

Social media represents a change in how people communicate with one another. For government, this presents new channels and methods of reaching the community.

1. What is Social Media?

Until recently, the majority of the Internet was a very one-way conversation. Like traditional books, just in electronic format, the Internet was speaking *at* its readers. There were limited opportunities for the visitors to websites to have an immediate impact on the message.

The newest generations of web tools enable every user to communicate well beyond their immediate social circle, opening their story, advice, or anything else they want to share to anyone interested in listening. Web 1.0 had a few early examples of this kind of empowerment. One of the first popular instances was the addition of user ratings and comments on Amazon.com. Anyone with an email address could review a product for the whole world to read.

Web 2.0 radically expands the role of the internet user into someone who not only consumes content, but also contributes to, spreads and creates it. Social media is an integral part of this Web 2.0 expansion of the functions of the internet.

Social media refers to a certain type of online tool that facilitates connections between people, as well as to communication and engagement strategies which seek to engage and interact with large, often ignored groups. To put it simply, social media is people having two way conversations on the internet.



source: www.johnhaydon.com

2. What does this have to do with social networking?

In the online world, the term social is best thought of as reflecting human interaction. Extending this idea, social networking is individuals forming communities of interest, whether professional, personal or issue driven. It is people powered communication driven by the desire of individuals to create and share knowledge and information with one another.

While social networking is possible face to face, it is made much easier through the web. A social network web site allows people who share interests to develop an online community. Social network sites provide different ways for users to interact, such as instant messaging, video and picture sharing, file sharing, blogging, and discussion groups

Social networks are, and have always been, the interpersonal connections that power the functions of government, commerce and indeed all of society. Online, web 2.0-style social networking sites seek to take the existing and valuable social networks that exist in every walk of life, and make them visible, larger, easier to access and thus of greater benefit to all involved.

For more on social networking, watch [this video](#) about social networking in plain English.

To distinguish social media sites generally from social networking sites as a specific form, consider whether the major driver is content or community. For example, while social media sites like Wikipedia, YouTube and Flickr may have community features like 'friending' the general focus of those sites is on creating, sharing, and interacting about specific content. Similarly, though much content is shared on social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, the main focus for users on those platforms is creating and maintaining communities with friends, family, and/or professional colleagues.



source: www..michaelhyatt.com

3. What does this look like?

Below are a few examples of social media on the internet:

- **blogs:** personal opinions and commentary on an individual site. (Every group on the VPS Hub has one!). See the blogging guide on theGov 2.0 tool box for more info.
- **micro blogs:** (eg [Twitter](#)) – smaller, faster and often more personal versions of blogs. Traditionally engaged in far more using portable devices such as smart phones or iPads.
- **social network:** (eg [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), etc) – online spaces to create and engage with a community of friends and/or colleagues.



- **video sharing** (eg [Youtube](#)) – sites that allows users to share videos.
- **podcasts**: an audio recording that is disseminated online and can be played on computers or portable music devices. If it includes video as well, can be known as a Vodcast.
- **wikis**: community-generated documents and databases. Users can create content and contribute to content created by others in the interests of creating better resources. [Wikipedia](#) is arguably the best known wiki, with over 2 million articles in the English edition alone.

For more definitions of key terminology in social media, see the glossary.

4. Why should I care?

Social media amplifies the connections between individuals and can accelerate information gathering and sharing. Web 2.0 opens the Internet to a new level of communication, creating opportunities for public servants that are prepared to join the conversation.

Social media can have many benefits; these include but are not limited to:

Organisational

- Capturing institutional memory and knowledge
- Facilitating knowledge transfer
- Keeping knowledge current through real-time updates
- Reducing unnecessary redundancies and data storage requirements.

Group and Interpersonal

- Identifying and leveraging subject matter experts
- Developing communities of practice around policy issues, services, individual client groups etc
- Enhancing collaboration across functional areas, geographic and portfolio boundaries
- Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of communication processes.

Individual

- Increasing efficiency, effectiveness and productivity
- Expanding knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Enhancing employee engagement and contribution.

Many of these benefits can already be seen in the operation of the VPS Hub – the Victorian Public Service’s own social media intranet.



5. What next?

The Government 2.0 project team has developed specific tools and templates relating to different types of social media. Before you access those, you may wish to ask yourself, which social media should I use?

Here are some options:

What do you want to do?	Blog	Wiki	Podcast/ Vodcast	Twitter	Youtube	Facebook
Communicate through writing with a predetermined group of stakeholders	✓	✓		✓		
Communicate through audio or video recording			✓		✓	
Communicate briefly, pass-on links/information, use social networks to spread your message				✓		✓
Interact with citizens/users, develop or control an online personality	✓			✓		✓
Store information in a way that is easy to access	✓	✓				
Collaborate with multiple people on the creation of content		✓				

6. Glossary

Blog: a website with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video, displayed in reverse-chronological order (most recent first). Readers are typically free to comment on the content of the blog, known as 'posts', and often subscribe to blogs via an RSS feed (see below).

Crowd-sourcing: taking the tasks commonly conducted by a certain group (government, business etc) and outsourcing them to a group of people or community through an open call for contributions. Web 2.0 communications technologies can be used to leverage the efforts and ideas of large masses of potential collaborators.

Data mashup: the combination of data from two or more previously unconnected data sources to provide new context and meaning to the information. An example of data mashing would be combining crime statistics with maps to visually depict incidences of crime across geographical areas.

Facebook: a global social networking website in which users create profiles and exchange text, images and links with friends, family and community members. Users can join networks based on location, workplace or educational facility and can join 'groups' on particular themes of interest, coordinate events and maintain a profile of themselves. Victorian Premier John Brumby has a Facebook account and currently has 2,326 friends.

Flickr: an image and video hosting website and online community. The site allows for posting of images and video, as well as user comment on that content. The site is used by many bloggers and twitter users to store images which are then embedded or linked to in their posts.

RSS: a method of publication of frequently updated online content, such as blog entries or news headlines. An RSS feed typically includes full or summarised text as well as metadata such as publishing dates and authorship. RSS feeds are read using aggregators, such as Google Reader and browser-inbuilt RSS readers.

Twitter: a free social networking and micro-communications site that facilitates the online publication of text messages up to 140 characters in length. Updates, known as 'tweets', are delivered to a user's 'followers' in real time. Twitter is used by individuals such as journalists and organisations such as the New York Times.

Yammer: a simple real-time communication tool for use within organisations, enabling employees to connect and share at work. Only individuals with the same email domain (eg .vic.gov.au) can join a given network.

YouTube: a video sharing website where users can upload, view and comment on videos free of charge

Wiki: a website (or collection of linked websites) that is freely contributed to, altered and edited by a number of users. Wikipedia is an example of a large-scale application of the Wiki principle.

Viral: something is virally spread on the internet, or 'goes viral', if it is spread widely across online media sources through posting and reposting by ordinary people, as opposed to a direct and continued effort by the information source. Many private corporations utilise this online form of word-of-mouth to advertise their products through viral marketing.

