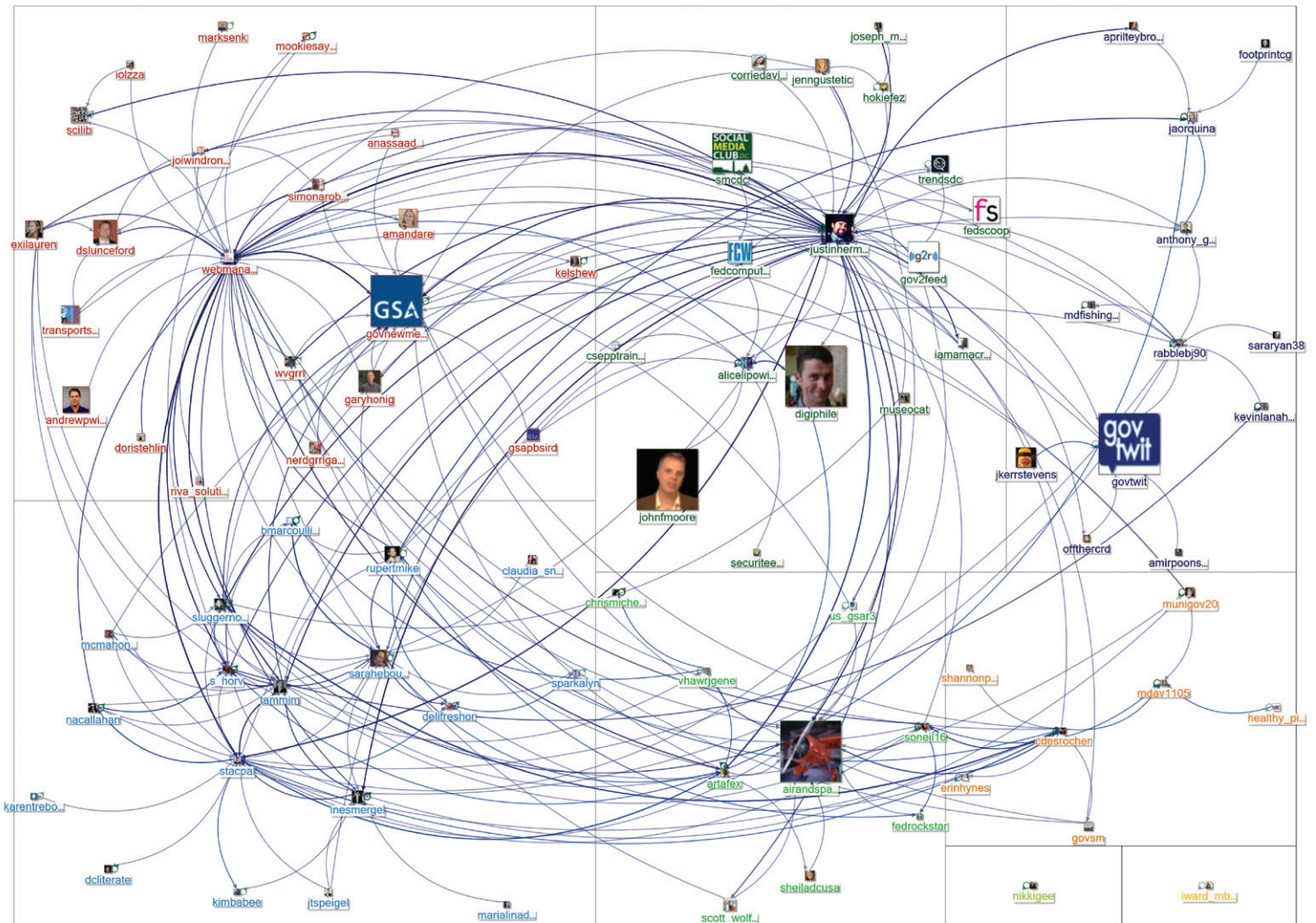




Working the Network

A Manager's Guide for Using Twitter in Government



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Working the Network: A Manager's Guide for Using Twitter in Government

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IBM Center for
The Business of Government

Table of Contents

Foreword	4
Executive Summary	6
Part I: Using Twitter in Government	9
Introduction to Twitter as a Social Media Tool	10
Developing Strategies for the Use of Twitter	16
Strategy One: Push	17
Strategy Two: Pull	17
Strategy Three: Networking	19
Strategy Four: Customer Service	20
Overcoming Challenges for the Use of Twitter in Government	23
Account Verification	23
Fast Pace of Updates and Platform Changes	24
Disclaimers: Personal Use vs. Organizational Accounts	25
Scheduling Routines and Automating Social Media Accounts	25
Distribute the Workload	27
Sharing Content on Twitter	28
URL Shorteners	29
Measuring the Effectiveness of Twitter	30
Part II: Twitter Features	35
Understanding Twitter's Functions	36
Retweeting—Sharing Information	36
@-replies	37
Hashtags	38
Direct Messaging	38
Aggregators: Twitter Falls	39
Twitter Memes	40
Twitter Lists	41
Twitter Search	41
Appendix I: Resources	43
Appendix II: NARA's Social Media Recordkeeping Guidelines (2010)	44
Appendix III: Summary Timeline of Regulations, Acts and Policies	45
Appendix IV: Klout Scores for Selected Agencies	48
About the Author	49
Key Contact Information	50

Foreword

On behalf of the IBM Center for The Business of Government, we are pleased to present this report, *Working the Network: A Manager's Guide for Using Twitter in Government*, by Ines Mergel, Assistant Professor of Public Administration, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University.

As of this writing, the federal government operates over 1,000 Twitter feeds. Federal civilian agencies maintain over 360 Twitter feeds, while the Department of Defense hosts more than 650. In addition to its official English feed, the State Department produces Twitter feeds in Turkish, Farsi, Arabic, Spanish, and French. It is fair to say that the federal government is embracing Twitter as a tool for citizen engagement.

But is government realizing the panoply of benefits that a comprehensive understanding of this tool promises? Beyond acting as a broadcasting channel—supplementing the website by promoting press releases or announcing new initiatives—Twitter can help agencies follow public conversations on issues relevant to their organizations.

Like many technological tools, Twitter does not come with an instruction manual. To help both government executives who must decide whether Twitter is a useful tool for their organizations and frontline managers who will create and administer the Twitter account, Ines Mergel has written this guide, detailing the benefits—and risks—of hosting a Twitter feed, as well as the specifics on how to maintain a Twitter feed to achieve optimum results.



Jonathan D. Breul

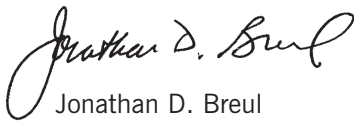


Maria-Paz Barrientos

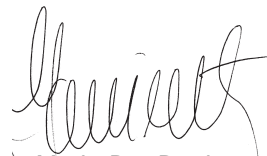
Government organizations that have not yet established a Twitter account can use this guide to learn the steps that they need to take to get up and running. For more advanced users, this guide offers advice on how to reap greater benefits from Twitter—including how to use it for analytics and how to take the next step and use the data to increase the scope of an organization's Twitter network.

In addition to the information about Twitter itself, this guide presents material about the expanding ecosystem that is growing up around Twitter. Applications like Klout, TweetDeck, HootSuite, and Instagram add new kinds of functionality and make Twitter feeds more valuable both to government and to citizens who subscribe to their feeds.

Finally, this guide includes numerous examples of how federal agencies are effectively using Twitter. Both newcomers and old hands will learn how organizations across government are employing this important tool to help them accomplish their mission in new and innovative ways. We hope that this guide will be useful in increasing understanding about the use of an important social media tool, Twitter, which is now being deployed across the federal government.



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Executive Summary

Twitter—a microblogging service that allows for short updates of 140 characters—has grown to over 540 million registered accounts as of early 2012. News organizations, corporations, and the U.S. government have adopted this new practice as an innovative form of interaction with their stakeholders. Many government agencies maintain at least one Twitter account, and even multiple accounts, based on their operational needs and their diverse audiences. It can be unclear to government Twitter users what the best strategies are for interacting with the public on Twitter, and how an agency can use Twitter in a meaningful way to support its organizational mission.

Twitter updates are seen as public conversations and are increasing not only transparency and potentially accountability, but can also—when used appropriately—lead to increased inclusion of public opinion in policy formulation through information aggregation processes. Twitter can be used effectively to involve a large number of citizens and create conversations with an engaged, networked public. The outcome of these conversations can be new insights and even innovations in the public sector including suggestions on how to make government more effective, or rapidly accelerating emergency responses that help to improve public safety.

This report is based on insights gained from discussions with social media directors in U.S. federal government agencies and observations of their daily Twitter tactics. Part I provides an overview of current strategies for using Twitter to interact with citizens. Four main strategies are identified:

- Push
- Pull
- Networking
- Customer service

In addition, hands-on best practices are presented for both public managers and social media administrators.

Twitter is still a relatively new tool. The platform frequently changes and features are added or moved, so government organizations need to be flexible and react to the changes. Suggestions on how to overcome both the technological and behavioral challenges are provided, and examples of best practices show how agencies have overcome these hurdles.

It will be important for the future use of social media in the public sector to show how investments in content curating and online interactions affect a government organization. Current measurement techniques are provided to help social media managers create a business case for the effective use of social media.

Part II of the report explains the main Twitter functions. The platform has many innovative features and emerging memes that public managers need to be aware of. These include retweets, @-replies, hashtags, direct messaging, Twitter falls, lists, and advance search functions.

Finally, the Appendixes provide other resources, including other government Twitter guides, official Twitter.com resources, social media-related Twitter hashtags, the National Archive and Records Administration's social media recordkeeping guidelines, and an overview of government regulations, acts, and policies that guide Twitter use in the public sector.

Part I: Using Twitter in Government

Introduction to Twitter as a Social Media Tool

About 700 different departments, agencies, initiatives, and teams within the U.S. federal government have set up a total of 1,015 Twitter accounts. Over 60 percent of these Twitter accounts are used by the Department of Defense.

Microblogging is a form of blogging that allows users to write brief text updates (usually 140 characters). The microblogging service most popular today is Twitter. Twitter is used for 140-character-long updates that can point a user to other rich media content on a government organization's website. The service is often used to interact with an agency's audience. Public-sector applications include, for example, the active distribution of mission-relevant information, information searches, emergency alerts, and public diplomacy. A more indirect, almost passive, way to use Twitter includes citizen network participation or just following public conversations about relevant issues.



Twitter's founders describe their approach to the service as an online short messaging service (SMS) that makes short updates independent of a cell phone and moves the interactions into a web browser. Like users of Facebook and other social media platforms, Twitter users set up personal accounts and follow the updates of other users. Twitter uses an asymmetric follower model, which means that contact requests don't have to be confirmed; the result is that users may have a high number of followers compared with the numbers of accounts they themselves are following.

