SOCIAL MEDIA:

RESEARCH AND PROPOSED MECHANISM

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INTRODUCTION

Social media continues to be an increasingly important way for organisations – commercial, governmental, research and non-profit - to communicate with their stakeholders both internally and externally. As a result, even organisations with complex business processes and relationships are realising that they need to get involved:

> "we operate our businesses today in a "conversation economy," where peer-to-peer conversations, fuelled by social communities and online research, drive brand perceptions and purchase decisions. It's a whole new playing field that will require a dramatic shift in how we go to market and how we engage with customers. Online conversations lead to comparing notes, and today social media sites and other online resources are a brand's most influential medium."[1]

As part of Organisation X's process in determining how best to engage in and with social media, we have been talking to people in organisations similar to ours, about their experiences and reasons for doing so. This document serves to distil some of their messages, combined where appropriate with other research, to address issues of policy, tone, process and resources[2].

KEY FINDINGS

- Guidelines are better than detailed policy, due to the lead times involved
- A continuous presence leads to credibility with external audiences
- Make use of internal staff expertise in responding to questions/comments
- Response time is important – it should be fast unless an issue is being deliberately throttled (and the appropriateness of that is subject to the issue itself)
- It's OK to say 'we don't know yet, we'll get back to you' publicly. Transparency is important
- Risk identification is key
- Tone is pivotal – it is not only possibly but necessary to split tone and message. 'PR' language is received negatively in social media circles.
- A single voice is appropriate for many organisations, particularly if large and complex
- Peer defence – support your supporters, and allow them to defend the organisation (they have more credibility in doing so than the organisation itself).
- Be conversational, not confrontational
- Social media can build mana, encompassing trust, credibility and reputation

STRATEGY VS POLICY VS GUIDELINES

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[1]Harnessing the conversation economy: Business strategies for meeting customers on their own turf http://www.jivesoftware.com/files/pdf/whitepaper/WP-Jive-Conversation-Economy.pdf
[2] See *'Social Media Discussion Document – aimee whitcroft – July 2011'* for background including an overview of social media, platforms to consider, some case studies, the current situation and thinking forward

The organisations we spoke to said they make use of guidelines as opposed to detailed policies or strategies. A large part of the reason for this was the length of time a policy can take to write - by the time it has been written, the circumstances/platforms around which it was based may have become obsolescent; and technologies/best practise will have moved forward.

This is especially true in the social media space, which is iterative and moves extremely quickly. An example of this is Google+ – in the very few months since its release, it has become one of the largest and most talked-about social networks in the Western world, and organisations are very quickly establishing a presence on it. Notably, it has a very strong and very large science-related set of communities who are extremely active on it.

Other reasons for guidelines as opposed to a detailed policy, spoken about by the organisations with whom we spoke, and also espoused in numerous case studies and articles on the subject are:

- Existing HR and policy guidelines within an organisation will generally cover behaviour regarding language which is (in)appropriate, forums in which comment is allowed/not allowed, and the sort of comment that is appropriate should staff be approached.
- Showing the staff involved that their judgement is respected facilitates better behaviour and morale - "Assume that if people know how to behave in the real world, they'll figure out how to behave in the online world as well"[3].

The NSW Department of Education and Communities has published their guidelines, which can be found in the document 'Social Media Strategy and Governance'[4].

TONE/LANGUAGE

Key message: Different tones are best suited to different media – a 'one tone fits all' approach will be negatively received.

Social media is by its nature decentralised and personal. As such, content in this sphere that is personal and informal in tone will seem more natural in context and is more likely to be perceived positively. Generating likes, retweets and comments is about giving people a moment of excitement or a desire to engage.

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[3] EMC/ONE: A Journey in Social Media http://www.jivesoftware.com/files/pdf/whitepaper/WP-EMC-whitepaper.pdf
[4] Social Media Strategy and Governance, p20
http://www.communication.uts.edu.au/centres/acpc/docs/social-media-research-report-online.pdf

Recent research has demonstrated that a sense of personality (even from Fortune 500 companies) is positively received[5], and that "Levels of trust, commitment, and satisfaction from users all appear to be positively affected by the use of the human voice in social media.[6]".

Social media communities don't build overnight – be patient. But, be aware that people are also easily bored, so social media messages need to be frequent and timely. Recent research indicates that 90% of consumers[7] stop following brands because of communication which is too frequent, boring, or irrelevant.

> *"Make sure that whatever you do, it is not with the sole intention to push information out … Take the time to respond and have meaningful conversations. That will increase your following tenfold. It's just like e-mail marketing: Don't be a blaster. Be a resource."[8]*

Further, people read web material differently to printed and other material[9] - they scan as opposed to reading every word, making it important to be not only informal, but also clear and concise:

> *"I think the main points to remember when developing a style guide are to value highly clear, concise, to the point, honest, and attention-getting writing. Social media seekers read and scan quickly and the payment in the web economy is via links which translate to attention."[10]*

Examples of poor tone include SeaLord, in August/September 2011, reacting on their Facebook page to news items around tuna fishing practices[11]. Their response took too long (many hours to days), and the tone used for the response was classic PR language, which was taken poorly by their audience and for which they are still receiving criticism.

