How social media is transforming the public sector in Australia and New Zealand

WHITE PAPER

Connected Citizens, Connected Government
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Connected Citizens, Connected Government

How social media is transforming the public sector in Australia and New Zealand

Introduction

Australia’s government agencies and public sector stakeholders are increasingly looking to use social media to improve the quality of services, enable greater citizen engagement, elevate public services, reduce costs and much more.

Social media is providing government organisations, departments and agencies a means to connect like never before, and to provide customer service that previously wasn’t possible.

Australians continue to become more connected, and increasingly, the tools they’re using to connect are digital ones. Citizens’ expectations for digital government are rising—so maximising government investment in social media requires a strategic approach to social engagement with citizens.

Governments are adopting new technologies to meet these expectations and deliver a better experience to citizens. Government agencies that are doing it well have mastered a way to adopt a human-centric approach when engaging with citizens on social.

But there’s a lot of work still to do. Now, more than ever, government departments and organisations looking to harness the power of social media must adopt tools to ensure positive outcomes. Social media management solutions can simplify social engagement and pay for themselves in the form of operational efficiencies, streamlined service delivery, and improved citizen satisfaction with government interactions.

This paper explores the value of social media as an agent to drive efficient, effective, and citizen-centric engagement across the public sector in Australia and New Zealand.

Amplifying Social Reach

6,000 Tweets sent every second
100 Million Daily active users of Snapchat
1 Billion Daily searches on LinkedIn
80 Million Photos shared on Instagram daily
1 in every 6 minutes Amount of time spent daily on Facebook
4 Billion Daily views on YouTube

Source: Hootsuite

Hootsuite
How governments are using social media

Engaging with communities

Social media continues to attract a multigenerational audience hungry for real-time information and engagement. Of the 84 percent of Australians who access the internet daily, 79 percent are actively using social media.1

While government agencies are using social media to disseminate information, many are focusing their efforts on using it as a broadcasting tool, resulting in one-sided conversations that don’t result in meaningful engagement with citizens. As a result, citizens have a less-than-satisfying experience, which does nothing to improve their view of—or relationship with—government entities.

Informing and connecting citizens

Agencies that have adopted social media effectively are reaping the benefits by digitally connecting citizens with their government services.

With the largest Facebook audience of any police service in the world, The Queensland Police Service was one of the first movers in Australia’s public sector to use social media for citizen engagement.

After using social media as a primary real-time news channel throughout the 2010-2011 Queensland floods, the police service today actively manages an audience of over one million followers across Facebook and Twitter. By publishing engaging content and responding to citizens in real time, they continue to successfully build community and citizen engagement.

Queensland Urban Utilities

The social media accounts of Queensland Urban Utilities cover more than just their business activities. By providing citizens with real-time information on water and sewerage service interruptions, water quality, infrastructure, and assets—as well as information from other organisations that relates to their customers—the organisation has successfully operationalised their social media activities. The team can be contacted throughout business hours on weekdays, with additional scaling of support resources outside of this in times of incident or emergency.
Simplifying government operations

Compared with traditional methods like telephone, mail, email, and in-person contact, social media provides government agencies a cost-effective way to communicate with a larger audience.

For example, governments can use Twitter and Facebook to issue alerts and expedite the speed of information sharing—from traffic restrictions and weather alarms to missing persons alerts.

In December 2016, Transport for NSW partnered with Twitter to launch a personalised transport alerts service that notifies customers in real time about delays or disruptions while travelling on trains, light rail, and ferries. The partnership, an Australian first, allows Sydney commuters to sign up to receive alerts through direct message by visiting @TfNSWAlerts on Twitter.

Evaluating the maturity of social government

Hootsuite’s Digital Maturity Assessment has benchmarked over 200 organisations to date, evaluating governments and organizations from major industries such as financial services.

While the sample size for government is small, early indications show that government agencies range from early to mid-maturity in the digital transformation journey. Social media is one of several elements crucial to transformation, offering government agencies a relatively quick win in terms of enhancing the citizen experience.

Our research has helped define the following five stages of maturity:

1. **Siloed**
   Social is often limited to a marketing use case and the champion for digital is a marketing manager.