The core of the service is the news feed that automatically displays updates from those whom an account holder actively chooses to follow, as the screenshot shows.

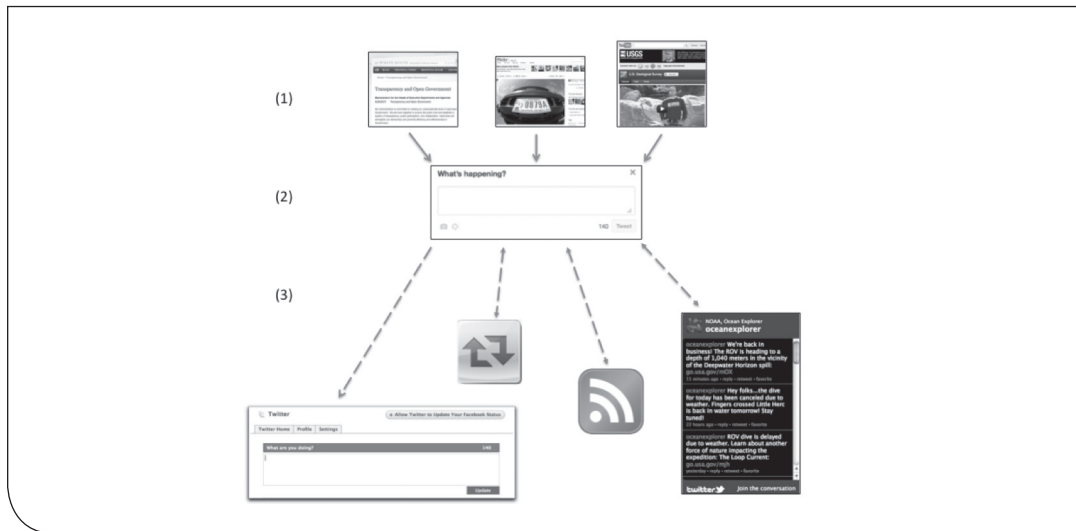
Many users combine Twitter updates with other social media accounts and automatically post updates to their news feed from Facebook, blogs, or other content-sharing sites, such as Flickr or YouTube. The rich-media sharing function allows Twitter updates to extend the character limit of 140 words; and pictures, links to websites, or videos can be embedded in a tweet (a Twitter update), so that readers are directed to longer versions and texts outside of Twitter or on a government agency's website.

Figure 1 shows the journey of a tweet:

- Different types of media content can be used to compose a tweet. It can include a link to content on a government website, a picture, or video.
- The status update with the question "What's happening?" describes the posted content in 140 characters or fewer.

- An organization's Twitter update can automatically be posted as status updates on a Facebook page, retweeted by other users, reused in the blogosphere, or embedded on an agency's website using a widget.

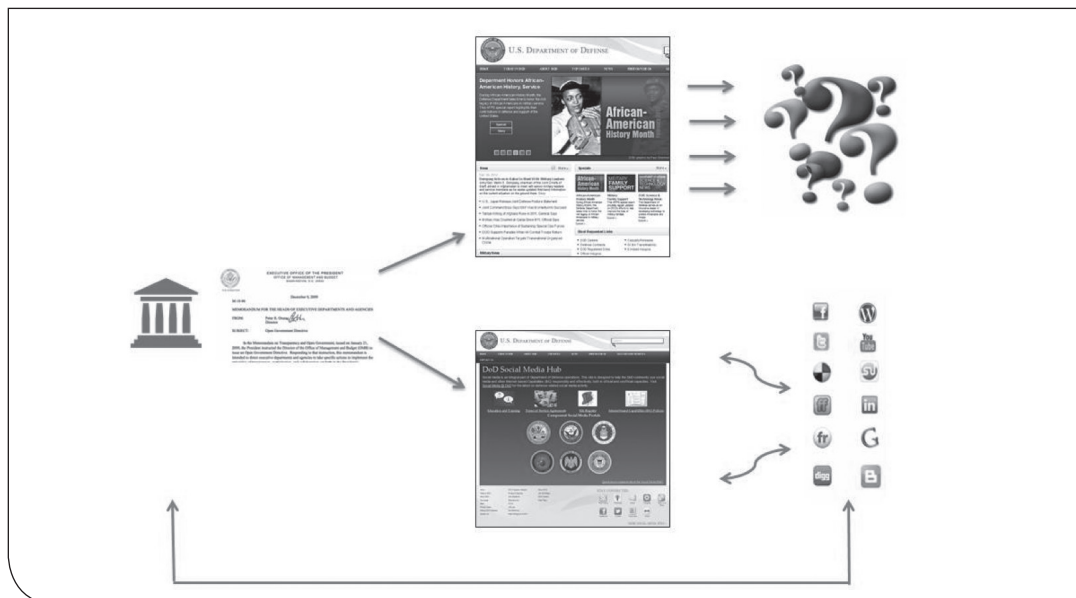
Figure 1: Crafting and Using Twitter Updates



Understanding the reach and effectiveness of social media engagement can help make the case for the use of tools like Twitter. Figure 2 shows that social media updates can travel through a multitude of channels in comparison with the traditional website publication mechanism.

Traditionally, formal press releases, memos, or other news are added by a web manager to an agency's website. While there are a few mechanisms, such as mailing lists, to direct the right audiences to the website, most of the traffic is anonymous. Beyond hits on the website, there is relatively little insight available into the web audience.

Figure 2: Adding Social Media Channels to the Communication Mission



Social media channels like Twitter, on the other hand, allow for the reuse of messages, for redistribution of official government content in a snowballing mechanism through each user's network and through a diverse set of social media platforms. Once a message is posted, it can potentially reach unlimited numbers of citizens. Messages can automatically be reposted on other social media channels, such as Facebook. Moreover, as the graphic shows, interactions can easily occur in a bi-directional, reciprocated manner. Twitter is therefore opening possibilities for interactive exchanges that traditional websites currently do not allow.

The brevity of microblogs creates distinct opportunities and drawbacks different from those of a full blog. For government, Twitter can simply consist of references to online resources focused on an organization's news, events or other public information—pulling audiences back to an agency's website.

Similar to weblogs, microblogging services are used to distribute mission-relevant information. Beyond the distribution of information that is posted on blogs or on an agency's website, microblogs have the additional advantage that Twitter messages are directly delivered into subscribers' news feeds and are thereby reaching followers directly or indirectly when messages are forwarded, potentially resulting in government agencies reaching unlimited numbers of people. Among the overall top trending topics of 2010 were two in which the U.S. government was heavily involved: the BP Gulf oil spill and the Haiti earthquake.¹ In 2011, the top 10 trending topics worldwide included the Japan earthquake and tsunami, the Libyan conflict, Egyptian protests, or Bin Laden updates.²

In the past three years, Twitter has grown significantly to over 500 million registered accounts in early 2012. News organizations, corporations, and more recently, government agencies adopted this trend. Many government agencies now maintain at least one Twitter account—some even manage multiple accounts, based on their operational needs and their diverse audiences. Some agencies often use their Twitter news feed as a parallel publishing stream—repurposing existing formal announcements, such as press releases, to distribute them through an additional channel.

Why should an agency jump on the Twitter bandwagon? Agencies must first think about their mission. Who is the audience? It is generally not the "American public;" instead, each agency has very specific constituents and choosing the right tool should follow the preferences of the audience. In fact, a government agency's audience usually consists of many heterogeneous constituencies with different expectations and habits regarding how they prefer to receive official government information. Twitter is one of the channels where citizens are talking about topics relevant to the mission that guides the work of a government agency. People are discussing issues online and there is value in knowing what they are saying about the agency, and knowing how the issues an agency is promoting are discussed online. Twitter has evolved into an instrument that allows agencies to be part of the conversation or at least to listen in and help with fact-finding or damage control.

Twitter updates, or tweets, can be described as public conversations and are improving not only transparency and accountability, but can also, when used appropriately, lead to increased inclusion of public opinion into policy formulation through information aggregation processes. Twitter can be used effectively to involve large numbers of citizens and create conversations with an engaged, networked public. The outcome of these conversations can be new insights and even innovations in the public sector, in response to suggestions on how to make government

1. See http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/feb/13/twitter-peoples-voice-fifth-birthday?CMP=tw_t_gu for a detailed report and (<http://blog.twitter.com/2010/12/hindsight2010-top-trends-on-twitter.html>) for a discussion on the official Twitter blog.

2. See <http://mashable.com/2011/12/06/top-twitter-trends-2011/> for a full list of top Twitter trends in 2011.

more effective. Other ways to use Twitter can be simple repostings of vital emergency information in areas beyond the direct reach of government, thus transporting the information to those audiences not visiting government websites on a regular basis.

The following tweet, posted by the Department of Homeland Security during the 2011 hurricane and earthquake, encourages citizens to specifically use [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com) to update their family members instead of overburdening traditional channels such as landlines or mobile phones. The number of retweets (displayed 100+) shows that many citizens were willing to repost this information and spread the message.



As Lee Rainie, the director of the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project, says: "The common reputation of Twitter is that it's frivolous, which isn't the case. If it's set up right, it's a rich environment of lots of learning and sharing of important material. It's not just 'what I had for breakfast.'"

Using Twitter in effective ways is not about creating new content or services but rather taking advantage of the new delivery methods for content curating. Twitter is very easy to set up and maintain. The use of Twitter can be compared to short text messaging services on mobile phones and updates can either come through a web interface or a text-enabled phone.

On April 14, 2010, the Library of Congress announced that it had acquired the entire Twitter archive—a step forward in reducing some of the hesitation social media directors, especially in the federal government, were facing. Up to that point, it was unclear how to keep public records of Twitter messages—or any messages created on social networking services. The Library of Congress' collaboration with the microblogging site [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com) now creates a lifetime archive of all Twitter updates ever sent, but it doesn't necessarily relieve government agencies of the responsibility to archive their own records. It does, however, help users to access their data, given that Twitter only displays the last two weeks of updates on its website.



With shrinking travel budgets, Twitter users have also shown that the service is useful as a back channel during presentations at conferences, to follow ongoing conversations that can help to bridge geographic distances. Other uses include simple informational updates, ranging

from the UK's Downing Street summaries of the prime minister's daily activities and priorities (@DowningStreet), San Diego County's Twitter feed with general countywide information (@SanDiegoCounty), or Roanoke County Public Libraries' Twitter feed with prolific information related to new titles, upcoming events, etc. (@RoCoPubLib). These updates can also include advice for updates on infrastructure, construction issues, or even complaint reporting that can be combined with ongoing campaigns.

While social media in general have become an accepted forum for public engagement in government, many public managers struggle with effective use and are looking for insights into how to use social media, as the following tweet by EPA's social media lead Jeff Levy shows.



