project as it comes. But say we take today’s webchat and Q&A which we’re doing with the Guardian, we’ve done webchats before and we have a limited number of metrics, for example we know roughly how many people should turn up, how many questions should be asked, and we should get a feel for the quality of the questions that are asked as well, and the frequency with which we respond.”
SECTION FIVE: THE BEST OF TIMES, THE WORST OF TIMES

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media
As part of our online survey, we asked participants four simple questions:

- What is the most successful example of your organisation using social media?
- What is the least successful example of your organisation using social media?
- What is the most successful example of which you are aware of another organisation using social media?
- What is the least successful example of which you are aware of another organisation using social media?

The final pages of this Report – in no particular order – contain examples of what they told us.
BEST: The use of Twitter, Facebook and online forums during the release of the feature film FOUR LIONS (Chris Morris's comedy about suicide bombers). Chris has a large online following which he is in regular dialogue with. This constituency formed the core of the online campaign focus positioning the film as a comedy first and 'controversial' later. When attempts to sensationalise the film's content were made in the traditional press, the online communities 'self-regulated', making the case for what the film was really about and trying to achieve, without the need for intervention from us as producers.

WORST: “Warner Brothers spending huge amounts of money on an online game to accompany a large feature film release only to discover that nobody wanted to play it. They hadn't identified existing online communities on which to build for the film other than broad cinema fan-bases. They also hadn't asked what those communities might want by way of interaction. Crucially, their core-audience wasn't gamers and simply refused to engage with the offering.”

BEST: “The Teenage Cancer Trust retweeted a link to a film on our children's website. It was retweeted by celebrities and went viral”
Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media

**BEST:** “Tweets from CBI response to major government announcements such as Budget or Autumn statement - these garnered feedback and retweeted and boosted our following and awareness of our Twitter handle.”

**BEST:** “Our recent call to help us define integrated care across Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. We got over 60 responses, with more still coming in. The responses have been generally of high quality, and helped us construct an interesting Wordle around the complex subject of integrated care.”

**WORST:** Almost anything than you can classify as an "attempt" to use social media is immediately a failure: social media work best when they are built upon communities which already exist and are a continuous part of the organisations activity. Intervening artificially into that eco-system or trying to create one from scratch is rarely successful. Some of our most lacklustre social experiences have also come when we have tried to use social media as one-way marketing tools.”
BEST: “A Twitter Q&A with our CEO. It enabled our CEO to show her personality to the wider public, publicly answer difficult questions and put the record straight on some myths and false stories. It led to a growing understanding of what social media is and the potential it has for corporate communications. Additionally it led to a Guardian Healthcare Network article using tweets as quotes which got our message out to a wider audience.”

WORST: “Some of the event coverage has had a small following due to lack of time to prepare beforehand. Spending half a day tweeting from a small event to no one in particular can be a waste of resource. However, larger events with more popular topics and speakers do show real value in the online audience they build up - including 'questions from the web' for speakers and sharing relevant links between interested parties.”

WORST: “Any organisation that has an open Twitter, Facebook or other social media presence that is never updated.”
Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media

WORST: “I can think of a few examples which fizzled out after initial high expectations. eg a blogger posting a couple of entries, building up an audience and then not following through.”

BEST: “The British Heart Foundation - Hard and Fast- viral with Vinnie Jones on doing chest compressions without mouth to mouth. It brought home in an entertainly way, how to give chest compressions in the event of a heart attack and before an ambulance arrives.”

BEST: “I think the Movember campaign raising awareness of prostate cancer by getting men to grow moustaches is excellent. It uses photosharing sites like facebook and flickr to create a month where it is impossible not to see one of your friends hosting a ridiculous ‘tach - also generates millions for charities.”

BEST: “The range of Foreign Office staff participating online in a personal capacity is pretty impressive - 90 bloggers, loads more on twitter, and probably plenty of diplomats using local digital channels around the world for public diplomacy.”

WORST: “I can think of a few examples which fizzled out after initial high expectations. eg a blogger posting a couple of entries, building up an audience and then not following through.”
BEST: “Being able to manage quickly a situation when an error was discovered in a publication with perceived (but not real) implications for nearly 3,000 trainees due to sit an exam in a few weeks time, and quickly organising third party support.”

WORST: “Allowing inaccurate information about the organisation to stay on Wikipedia and not addressing that quickly enough. No harm actually done but the potential was there.”