2. **Collaborative**
   Multiple teams or departments are enabled by a single social media management platform and the champion for digital is a director.

3. **Integrated**
   The organisation is leveraging a combination of social media data and CRM to provide an enhanced experience across the customer journey.

4. **Strategic**
   The organisation has moved beyond social media metrics to understanding how digital is driving business ROI.

5. **Transformative**
   Customer-facing and internal initiatives are planned, executed, and measured with a “digital-first” mindset.

Government agencies range between Siloed and Integrated in their maturity.
The four pillars of a social government

1. Citizen and community engagement

Listening to citizens is the first step in learning what’s happening within communities.

Agencies can use Facebook events, polls, lists, and livestreams to gauge and monitor citizen engagement and identify community concerns.

**NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service**

With the parklands and wildlife of New South Wales forming the backdrop for their content, it’s not surprising to see the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service among the fastest growing public sector accounts on the social web.

But the service’s social accounts are about more than just pretty pictures. For example, “The Breach” video series uses social to educate and inform citizens about the annual migration of whales along the New South Wales coast, and the #SavingOurSpecies hashtag raises awareness of native flora and fauna and risks to the ecosystem.

The department also uses social media to communicate bushfire threats through Fire and Park Alerts.

2. Government service delivery

It’s unlikely that digital services will ever completely replace in-person services in government. However, if agencies redirect funding from traditional call centres towards digital service delivery, they can cut customer wait times, increase customer satisfaction levels, and save both government and taxpayers significant money.

Social media can help reduce the public sector resources consumed in the delivery of citizen services. Services like tax payments, permit applications, and license renewals, for instance, can be delivered as do-it-yourself services.

**Australian Government Department of Human Services**

Family Update was launched by the Australian Government’s Department of Human Services as a direct response to negative feedback on how challenging and time consuming it was to source information, connect with the department, and submit social security claims.

With the aim of helping families keep up to date with information about Centrelink, Medicare, Child Support, and the Department of Human Services, the Facebook page has enabled the team to respond to 80 percent of customer questions within three hours.

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*Image Source: NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

*Image Source: Family update AU*
3. Critical response communications

On social media, word of a crisis can spread across the globe in seconds. A strong critical response plan, directed through social media, can be a mitigating factor in containing a crisis. Spending the time and resources to develop a communications plan before an event takes place sets teams up to be quick and efficient with their response.

Twitter and Facebook updates can alert citizens to power outages, terror alerts, and weather disasters in real time for immediacy and accuracy. First responders can monitor community activity to better understand where citizen support is most needed.

NSW Rural Fire Service
The State Operations Centre at NSW Rural Fire Service Headquarters in Lidcombe is a world-class facility that allows the Service and its partners to effectively oversee and coordinate incidents. At its centre is the “Knowledge Wall”, a giant screen array that displays the latest feeds of information from ICON, BOM, and helicopter cameras alongside real-time social media activity. Working alongside other departments, The Public Liaison Unit is responsible for delivering warnings to the community through the NSW RFS website media, social media, and the Bush Fire Information Line.

Image Source: NSW Rural Fire Service
4. Government operations

As well as enhancing citizen engagement and service delivery, social media can create efficiencies in other areas of government operations.

For example, social tools can be used to attract and retain highly skilled workers where traditional recruitment fails. Younger workers are comfortable engaging via social media. Unlike insular traditional recruitment, social media enables open, transparent, and real-time interactions that give citizens an unfiltered understanding of the opportunities and benefits that exist within government employment. This can help enhance the employer brand of government agencies and help them compete against the private sector for fresh talent.

While external recruitment can be out of reach for some government departments, social media provides a unique opportunity for organisations to identify and recruit new talent.

New Zealand Police Recruitment's award-winning #RunningManChallenge campaign enabled the organisation to build employer branding and awareness and communicate their culture to help drive recruitments in 2016. Thirty million views and hundreds of thousands of shares later, the video highlights the utility and operational impact social media can provide.