With the recent advent of the so-called social media revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, attention to the usefulness of Twitter as an important organizing, information-sharing, and general networking service has increased. It is not only to understand how citizens are using Twitter as an organizing tool, but also to use Twitter as a tool that helps to take the temperature of citizens (groups).³

Twitter chose the U.S. Geological Survey as its first government business case study and featured the agency on its site:



twitter 101

- What is Twitter
- Getting started
- Learn the lingo
- Best practices
- Case studies
- Best Buy
- US Geological Survey
- The North Face
- Dell
- J&Bee
- Tausner Wines
- Current
- Taxi O Lite
- CoffeeGroundz
- Elzy
- NAKEDPizza
- American Apparel
- Pepsi
- Levi's
- Other resources
- Download the slides

SCIENCE FOR A CHANGING WORLD

One of the U.S. Geological Survey's unique responsibilities is the monitoring and reporting of earthquakes, which affect the daily lives of people around the world. By mining real-time tweets, the USGS expands its suite of seismically derived information and obtains first-hand accounts of shaking seconds after an earthquake occurs.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Twitter asks its many users to answer the question "What's happening?" For millions of people throughout the world who are disrupted by sudden shaking, the answer is clear: "earthquake!" Earthquakes are unique and sometimes terrifying ordeals.

USGS
science for a changing world

3. See Gov2.0 Blog Radio show with Major Juanita Chang, U.S. Army Director, Online and Social Media Division, Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, and Matt MacLaughlin from SCoE Mobile <http://gov20radio.com/upcoming-u-s-army-social-and-mobile-victories-and-challenges/> (March 13, 2011).

Table 1: Overview of Agencies and Departments on Twitter

Department/ Agency	Following	Twitter Followers	Twitter Handles	Twitter URLs
USDA	159	47,453	@USDA	http://twitter.com/#!/USDA
Commerce	113	10,532	@CommerceGov	http://twitter.com/#!/CommerceGov
Defense	322	54,671	@DeptofDefense	http://twitter.com/#!/DeptofDefense
Air Force	356	31,428	@usairforce	http://twitter.com/#!/usairforce
Army	294	104,524	@USArmy	http://twitter.com/#!/USArmy
Coast Guard	90	16,479	@uscg	http://twitter.com/#!/uscg
Marines	157	69,935	@usmc	http://twitter.com/#!/usmc
Navy	23,474	31,093	@navynews	http://twitter.com/#!/navynews
Education	13	76,113	@usedgov	http://twitter.com/#!/usedgov
Energy	85	33,900	@Energy	http://twitter.com/#!/ENERGY
Health and Human Services	116	152,308	@hhs.gov	http://twitter.com/#!/hhs.gov
Food and Drug Administration	8	3,268	@us_fda	http://twitter.com/#!/US_FDA
Centers for Disease Control	94	53,029	@CDCgov	http://twitter.com/#!/CDCgov
Homeland Security	176	51,220	@DHSgov	http://twitter.com/#!/DHSgov
FEMA	456	78,897	@fema	http://twitter.com/#!/fema
TSA	190	17,182	@TSABlogTeam	http://twitter.com/#!/TSABlogTeam
Housing and Urban Development	234	17,287	@HUDNews	http://twitter.com/#!/HUDNews
Interior	16,738	17,129	@Interior	http://twitter.com/#!/Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service	586	6,831	@usfwshq	http://twitter.com/#!/usfwshq
National Park Service	276	26,930	@natlparkservice	http://twitter.com/#!/natlparkservice
Justice	104	428,471	@TheJusticeDept	http://twitter.com/#!/TheJusticeDept
FBI	961	246,249	@FBIPressOffice	http://twitter.com/#!/FBIPressOffice
Labor	91	27,507	@USDOL	http://twitter.com/#!/USDOL
State	261	171,970	@StateDept	http://twitter.com/#!/StateDept
Secretary of the Treasury	875	25,065	@RayLaHood	http://twitter.com/#!/RayLaHood
Department of the Treasury	140	25,578	@ustreasurydept	http://twitter.com/#!/ustreasurydept
Veterans Administration	770	26,653	@DeptVetAffairs	http://twitter.com/#!/DeptVetAffairs
Environmental Protection Agency	40	51,275	@EPAgov	http://twitter.com/#!/EPAgov
FCC	35	450,044	@FCC	http://twitter.com/#!/FCC
FDIC	0	4,722	@FDICgov	http://twitter.com/#!/FDICgov
General Services Administration	147	2,872	@usgsa	http://twitter.com/#!/usgsa
National Archives	34	8,613	@USNatArchives	http://twitter.com/#!/USNatArchives
NASA	151	1,600,478	@nasa	http://twitter.com/#!/nasa
USAID	792	123,429	@usaid	http://twitter.com/#!/USAID

Status as of January 2012

Developing Strategies for the Use of Twitter

In government, Twitter can be used for many different purposes. The daily tactics depend on the overall social media strategy an agency designs to fulfill the organizational mission. The resulting day-to-day interactions can be divided into four main Twitter strategies:

- Push
- Pull
- Networking
- Customer service

The following table provides a summary of the strategies described on the following pages.

Table 2: Overview of Twitter Strategies

Strategy	Organizational Responsibility	Tactic	Business Value	Policy	Number of Accounts	Resources	Information Vetting
Push	IT department	Representation	Informational broadcasting	No interactions allowed, commenting disabled	One account for the whole agency	None	Typical information clearing process as for any public statement
Pull	Public Affairs office	Engagement	Educational	Dedicated social media policy (i.e., commenting policy)	Official public affairs account plus agency accounts	Dedicated social media department with staff and budget	Information vetting for repurposed statements; ad hoc interactions
Networking	Knowledge experts	Mingling	Transactional & empowering	Open exchanges with social media guidelines	Unrestricted	Dedicated social media department, incl. staff and budget Plus expert accounts	Information vetting for repurposed statements; ad hoc interactions; "responsible exchanges"
Customer Service	Dedicated customer service representative	Transaction	Relationship building, instant support	Social media strategy and policy	Preferably one, if necessary several for different content areas	Social media department with the help of knowledge experts throughout the organization	Repurposing of standard responses, FAQs, but also individualized responses in accordance with the existing policies

Strategy One: Push

The first strategy can be called push: Twitter is used as an extension of the existing (usually relatively static) Internet presence as an additional communication channel to get the message out. This results in (relatively unmoderated) Twitter updates that are mainly used to publish press releases or appearances of the secretaries.

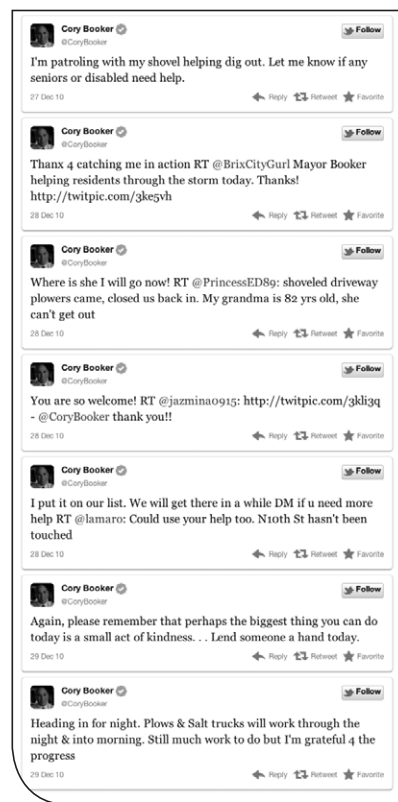
As one agency social media director explains: "Let's put it this way, maybe it's 1/100th of my week being applied to this, because we have everything automated. We want to take a buckshot approach, as long as it does not take up a ton of our resources. As long as we can manage that, there's no reason not to go out there and be able to communicate with the people in the form in which they are comfortable. It is all through word of mouth. Whoever is out there getting it has found a real value for it, and it will get to the point where we will be comfortable enough to at least somewhat publicize this. And once we somewhat publicize this, more and more people will get on there. It is easier for people to get notified of things if they are using Twitter. If they have Twitter open all the time, it's easier to tell them about that. People are using that, almost as much as they're using e-mail now."

Strategy Two: Pull

Twitter can also be used to bring audiences back to an agency's website, where the news is aggregated (to avoid losing control of what happens with the information). Pull strategies actively involve audiences using some degree of interaction that results in a few retweets (reuses of messages by other Twitter users) or answers to comments on responses from Twitter followers. Examples include the CDC's use of social media tools to alert and inform the public about peanut salmonella outbreak, or its H1N1 flu campaign. Another example is an active engagement tactic, such as Newark Mayor Corey Booker's use of Twitter during the 2010–2011 snowstorms in New Jersey. He used Twitter to actively inform the public about snow removal and his personal help with and engagement in the process.

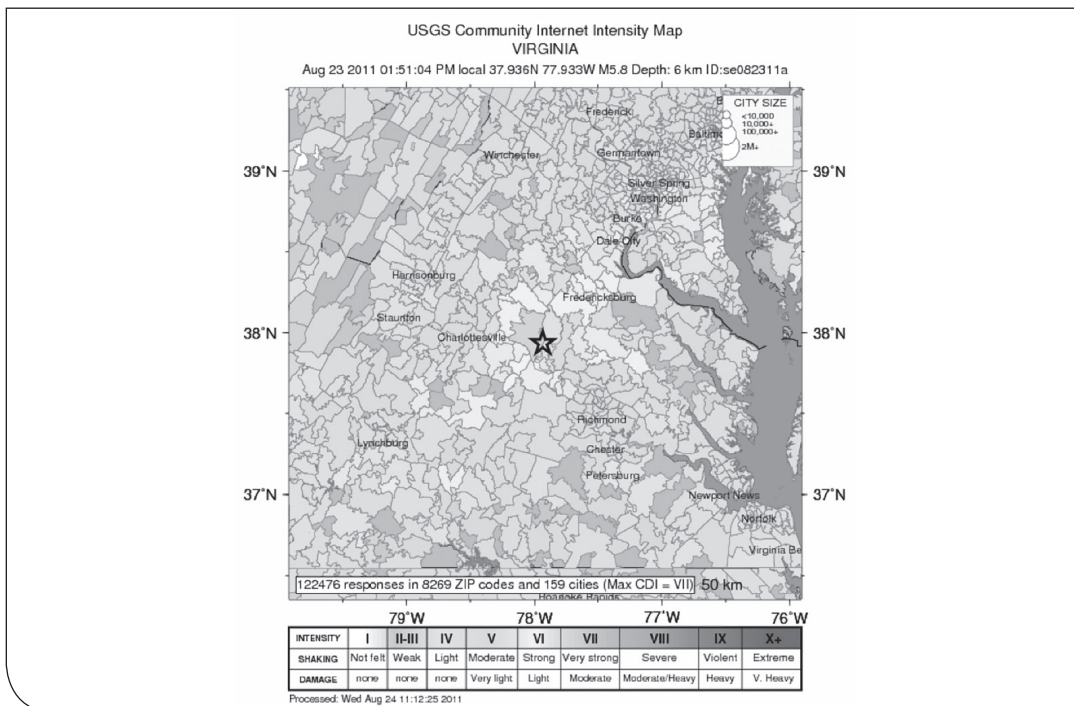
Another example of an efficient pull strategy is USGS's "Did you feel it?" platform requesting citizens' experiences of an earthquake. While the results are not meant to compete with scientific evidence, the so-called citizen scientists are providing insights beyond the officially collected data and provide an additional layer of interaction with the public.

The Figure 3 reports the "felt intensity" as experienced by the public. USGS states on its website: "We can get a more complete description of what people experienced, the effects of the earthquake, and the extent of damage, than traditional ways of gathering felt information." The magnitude is quantitatively measured on a Richter scale recorded by a seismograph; the intensity is a qualitative measure of the effects of the earth-



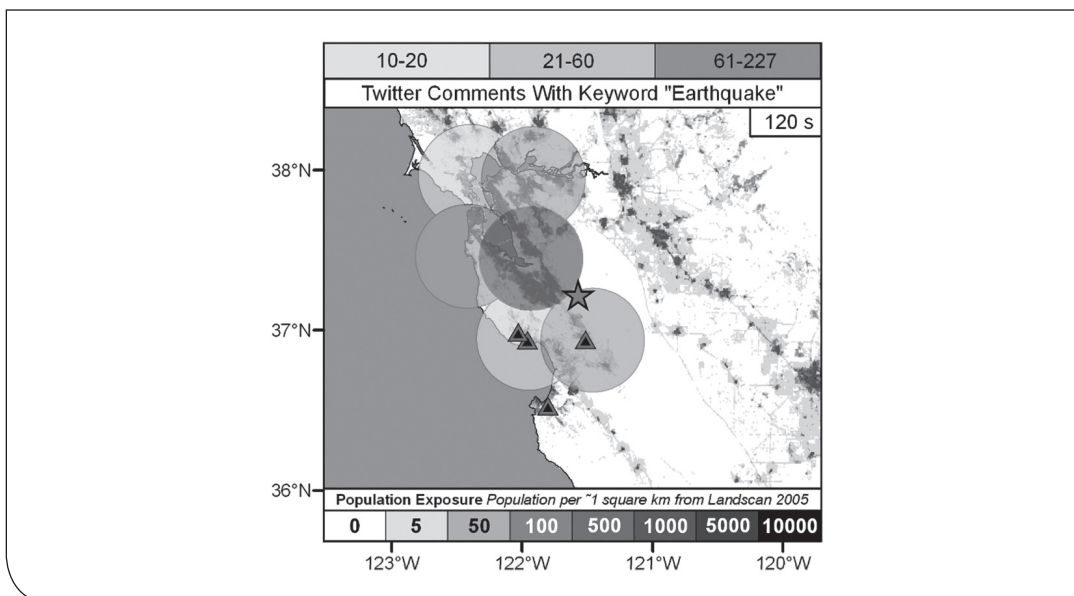
quake. Intensity information is gathered in an Internet survey and responses are displayed on the USGS Community Intensity Map.

Figure 3: USGS—Did You Feel It? Earthquake Community Internet Intensity Map



In addition, USGS compiles tweets of Twitter users mentioning the keywords or hashtag “earthquake” in their Twitter status updates, and displays them on a map. The USGS Twitter Earthquake Detector (TED) automatically collects messages and provides narrative accounts of felt earthquake intensities in real time on a geo-tagged map, visualizing how citizens perceive the intensity of an earthquake in their neighborhood:

Figure 4: USGS Twitter Earthquake Detector (TED)



Source: <http://recovery.doi.gov/press/us-geological-survey-twitter-earthquake-detector-ted/>

Strategy Three: Networking

The third strategy—and at the same time the least observable—is a networking strategy. Twitter can be used in highly interactive ways with a lot of back and forth between the agency and its diverse constituencies. By closely observing the agency's Twitter encounters, an account holder will quickly get a sense of who is following them and who they should be reaching. Twitter can be used very strategically, not only to control and direct messages to influencers in the network, but also to have eyes and ears on the channels where actual issues relevant to an agency's mission are being discussed.

Examples for networking tactics include the innovative use of hashtags, such as the Department of State's use of the hashtag #AskState that was used as an online town hall meeting. Citizens were prompted to use the hashtag to ask questions.



Leading up to the event, the hashtag #AskState was used to collect questions for the speakers. Questions were answered during the live event, and the speakers also had an opportunity to directly respond and react to real-time feedback on Twitter. Since the event, the hashtag remains in use and the Department of State responds to ongoing questions posed by citizens, moving the time-bound campaign into a continuous conversation mode. This strategy helps to facilitate issue networks and helps the department to be part of the network, reacting to discussions and questions by providing facts and formal statements.



Strategy Four: Customer Service

The most challenging strategy is to use Twitter as an actual customer service delivery tool. Examples of companies in private industry which actively provide customer service on Twitter include Southwest Airlines, Hewlett Packard, Yelp, Xbox, Etsy, and Comcast customer service on Twitter (@ComcastCares). All provide strong e-service via social media technologies. Going forward, government agencies have the opportunity to think about ways in which social media can be used for ongoing customer service.

In 2011, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directed agencies to set service standards and use customer feedback to improve the customer experience. Agencies and departments are currently following up with implementation plans, establishing customer service task forces, and finding ways to use innovative technologies. Twitter can be used to collect feedback from citizens, but also to provide timely responses. While this pace might challenge the current standard operating procedures of providing or even collecting input from citizens, OMB provides additional guidance on how to ensure the maximum quality of information provided in these exchanges.

National museums and libraries are using Twitter in innovative ways to provide real-time assistance for requests posted by researchers, teachers, and students. Others are using Twitter to provide information that is not available on their websites, including behind-the-scenes news on an ongoing exhibition.



Best Twitter Practices for Public Managers

Design a social media strategy that helps fulfill the mission of your organization.

Think about what the strategic goals are, what the content is that your organization is producing, what the potential channels for the content distribution are, and how Twitter might fit into this overall strategy as one channel for interacting with the stakeholders of your organization.

Design and distribute social media tactics according to your social media strategy.

What is appropriate content to share? Who needs to be involved in:

- Broadcasting of routine updates
- Ad hoc crisis communication
- Fact-checking missions
- Online, ongoing customer service

Design information vetting procedures.

Where is the content coming from? Who needs to be involved in the content curating process? What does a stepwise information review process look like?

Assign manpower to staff and update social media accounts.

Dedicate resources and capacity to those people in your organization who should take on the additional (or sole) responsibility to curate content, respond to social media interactions, and overall, maintain social media accounts. Once you decide to open the social media toolbox, citizens will expect real-time information exchanges with their government.

Provide resources to train social media personnel.

Think about a social media sourcing strategy. There needs to be a core social media team which takes on the heavy workload, but also knows whom to include when they themselves don't have the answers and need to reach out to knowledge experts deeper in the organization. Increase awareness that social media is not a technology function, but the responsibility of all employees in the organization. Distribute the workload across many shoulders.

Learn how to interpret social media data.

Enable your social media team to collect social media data, look at the data frequently, and understand how to interpret these data to understand the impact your agency is making. Be prepared to adjust your overall social media strategy if needed.

Fail, fail, fail ... fast.

Social media platforms are hosted, designed, and frequently changed by third-party providers. This might mean that because of the fast pace of platform changes, but also because of changes in your audience's social media behavior, your staff might make mistakes. Be sure to tackle mistakes head on: don't retract or delete published updates. Someone will have already retweeted your content, saved it in a blog post, and copied it to their own hard drive. Be open and transparent, admit mistakes, and publish the corrected facts.

Best Practices for Administrators

All social media interactions need to follow your organization's social media strategy and resulting daily tactics.

The strategy will include information about acceptable social media content, tools, and social media channels, and will help you manage your day-to-day updates.

Don't do it on your own!

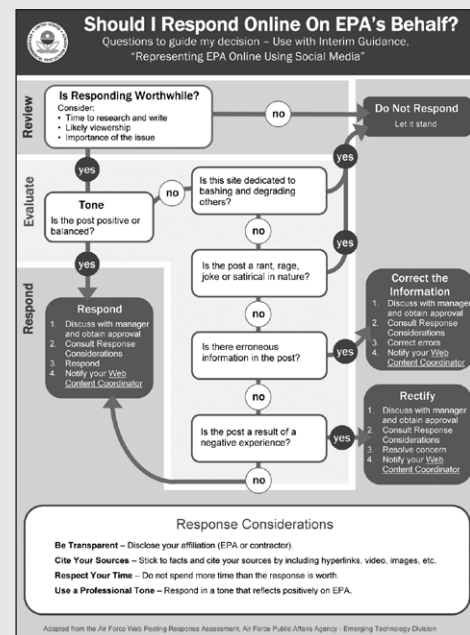
A social media team should be responsible for the main functions, but reach out to knowledge experts if you can't answer the questions you receive via Twitter on your own. You will raise your reputation by including those in your organization who have specialist-level knowledge about issues.

Daily content curating.

Public affairs officials are not necessarily the ones who can curate all content. Set up routines to search for updates or encourage those creating news in your organization to provide content that can be distributed through your social media channels. Think about when to respond, retweet, or comment on your audience's tweets. Follow the EPA's cheat sheet, "Should I Respond Online On EPA's Behalf?" (shown).

Find a human voice.

Twitter is a great tool to provide agency information in plain language. Use IDs or other types of author identification so that your audience knows who is tweeting with them this week, on a specific day, or during a campaign or event. Remember that Twitter is a public conversation!



Keep routine updates among your team.

Prepare routines that will alert your team about upcoming events, schedule updates and responses, and line up automatic updates that reach out to difference audiences at different times throughout the day. Don't spam or you will lose your audience!

Make sure to distinguish between your personal social media accounts and the organizational accounts you are responsible for.

Your updates on behalf of a government organization might be temporary. You might move on to other types of jobs or assume other responsibilities. Use a Twitter account name that can stay with the organization or team when your responsibilities change.

Get training in social media data analysis. Use free tools, such as Google Analytics, Facebook analytics, or Klout to understand how your audience perceives its interactions with your agency. Create a business case for your social media impact and acquire additional resources to build a professional suite of analytics tools.

Overcoming Challenges for the Use of Twitter in Government

Twitter's API and its users' behavior are evolving and changing in sometimes unpredictable ways. This makes it necessary to consider how to mitigate the risks involved in using a third-party website with its own rules and evolving user behavior.

Twitter use patterns have emerged as innovators in government use social media for customer service. For several years, these practices have evolved, becoming acceptable use practices in government. Several OMB directives published in 2010 have helped to promote and regulate the safe use of social media applications. Nevertheless, there are several open issues resulting from agencies' initial experience with Twitter. Among them is the question of personal vs. organizational use.