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**Small City, Big Thinking**

On the border of New South Wales and Victoria in Australia, Albury City is focused on connecting and engaging with their 50,000 local residents, as well as surrounding regional community of 130,000 people. Many of whom utilise city services, facilities and the wide range of experiences on offer.

Innovation is at the core of their values. The council’s approach to social media is a best-practice framework scalable across the entire public sector, showcasing that innovation isn’t limited to big cities—or big budgets.

Centralising social media activity across a single platform enables key departments to promote community events, local businesses, and development within the area. By educating and scaling social media across their existing teams, the council is able to efficiently and effectively engage with citizens. Should the team not be online, residents are able to submit feedback and enquiries via Facebook.
Proving the value of social media in government

Simplified outreach
Social media engagement can be used to enhance agency outreach by delivering a unified communications strategy that's on-brand and consistent.

A single platform for social management can centralise social outreach and engagement at the federal and state levels for efficiency and ease of procurement. It can also empower teams at the local and department levels to maintain their brand voices. Automation features that allow users to schedule social posts help keep engagement flowing, with less time invested in the process.

Effective listening
Social listening helps agencies learn what's on the minds of constituents. Likes, dislikes, and concerns are posted in real time, giving governments insight into relevant discussions. Listening to these discussions sets up agencies to respond to messages, brand mentions, and comments across all social channels, helping them resolve problems and maintain brand reputation.

Value you can measure
Measurement of success is key to proving the value of social and increasing budget for social initiatives.

To measure success, agencies need to start by defining what success means to them. Hootsuite defines social media ROI as “the sum of all social media actions that create value.” Activities on social media that create value for governments might fall under categories such as brand perception, customer experience, and security and risk mitigation.

With a well-established definition of success in place, agencies can use social media management software to measure and demonstrate progress toward program objectives.

Security and brand protection
Few things can be more damaging to perception of a brand than a negative social post that turns viral. A centralised social media management platform makes it easy to recognise and address potentially damaging social content.

Staff access can be managed across departments with secure logins, publishing approval workflows, and flexible permission levels. This allows for consistency across departments, agencies, and locations, and ensures that posts are reviewed, approved, and compliant.
Bringing the value of social government to the surface

- **Advance public sector missions**: An effective social media campaign to communicate the goals and benefits of government initiatives can help get constituents advocating on your behalf. Social conversations on Twitter and Facebook, viral videos on YouTube, and image shares on sites like Pinterest and Instagram all help drive awareness of—and engagement with—government causes. A social media management platform can provide enterprise-strength social media capability in an affordable solution to advance these initiatives.

- **Streamline agency operations**: Social media management tools can speed government response to emergencies to safeguard constituents and communicate in a timely manner. Governments can post emergency alerts and instant updates across several social channels from a single dashboard while monitoring responses and inbound communications.

- **Reduce cost of citizen outreach**: A shared platform for social media campaigns can unify social interactions, reducing redundancies and making information more transparent and available for citizen and inter-agency consumption.

Conclusion

Each agency, department, and organisation across Australia's public sector is at a different stage of the digital transformation journey. While social media is just one stage in this journey, it offers government agencies a relatively quick win in terms of enhancing the citizen experience.

The sector's social media use satisfies citizen demand for real-time information, makes citizen engagement easier, and streamlines government operations. Using social media, governments can control costs, increase transparency, earn greater public trust, and create positive public sentiment.

Effective social outreach requires that departments and organisations listen as much as they post, and that they respond quickly to comments and mentions. Investing in a citizen engagement platform such as Hootsuite to streamline and coordinate social media across departments and agencies is a critical step in ensuring successful social media adoption that delivers real value to government.

References

About Hootsuite for Government

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation

Hootsuite is the most widely used platform for managing social media, loved by over 16 million people around the globe and trusted by more than 800 of the Fortune 1000. Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era and scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and regions. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of social networks complemented by 250+ business applications and integrations, allowing organizations to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

Along with our channel and agency partners, we help organizations build deeper relationships with customers, stay connected to the needs of the market, grow revenue, and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help organizations pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through product training, group training and tailored organizational training, as well as security and compliance services.

Request a custom demo today by visiting hootsuite.com/government