Account Verification

Tweeting on behalf of a government agency is typically interpreted as formal guidance and formal opinions broadcast by government. It is important for users to understand whether an account set up in an agency's name is an officially sanctioned account. Initially, Twitter endorsed accounts through a verification process. Accounts then received a blue checkmark next to their name, so that it was clear that the account holder was tweeting in an official capacity.



New accounts can be registered on HowTo.gov.

The screenshot shows the 'HowTo.gov' website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for HOME, WEB CONTENT, SOCIAL MEDIA, CONTACT CENTERS, TECH SOLUTIONS, COMMUNITIES, and CUSTOMER SERVICE. Below the menu is a search bar and a 'Search' button. The main content area is titled 'Register Social Media Accounts' and includes the following text:

Many people now use tools like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to receive news and information, so it's important to help the public verify which social media accounts are managed by government agencies.

If you work for the U.S. federal government and have a .gov or .mil email address, use this tool to register your agency's social media accounts (including elected officials or Cabinet members), so the public knows they are official.

To register an account, enter the account URL in the field below and click "Look Up"

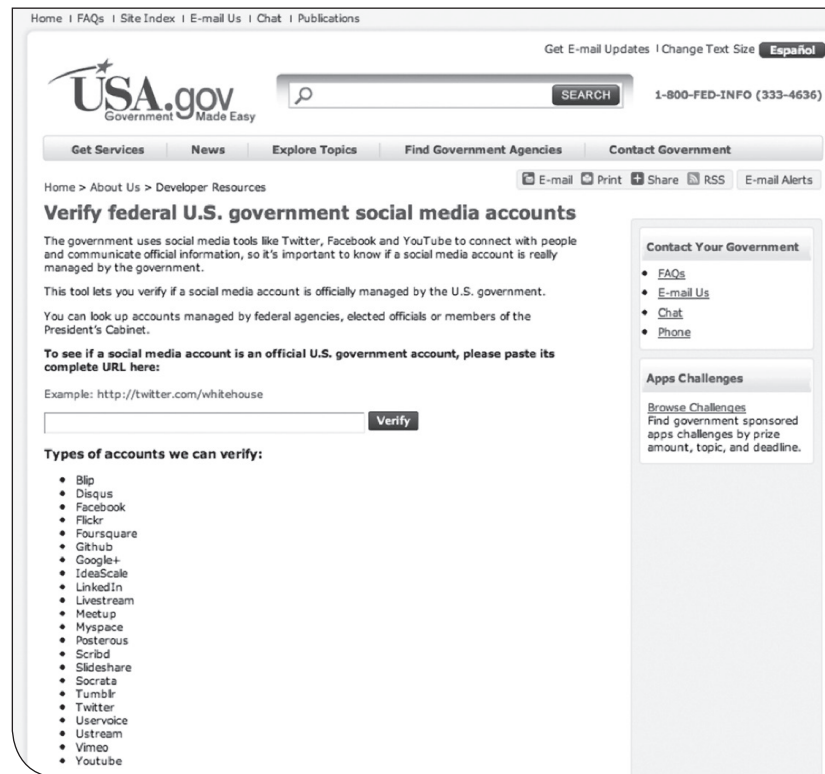
- If it's not yet registered, you can add it
- If it's already in the system, you can update it

Please paste the URL of the account you'd like to register here:
Example: <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

Types of accounts we can verify:

- Blip
- Disqus
- Facebook
- Flickr
- Foursquare
- GitHub
- Google+
- IdeaScale
- LinkedIn
- Livestream
- Meetup
- MySpace

In addition, GSA has developed a verification tool to ensure credibility of a government Twitter account. The following screenshot shows GSA's Social Media Registry that can be used to search for a verified account.



Fast Pace of Updates and Platform Changes

Monitoring ongoing conversations on Twitter provides great insights for government, but at the same time that fast pace of updates and postings has changed the way that Twitter account holders create content and respond to messages. Fast-evolving conversations leave little or no time for content vetting with the legal counsel of a government agency. Instead, the expectations of citizens are high to receive near real-time feedback. As one social media director in a federal agency notes: "For Twitter and Facebook there is no real clearance process. We have advocated very, very hard that there shouldn't be one, because of the nature of Twitter, you gotta be on top of it. It's a timely type of platform, everything's time-sensitive, and any type of clearance process really can obviate the whole purpose of using it."

Platform changes are inevitable and cannot be controlled with free social media providers as they are in other types of purchased software tools, where vetting processes are in place to make sure that the changes don't affect existing standard operating procedures. Some agencies have decided to only host one central account; others provide freedom to all teams, satellite offices, and knowledge experts to maintain their own accounts.

To keep up with the fast pace of changes, training is necessary to help account holders understand the medium, overcome initial resistance to writing freely online, and ensure that mistakes are retracted or honestly addressed.

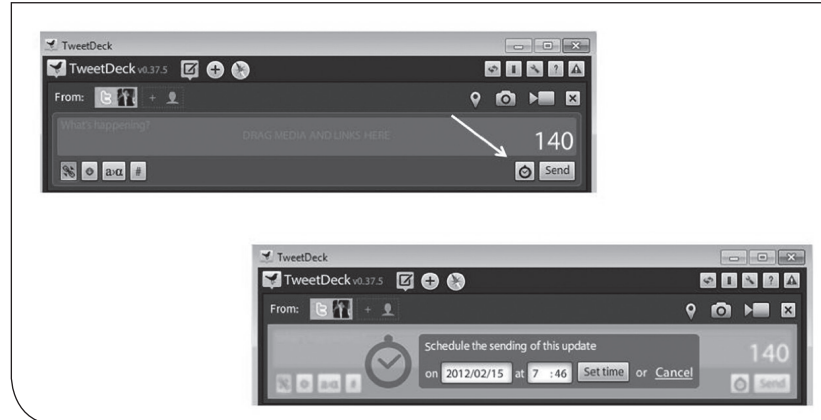
Disclaimers: Personal Use vs. Organizational Accounts

All official government Twitter accounts should include a disclaimer or terms of service statement. As an example, the White House Twitter account explicitly states that the messages are archived, implying that they are part of the public record of the White House and not private messages: “Official WH twitter account. Comments and messages received through official WH pages are subject to the PRA and may be archived. Learn more <http://wh.gov/privacy> (linking directly to the White House privacy page: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/privacy>). Many government agencies also use Twitter’s Bio section to identify the authors of tweets, thus providing additional information about the agency or individual that manages the account. As a result, many White House social media sites and profiles include the statement above alerting users to the fact that the content is subject to the Presidential Records Act.



Scheduling Routines and Automating Social Media Accounts

Routines to automatically send out tweets can come in handy for already scheduled events. If an agency is organizing a three-day conference and knows that reminders for the event should be sent out at specific times leading up to the event, desktop applications such as TweetDeck (recently acquired by Twitter) provide the tools to schedule a specific time for a tweet to be sent out.



Or, as soon as an agency has published an update to its blog, photo, or video-sharing sites, an automatic message is sent out on Twitter pointing to the new content. The website allows third-party applications to access the Twitter API and automatically post updates to a personal Twitter account. This also means that publishing rights are handed over to another application, which can potentially compromise an account.

Automatic @-replies or mentions are a violation of Twitter’s rules. Twitter also discourages automatic retweets of trending topics or keywords, even if an account holder considers these keywords of interest to his or her followers. In government, this practice is especially difficult, as retweeting or automatic forwarding can be considered endorsement.

One social media director in a federal agency explains her approach: “Twitter is a by-product of the work we already do. Here’s what I mean by that. When my team posts a press release,

or a media advisory, or a speech, as soon as they post it, they go to Twitter and post a tweet, or they tweet that item. And we have an automated feed that feeds all of those into the Facebook page.”

Specific, verified content can, however, be easily distributed to several different social media outlets. Public emergency alerts sent out through an agency’s website, text messages, Amber Alert system, etc., can also automatically be posted to Twitter using third-party applications. For example, the following tweet was sent out through a service called HootSuite, a social media dashboard solution that helps users organize their social media accounts in one single application.



Another example is the Los Angeles Fire Department's automatic Twitter emergency services updates. In a similar fashion, the CDC is using Twitter to alert the general public about national health threats:



Tip: Time messages strategically! Don't overburden the audience.



Reusing already tweeted messages can be another form of automation or scheduling. An agency can repost one of its own previous tweets several times per week or at different times throughout the day. It's important to rewrite the initial message so that it does not annoy those followers who are frequently checking in and paying attention to the majority of updates.

Distribute the Workload

Using Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and photo-sharing sites in addition to formal communication tools can become overwhelming at times. Distributing the workload to many helping hands can reduce the burden on a single employee. Consider, for example, the changes in the social media strategy of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Initially, only one account was available on each social networking platform. They were centrally implemented, managed, and maintained by the Director of New Media, Brandon Friedman. In 2011, the VA Directive 6515 allowed the use of collaborative social media technologies throughout the organization and all 153 VA hospitals are now allowed to host their own social media accounts and locally connect to their audiences.

Tip: Get employees and experts involved ... don't do it by yourself. They're passionate about their job and will help grow the agency's efforts in a positive direction.

Coordinating and curating content across different social media platforms and the existing outlets can be organized with a Google calendar. As one of the social media directors says, "At the enterprise level, content curating is decentralized to a degree. We use a Google calendar right now for content alignment. This is something new we've just been doing this in the last month. For example, my little cell here, we primarily are concerned with the content on Facebook, Twitter, and to a lesser degree some of the other channels I mentioned. But we have a visual information shop, so it's a completely different office in here, all they do are imagery and video, as an example. They will primarily contribute to Flickr and YouTube, but also Facebook on a regular basis. We have journalists and photographers and videographers who go out and capture stories about the [agency]. Well, we

also try and capture that, we'll either repurpose that or occasionally we'll get them to do some more social media-specific content that we can then put up on whatever the appropriate presence is, and they can do it directly."

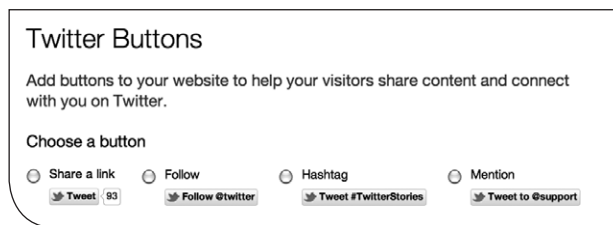
The calendar is used to align content with communication priorities, scheduled events, general releases per month, themes, and ad-hoc issues. A calendar helps to keep track of ongoing and reoccurring events that are scheduled in advance, reminds the office where to update what content and provides an overview of the density of updates per unit and even down to the individual team level or geographic region. Including satellite or regional offices in the efforts helps to give local events exposure on social media channels, but also reduces the burden on a central social media group to be the sole provider of new content.

Scott Horvath, USGS's social media lead, recently explained workload distribution and frequency of updates in his agency in a blog post on GovLoop: "As far as who is taking the lead in coordination then that would be me. The amount of time it takes to respond is really dependent on the event. On days where there's nothing major occurring then we typically end up posting 3-8 tweets per day. We always have at least two people on the main Twitter account each day. One person is on throughout the week monitoring and some tweeting, while the other person is rotated each day, and [they] are typically spread out across the country. In total there are three people that are rotated on the weekly schedule and five that share rotation during the week. After hours is tricky. Many of us already use Twitter so while we don't actively respond on weekends and after hours like we do during the week, we do still see what is flowing through and can choose to respond if we feel it is justified to do so. When a

major event occurs, like an earthquake, then we all make sure that we are paying attention at the same time to help cover each other. Because we have specific people that handle specific areas of science then we assume they will be the ones responding. But if they tell us they need backup or aren't available then others will cover. We also communicate through various ways in order to stay in touch with each other. Overall because the workload is distributed it doesn't take a lot of time from each person to monitor, respond, and share."

Sharing Content on Twitter

Twitter provides a series of buttons that can be easily integrated into a government site to help visitors promote formally approved content and share it on Twitter.




Twitter's strength is that it allows users to share other types of rich-media content, such as pictures, videos, or blog posts. This includes content posted on third-party, content-sharing sites, such as Flickr, Photobucket, or YouTube. All currently approved content-sharing sites are listed on [HowTo.gov](#), including guidelines on how to use the sites.

In addition to linking to existing content on content-sharing sites, many government users are also uploading content directly from their smartphones to official government Twitter accounts. Applications such as Twitpic or Instagram can be used to upload and distribute pictures during live events to inform the public in real time and help to show real human interactions. Below is an [@Instagram](#) Twitter update (01/03/2012).



URL Shorteners

For many agencies, 140-character updates are not enough space to convey the message they want to send. Agencies have found creative ways to use Twitter to point their followers to longer blog updates or include links to other media, such as press releases on the official government website or photo-sharing services (such as Flickr or Yfrog). This practice has spurred the creation and use of URL shorteners, online services that reduce long URLs to very short links that can be inserted into a tweet and leave enough space for a description. Popular examples include [TinyURL.com](#) or [Bit.ly](#). The official U.S. government URL-shortener service, [Go.USA.gov](#), helps “government employees create short .gov URLs from official government domains, such as .gov, .mil, .si.edu, or .fed.us URLs.”⁴



Go.USA.gov
Create short, trustworthy .gov URLs

Log in to shorten a URL

Username: Password:

[Create new account](#) [Request new password](#)

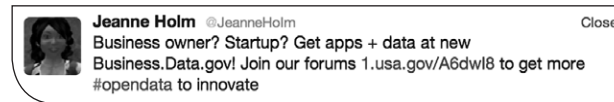
Go.USA.gov lets government employees create short .gov URLs from official government domains, such as .gov, .mil, .si.edu, or .fed.us URLs.

We are currently beta testing **Go.USA.gov**. Go.USA.gov registration is limited to people with .mil, .gov, .fed.us, and .si.edu email addresses. If you are a government employee and would like to use it, please [register for an account](#). If you are a government employee, but are unable to register, please [contact us](#).

Go.USA.gov has shortened **146060** URLs that have been clicked **36962631** times.

4. See <https://go.usa.gov/> (login required).

URLs shortened with [Go.USA.gov](#) are customizable and therefore unique to a specific event, or they highlight a given topic. The use of the official U.S. government URL shortener has the added value of creating URLs in a sanctioned environment. The shortened URLs have a specific format that indicates the official nature of the service and therefore implies credibility. Users are potentially less reluctant to open a link, as the following example shows.



Measuring the Effectiveness of Twitter

Government agencies using social media—and especially Twitter—need to show how this is making a difference. So far, government's measurement activities have been highly regulated and cookie policies have restricted the collection and analysis of user data. The main goal for measuring impact should be to show how the use of Twitter can support the mission of an agency.

Consider the following Twitter network, created using the social media network analysis software NodeXL. Tweets were collected from all those Twitter accounts using the hashtag #FedTweets, which resulted in the top graphic in the very early days. The hashtag was used by the organizers of a social media webinar offered by GSA's web manager university. Leading up to the webinar, only a small group with a handful of Twitter users started to use the #fedtweeps hashtag. The network was initially relatively small and basically shows up in group conversations among a few specialists. The expansion of the network is seen in Figure 5 on the following page.

The second Twitter network downloaded on the day of the webinar shows a growing number of Twitter users actively engaged in the conversation about the use of Twitter in government. They were answering each other's questions and interacting with the organizers and speakers in the center of the #FedTweets Twitter network. The extensive Twitter network can be interpreted as an increase of engagement and participation, but also shows the usefulness of the content an agency is sharing via Twitter.

The practices for measuring and gaining insights into the impact of government Twitter use vary widely across agencies. Some agencies view the number of retweets and @mentions they receive as an indicator that citizens are paying attention to the official government updates.

A social media director explains: "With Twitter, what we do know, we're now looking at measures of reach in addition to just like followers. So, we're putting together a little dashboard that will try to get an assessment of how many individuals were reached by the message. So by looking at peoples' followers and how many retweets that have occurred, we are looking to obtain a more robust social media monitoring tool, so we can look at sentiment and influencers in our budget for next year."

Other agencies are using social media monitoring dashboards, such as Radian6, for weekly trend analysis. The results are trending topics that provide insights about the conversations related to the agency. Insights beyond the general topics discussed also capture the sentiments of the conversations, provide a sense of the volume, and allow conclusions about the urgency of the trending topics. Moreover, insights can include top posts, most-commented-on posts, or most shared video. These insights will help to gain an understanding of what content and themes are salient during a specific day or week.

Other departments are ranked as specialists, pundits, or broadcasters:

- **Treasury is a specialist, defined by Klout as:** You may not be a celebrity, but within your area of expertise your opinion is second to none. Your content is likely dedicated to a specific topic or industry with a focused, highly engaged audience.
- **CDC.gov is a pundit, defined as:** You don't just share news, you create the news. As a pundit, your opinions are widely known and highly trusted. You're regularly recognized as a leader in your industry. When you speak, people listen.
- **HHS.Gov is a broadcaster, defined as:** You broadcast great content that spreads like wild-fire. You are an essential information source in your industry. You have a large and diverse audience that values your content.
- **Navy is a networker:** You know how to connect to the right people and share what's important to your audience. You generously share your network to help your followers. You have a high level of engagement and an influential audience.

While the scoring mechanism is not transparent, Klout scores are currently providing the best insights available and can help in understanding how well an agency performs on Twitter. A comparison with the communication strategy and overall mission of the agency can then provide additional insights.


Appendix IV provides an overview of Klout scores by agency (last updated in January 2012).

Part II: Twitter Features

Understanding Twitter's Functions

One of the big differences between Twitter and a social networking service like Facebook is that Twitter has an asymmetric follower model: anyone can follow a public Twitter account without pre-approval or expectation of reciprocity. Twitter does offer the option of protecting an account, requiring each follower to be approved by the account owner before content is viewable. As a government entity, an agency does not need to follow back every one of its followers. This may lead to an unbalanced follower/followed account, but on Twitter there is no expectation of reciprocity. For example, the White House Twitter account currently has more than 2,600,000 followers, but only follows about 150 government Twitter accounts. As an agency establishes its Twitter presence, it should, however, consider the content it wants to deliver and the image it wants to portray. Many government agencies tend to follow other government agencies at the local, state, and federal level. A good strategy is to look for other established accounts that follow a similar communication mission and follow them back to understand successful practices.

Retweeting—Sharing Information

An agency may want to consider forwarding or sharing of someone else's message, known as retweeting. In other words, a Twitter account holder finds another Twitter user's updates compelling and shares the original message with all of her followers—she retweets the original tweet. Retweeted messages are highlighted with the RT symbol:  and the account name that has retweeted the message. This practice is an easy way to reuse existing information that has popped up in an agency's Twitter news feed.

The web interface of [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com) currently does not allow any changes to the original message. Twitter desktop applications such as TweetDeck or HootSuite, however, do allow editing so that additional comments can be added to the original message.

Tip: Use direct attribution as much as possible to highlight the original source of Twitter updates.

Other practices include a hat tip, abbreviated as h/t or ht, and the addition of a Twitter account where a specific message originated. This practice attributes content to another author—giving him or her a hat tip or highlighting that the original content was heard through them. Another practice is to add "OH" for overheard—used for things an agency wants to share that were said or heard offline (or at least not on Twitter). It is usually used without direct attribution to a specific person, either because it is not possible or because the originator of the attributed material might not want their identity revealed.

Retweets, HT, or OH messages can increase the audience by thousands: as soon as content is seen as valuable enough to be shared, an agency has the potential to increase its reach into networks of those people willing to retweet the messages. In comparison with direct

communication to all followers of an account, retweets' value is the word-of-mouth function that helps to spread messages.

Asking for retweets has become acceptable practice and is used as a mechanism to gain legitimacy and increase reach.

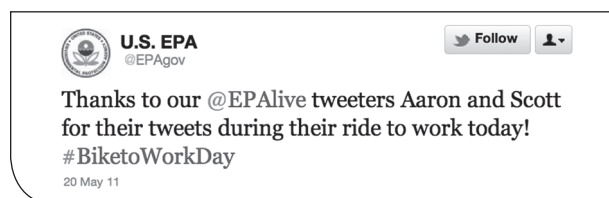
@-replies

In case an agency wants to reply directly to a tweet from a Twitter account it is following, **@replies** can be used. A tweet that starts with @username is considered a direct response to an update. The tweet will show up in the agency's updates and all followers can read it, but it will also show up in the news feed of the person who was directly addressed. The whole conversation including retweets and @replies to the original message can be traced by anyone interested in the thread, as the following example shows:



@replies are also a good way to draw attention to a specific issue. As an example, when an agency tweets about a town hall meeting, it can provide the URL to the meeting website, and add several organizational Twitter accounts (such as neighboring localities, local media, civic leagues, etc.). These messages then show up in their news feeds. The @mentions will likely increase awareness of an event or of information the agency would like to share. Not only is this a way to increase social awareness, but it also increases the likelihood that account holders will share the tweet with their own network of followers.

@mentions provide the opportunity to send someone a message who is not directly following an agency's Twitter handle—instead of sending a direct message (through Twitter's messaging service). To encourage another Twitter account holder to follow an agency, a tweet with @TheirAccountName might prompt a follow back, so that the direct message feature can be used:



Hashtags

A hashtag, denoted by the # sign in front of a keyword, is used as a categorization technique: the hashtag highlights specific keywords in a tweet that can then be used as search terms throughout the Twitter universe. Hashtags are a great way to catalog updates and cater them to different audiences. The advantage is that an agency does not need to follow everyone who is using the same hashtag. Instead, account holders can save a search for a specific hashtag (for example, #gov20 for Government 2.0 or #opengov for Open Government) and go back to this search now and then to see what people are talking about. A hashtag is clickable, similar to a link, and the search for a hashtag results in a list of all updates that have ever used the same hashtag. Very popular hashtags can become trending topics.

Another Twitter tradition, #FF (Follow Friday) is used to recommend an agency's favorite Twitter users. A Follow Friday update includes a list of Twitter handles (@YourName). Together with retweets, #FF marks what some people refer to as Twitter love, since directing an agency's Twitter network to the agency's own favorite will likely result in more followers for those accounts.

Hashtags are an evolving way to track conversations by topic. Twitter has not yet designed an intuitive way to follow all threaded discussion on a specific topic, so that sorting and searching through hashtags is still the state of the art in tracking topics of interest.

Table 3: Do's and Don'ts for the Use of Twitter Hashtags

Do's	Don'ts
Use zero to one hashtags per tweet. Only pick one that clearly fits into the current use or discussion used by other users of the hashtag.	#Do # Not #Hashtag #every #word #in #your #tweet.
	Don't string together as many popular hashtags as possible to receive attention.
	#DontUseMadeUpHashtagsThatMakeNoSense

Direct Messaging

Direct messages are similar to direct e-mails and can only be sent to those accounts that follow an agency back. They are directly delivered to the e-mail account associated with the Twitter account. Using the direct message function is a result of an initial decision of whom to follow back and whether following might be interpreted as endorsement. One social media director highlights: "On Twitter we don't follow people back that we don't have an official relationship with, or that is not a local, state, or federal entity. We don't want to imply that we support or endorse an individual and their opinions and different things, so we just don't follow unless we have that relationship. So direct messages not so much."

The Washington State Department of Transportation has set up a Twitter account that follows citizens back, so that they can set up a direct message alert that is sent to their cellphones. The "know where you go" Twitter pilot updates commuters with real-time travel advice for Seattle-area travel, Canadian border wait times, mountain reports, and aviation updates. The direct message service can also be used in reverse: Citizens following the agency can request detailed updates and receive a direct message back via Twitter, tailored to their geographic location and needs:

Washington State Department of Transportation

Traffic & Cameras Projects Business Environment Maps & Data

You are here: [Home](#) > [Info](#)

More Information

- Keeping You Informed
- Mobile Devices
- Twitter

Twitter

We are using Twitter to help keep you informed about happenings around Washington state.

We provide information for you to make good travel decisions before you get into your vehicle and to "Know Before You Go". We regularly include "Know Before You Go" in our Twitter messages.

In order to receive these reports from us, set yourself up with a Twitter account and follow [@WSDOT](#). Once we follow you, you can get real time information using the following directions.

- Getting Seattle area travel times via Twitter
- Getting mountain pass reports via Twitter
- Getting Canadian border wait times via Twitter
- Getting aviation METAR weather reports via Twitter

Getting Seattle area travel times via Twitter

If you are a Twitter user you can get Seattle area travel times reports by sending a direct message to [@WSDOT](#). We will then tweet you back the current travel time for your requested route.

For a direct message from Twitter use this format:

tt [route identifier]

Example: tt seattle to Bellevue

Sample travel time text returned for Seattle to Bellevue:

Seattle to Bellevue: 12 min via I-90 and 12 min via SR 520

For travel time reports from your cellphone, send a text message to 40404 using this format:

d wsdot tt [route identifier]

Example: d wsdot tt Bellevue to Issaquah

Sample travel time text returned for Bellevue to Issaquah:

Bellevue to Issaquah: 10 min via I-405 and I-90

Route Identifiers are based on the following text descriptions:

Follow us on Twitter

- [@wsdot](#) - main account
- [@wsdot_traffic](#) - sound traffic reports
- [@wsdot_passes](#) - mountain pass reports
- [@wsdot_tacoma](#) - Tacoma traffic
- [@wsdotwsdot](#) - Go! To Go! taking information
- [@wsdotupdates](#) - 140 Construction updates
- [@wsdotinfo](#) - Ferry alerts and updates

Aggregators: Twitter Falls

Twitter falls are third-party services that use the Twitter API to collect tweets, either those posted by specific Twitter accounts or based on searches of keywords or hashtags. The tweets are displayed in real time and are falling into the display page. This type of tweet aggregator is useful in many different circumstances: Twitter falls can, for example, be used as back channels at conferences, press conferences, public meetings, etc. Other application areas can include monitoring of specific hashtags, such as the #SOTU hashtag use leading up to the State of the Union address. Aggregating tweets in one place provides insights into the general direction in which topics are discussed on Twitter.

The following example shows one third-party application called [TwitterFall.com](#) with the real-time results of the #fedtweets hashtag.

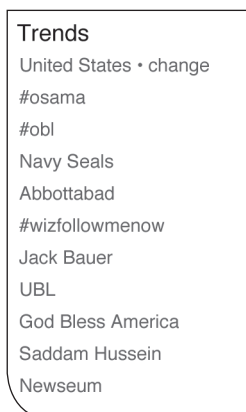
TwitterFall.com interface showing a list of tweets filtered by the #fedtweets hashtag. The interface includes navigation panels on the left (Lists, Searches, Geolocation, Login to Twitter) and settings on the right (Speed, Fall size, Language, Retweets, Text Size, Share, About). The main area displays a stream of tweets with user avatars, names, and text.

Twitter Memes

Twitter users are creating so-called memes as their use of the microblogging service evolves. Memes include the creation of a topic-relevant hashtag that describes a specific event, such as a conference or a public speech (#SOTU used for the State of the Union Address). Some of these memes are temporary and only capture conversations leading up to and during an event, then the meme dwindles after the event. Other memes persist over time and are widely accepted among Twitter users. One of these persistent trends is the “Follow Friday” hashtag (#FF). The following example shows how the White House promotes H1N1 content updates available through different government Twitter accounts using #FF:




Many memes can also be found in the trends or trending topics section on the Twitter page. Below are the top trends on Twitter on May 2, 2011⁵



5. Trending topics on Twitter on the morning after the White House made the announcement that Osama Bin Laden had been killed by U.S. Navy Seals.

Twitter Lists

Every day, several hundred Twitter updates can pile up in an agency's news feed, which can be discouraging and at times overwhelming. To avoid this, lists are an efficient way to organize important Twitter accounts and quickly access only their updates in a targeted search by using the **list** feature ().

Account names can be added to a list, even accounts an agency does not follow. Note that Twitter users can remove themselves from a list an agency has created. As an example, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is hosting more than 20 different Twitter accounts for its diverse audiences.⁶ Instead of the EPA following all accounts, it can put them on a list labeled "all EPA Twitter accounts." In turn, Twitter allows its users to follow other users' lists instead of following someone directly. This practice avoids endorsements, but the account holder still gets the updates. Below is EPA's "EPARegion9" Twitter list.⁷



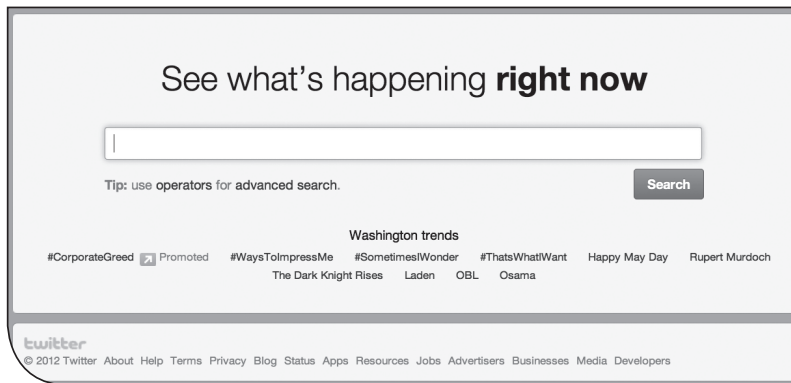
Twitter Search

Like Facebook, Twitter has become a social search engine. People tend to pay attention to updates within their own self-determined networks. To understand what an agency's constituencies or audience members are talking about, Twitter's powerful search mechanism is very helpful: <http://twitter.search.com>.

The search tool can be used to search in several different ways: for specific keywords or hashtags (using the #-sign), for people (in case the Twitter account name is unknown), organizations or events. The search function provides an easy way to listen in to ongoing conversations and so monitor how an agency or a hot topic related to an agency's mission is mentioned on Twitter. Even if agencies opt out of participating in social media like Twitter, it doesn't mean that their constituencies are not talking about them in these media. The search tool will keep a finger on the conversational pulse, even if the agency chooses not to post content directly.

6. See <http://www.epa.gov/epahome/socialmedia.html#Twitter> for a full list of EPA's Twitter accounts.

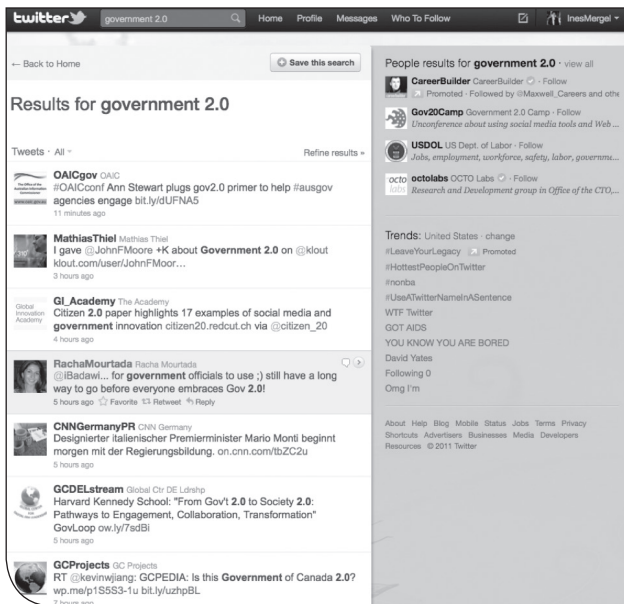
7. <http://twitter.com/#!/EPARegion9/environment>



Tip: Save search results as an RSS feed in a reader.

Twitter Search provides a powerful mechanism to filter noise from the thousands of messages using the same hashtag. Underneath the search box, Twitter displays the current trending topics catered to a user's geographic location or IP address.

As an example, the following search displays all the messages that were posted using the keyword Government 2.0.



Appendix I: Resources

Government Twitter Guides

- GSA [HowTo.gov](http://www.howto.gov/social-media/microblogging) microblogging guide: <http://www.howto.gov/social-media/microblogging>
- Mashable Twitter guide: <http://mashable.com/tag/twitter/>
- **GovLoop Twitter guides:**
 - 15 Commandments for Government Agencies on Twitter: <http://www.govloop.com/page/15-commandments-for-government-agencies-on-twitter>
 - 12 Commandments for Government Employees on Twitter: <http://www.govloop.com/profiles/blogs/new-twitter-guides-for-government-agencies-and-employees>
- NARA (2010). Guidance on Managing Records in Web 2.0/Social Media Platforms. <http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/bulletins/2011/2011-02.html>.

Official Twitter.com resources:

- Embedding photos into a tweet update: <https://dev.twitter.com/media/photos>
- Embedding Twitter on a government website: <https://dev.twitter.com/docs/twitter-for-websites>
- Help when an account is compromised: <https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-violation/topics/122-reporting-violations/articles/31796-my-account-has-been-compromised>
- Automating helps and guidelines: <https://support.twitter.com/articles/76915>
- USG Twitter Wiki: <http://twitter.pbworks.com/w/page/1779986/USGovernment>

Social Media-Related Twitter Hashtags

#fedtweets	Used to discuss Twitter best practices in government
#gov20	Used by Government 2.0 community to discuss the newest developments in the use of Web 2.0 technologies
#openGov #oGov	Used for all topics concerning the Open Government Initiative
#egov	Used for messages concerning the use of technology in government
#opendata	Used for discussions and conversations around Open Data topics in the public sector.

Appendix II: NARA's Social Media Recordkeeping Guidelines (2010)

Initial social media recordkeeping discussions and experimentation at the White House were followed by the National Archive and Records Administration's social media recordkeeping guidelines published in October 2010 (NARA, 2010). NARA reiterates the definition of federal records according to the Federal Act 44 U.S.C. 3301 as:

- All books, papers, maps, photographs, machine readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics;
- Made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business, and;
- Preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of data in them.
- Records retention/Public Records Request (options include downloading xml for your tweets daily for records retention or using a service like TwitterMail or TwInbox which lets you automate record retention by using e-mail)
- Back up your Twitter account

For a full overview of policies guiding use of web-based technologies including social media application see summary overview Appendix III.

Appendix III: Summary Timeline of Regulations, Acts and Policies

A summary timeline of regulations, acts and policies for the use of social media in the public sector appears on the following two pages.

Title of Policy	Date	Description	Link to Act
Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995	May 1995	Minimizes the burden on the public of filling out information for the government. Makes participation in government easier and more understandable. Improves the quality of government information for further accountability.	http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-104publ13/pdf/PLAW-104publ13.pdf
Government Paperwork Elimination Act	October 21, 1998	Uses alternative technology to initiate paperless interaction with the government.	http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-105publ277/pdf/PLAW-105publ277.pdf
The E-Government Act of 2002	December 17, 2002	Creates position of Chief Federal Information Officer. CIO's job is to implement the act and ensure all agencies and branches of government enhance the use of the Internet as a resource to interact with American citizens.	http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-107publ347/pdf/PLAW-107publ347.pdf
Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites	December 17, 2004	Creates guidelines for websites and describes how they can be used to implement the E-Government Act of 2002 to create a more citizen-centered government.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/fy2005/m05-04.pdf
Circular A-130—Management of Federal Information Resources	May 2005	Defines websites as a source of information to the public. Since it is information it must be maintained and recorded, like other forms of information.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars/a130_a130trans4
Presidential Memo on Transparency and Open Government	January 21, 2009	Sets three goals: government will be transparent, participatory, and collaborative.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Transparency_and_Open_Government/
A Strategy for American Innovation	September 2009	Plans to push open innovation of new technology to drive America's future and economy. Paves a path for future Gov 2.0 initiatives, including challenges and prizes.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/nec/StrategyforAmericanInnovation/
Open Government Directive (OMB Memo)	December 8, 2009	Outlines specific actions federal agencies must take to fulfill President's memo on transparency and open government	http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/memoranda_2010/m10-06.pdf
Department of Defense Responsibility and Effective Use	February 25, 2010	DOD's specific policy on new media and the Government 2.0 initiative	http://www.defense.gov/NEWS/DTM%2009-026.pdf
Guidance on Use of Challenges and Prizes to Promote Open Government (OMB Memo)	March 8, 2010	Incorporates use of competitions open to the public to drive innovation. Public participates in solving the problems facing the government.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/memoranda_2010/m10-11.pdf

Title of Policy	Date	Description	Link to Act
GSA Terms of Use Development	Ongoing	GSA works to negotiate Terms of Use agreements with multiple social media web platforms.	http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104320
Information Collection and the PRA (OMB memo)	April 7, 2010	Explains what does and does not count as information collection under Paperwork Reduction Act. This is relevant as e-government increases public interaction with the government through websites and new media.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/inforeg/PRAPrimer_04072010.pdf
Social Media, Web-based Interactive Technology and the Paperwork Reduction Act (OMB Memo)	April 7, 2010	Offers specific guidance on how new media fit in with older policies like the Paperwork Reduction Act.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/inforeg/SocialMediaGuidance_04072010.pdf
Guidance for Web Measurement and Customization Technologies (OMB Memo)	June 25, 2010	OMB's guidance on appropriate government use of web technologies.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/memoranda_2010/m10-22.pdf
Guidance for Agency Use of Third-Party Websites and Applications (OMB Memo)	June 25, 2010	Discusses how agencies should go about using web technology hosted by a third party, such as Facebook, Twitter, or blogs.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/memoranda_2010/m10-23.pdf
Accountable Government Initiative	September 14, 2010	Discusses closing the IT gap and generally making government more efficient through the use of technology.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2010/AccountableGovernmentInitiative_09142010.pdf
Plain Writing Act of 2010	October 13, 2010	All government publications (including websites and linked to information on social media) must be written clearly with easy to understand language.	http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ274/pdf/PLAW-111publ274.pdf
Guidance on Managing Records in Web 2.0/ Social Media Platforms (National Archives Memo)	October 20, 2010	National Archives issues memo gives advice on how agencies can comply with current mandatory recordkeeping requirements in a Government 2.0 and e-government world.	http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/bulletins/2011/2011-02.html
America COMPETES Act	January 4, 2011	Makes it significantly easier for all federal government agencies to legally host challenges and prizes using new web platforms.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/12/21/congress-grants-broad-prize-authority-all-federal-agencies

Appendix IV: Klout Scores for Selected Agencies

Department/ Agency	Following	Twitter Followers	Klout score	Label	Twitter handles	Twitter URLs
USDA	159	47,453	60	Broadcaster	@USDA	http://twitter.com/#!/USDA
Commerce	113	10,532	57	Specialist	@CommerceGov	http://twitter.com/#!/CommerceGov
Defense	322	54,671	61	Thought Leader	@DeptofDefense	http://twitter.com/#!/DeptofDefense
Air Force	356	31,428	61	Thought Leader	@usairforce	http://twitter.com/#!/usairforce
Army	294	104,524	67	Thought Leader	@USArmy	http://twitter.com/#!/USArmy
Coast Guard	90	16,479	59	Broadcaster	@uscg	http://twitter.com/#!/uscg
Marines	157	69,935	72	Thought Leader	@usmc	http://twitter.com/#!/usmc
Navy	23,474	31,093	47	Networker	@navynews	http://twitter.com/#!/navynews
Education	13	76,113	64	Thought Leader	@usedgov	http://twitter.com/#!/usedgov
Energy	85	33,900	59	Broadcaster	@Energy	http://twitter.com/#!/ENERGY
HHS	116	152,308	62	Broadcaster	@hhs.gov	http://twitter.com/#!/hhs.gov
FDA	8	3,268	10	Broadcaster	@us_fda	http://twitter.com/#!/US_FDA
CDC	94	53,029	66	Pundit	@CDCgov	http://twitter.com/#!/CDCgov
Homeland Security	176	51,220	64	Thought Leader	@DHSgov	http://twitter.com/#!/DHSgov
FEMA	456	78,897	75	Thought Leader	@fema	http://twitter.com/#!/fema
TSA	190	17,182	52	Thought Leader	@TSABlogTeam	http://twitter.com/#!/TSABlogTeam
HUD	234	17,287	50	Thought Leader	@HUDNews	http://twitter.com/#!/HUDNews
Interior	16,738	17,129	56	Specialist	@Interior	http://twitter.com/#!/Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service	586	6,831	54	Specialist	@usfwsHQ	http://twitter.com/#!/usfwsHQ
National Park Service	276	26,930	58	Thought Leader	@natlparkservice	http://twitter.com/#!/natlparkservice
Justice	104	428,471	62	Broadcaster	@TheJusticeDept	http://twitter.com/#!/TheJusticeDept
FBI	961	246,249	55	Thought Leader	@FBIPressOffice	http://twitter.com/#!/FBIPressOffice
Labor	91	27,507	54	Thought Leader	@USDOL	http://twitter.com/#!/USDOL
State	261	171,970	71	Thought Leader	@StateDept	http://twitter.com/#!/StateDept
Treasury Secretary	875	25,065	60	Broadcaster	@RayLaHood	http://twitter.com/#!/RayLaHood
Department of the Treasury	140	25,578	52	Specialist	@ustreasurydept	http://twitter.com/#!/ustreasurydept
Veterans Administration	770	26,653	62	Thought Leader	@DeptVetAffairs	http://twitter.com/#!/DeptVetAffairs
EPA	40	51,275	61	Thought Leader	@EPAgov	http://twitter.com/#!/EPAgov
FCC	35	450,044	66	Thought Leader	@FCC	http://twitter.com/#!/FCC
FDIC	0	4,722	39	Specialist	@FDICgov	http://twitter.com/#!/FDICgov
GSA	147	2,872	48	Specialist	@usgsa	http://twitter.com/#!/usgsa
NARA	34	8,613	53	Specialist	@USNatArchives	http://twitter.com/#!/USNatArchives
NASA	151	1,600,478	80	Taste Maker	@nasa	http://twitter.com/#!/nasa
USAID	792	123,429	72	Thought Leader	@usaid	http://twitter.com/#!/USAID

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Dr. Ines Mergel is an Assistant Professor of Public Administration at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and The Information Studies School (iSchool) at Syracuse University. She was previously a postdoctoral research fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, Program of Networked Governance; and the National Center for Digital Government at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Professor Mergel teaches Master of Public Administration program courses on Government 2.0, New Media Management in the Public Sector, Networked Governance, and Public Organizations and Management. Her research interest focuses on informal networks among public managers and their adoption and use of new media technologies in the public sector. In particular, she studies how public managers use new media technologies to search, share, and reuse knowledge they need to fulfill the mission of their agency.



A native of Germany, Professor Mergel received a BA and MBA equivalent in business economics from the University of Kassel, Germany. She received a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) in information management from the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland and spent six years as doctoral and post-doctoral fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, where she conducted research on public managers' informal social networks and their use of technology to share knowledge.

Professor Mergel's work has been published in the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, the *International Journal of Public Management* and the *American Review of Public Administration*, among others. Her books, *New Media in the Public Sector: Participation, Transparency and Collaboration in the Networked World* and *New Media in the Public Sector Guidebook—Designing and Implementing Strategies and Policies* are published in 2012 with Jossey-Bass/Wiley. Her thoughts on the use of social media applications in the public sector can be read on her blog: <http://inesmergel.wordpress.com>.

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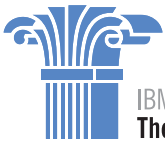
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