Examples of poor relevance include the recent and ongoing #QantasLuxury debacle[12], in which Qantas social media team put out a competition asking people to tweet their positive experiences, shortly following the international grounding of the Qantas fleet (amongst other issues).

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[5] Why Social Media Marketing is a Different Animal…And How to Take Advantage of It
http://www.atlanticbt.com/blog/why-social-media-marketing-is-a-different-animal/
[6] Use of Human Voice in Social Media Can Help Organizations Build Relationships
http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110518121233.htm
[7] Top Reasons Why Consumers Unsubscribe via E-Mail, Facebook and Twitter, Erica Swallow, Mashable
http://mashable.com/2011/02/08/why-consumers-unsubscribe/
[8] 5 Proven Strategies for B2B Social Media Marketing http://mashable.com/2010/11/04/b2b-social-marketing-strategies/
[9] How Users Read on the Web http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html
[10] Social media, conversation, and writing style http://justwriteclick.com/2010/03/24/social-media-conversation-and-writing-style/
[11] Tuna campaign bombards city http://www.stuff.co.nz/business/industries/5527393/Tuna-campaign-bombards-city
[12] A Qantas luxury – not having to face flak http://www.theage.com.au/national/a-qantas-luxury--not-having-to-face-flak-20111122-1nsy3.html

PROPOSED PROCESS/MECHANISM

STRONG POLICY

A strong policy, which makes it clear that statements which are inaccurate or defamatory are not acceptable, needs to be written. In addition, an organisation is not required to respond to a comment or question. Those which are merely provocatory can be ignored (as pointed out by Neal Richardson of Telecom NZ), whereas those asking questions can be pointed to the correct resource.

Additionally, should a question arise frequently, it is worth considering turning it into a FAQ, a resource for which could be available on Organisation X's website. This might also lessen the number of email/telephone enquiries received by Organisation X, and which take up valuable time in responding to.

While day-to-day monitoring and posting may only require one person, we have also heard suggestions that, during times of crisis, more than one person should be involved so that response times are fast. Both day-to-day and crisis management require that those involved in social media have buy-in support from upper management in order to involve lengthy approval processes which could impact organisational credibility and reputation.

A style guide should be developed which recognises the balance which needs to be struck between a tone which matches a decentralised and personal environment whilst maintaining the integrity of a professional brand should be developed: it is not only possible but important that the social media 'human' tone should be employed at all times, and responses kept conversational as opposed to confrontational (see Fact finding documents available in the Q drive).

It must be noted that neither Organisation X nor any other person or organisations has any control over the content of other people, or what they do with *its* content. As a result, it would be wise to form strategies covering all the possible scenarios which could affect the organisation, and how Organisation X would react (this is not as scary as it sounds).

Catalyst90, a Wellington-based Social Media Consultancy, has kindly shared their list of social media Dos and Don'ts[13]. While it needs updating, it is nonetheless a useful guideline.

MONITORING

Moderation allows for comments posted on, say, Facebook and Youtube[14] to be 'moderated' (i.e. controlled). In addition, using a disclaimer is both wise and best practice - they "account for social

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[13] Contact Catalyst90 for further details. http://catalyst90.com/

media and advise users on how the agency manages their social media presence."[15] CSIRO has, on its Facebook page[16], a very good example of such a disclaimer, which also includes terms of engagement.

MONITORING SYSTEMS

Monitoring tools are both useful and necessary, as they make the job of managing an organisation's social media presence far easier, less time consuming, and provide valuable insight into the public's engagement with the social medium in question.

Possible monitoring tools which could be used are:

Google Alerts - At the very least, Organisation X should be using Google Alerts to pick up notices about when its name is mentioned online.

Bit.ly – a URL shortener (useful for Twitter, particularly) which enables one to track how many times it's been clicked on, plus a range of other metrics.

Inbuilt trackers – most social media services have inbuilt trackers which look at number of clicks, location (where possible), and so forth

Google Analytics – GA is a very strong tracker able to provide a range of metrics such as page view, number of visitors to pages, location, etc. It would be used for blogs.

Given that government policy states that CRIs need to keep records of their communications, the use of an archiver for tweets would also be key. There are a number of different services for this – TheArchivist is one (which allows either public or private archives), but one could also build private archives on Organisation X's servers, etc.

Hootsuite is a well-respected multi-platform tool which allows organisations to cross-post to numerous platforms including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+.

TIME/RESOURCES

The time and resources spent by an organisation differ vastly according to their needs, budget and skills. Some have staff members whose duties include outreach and social media engagement, while others have one or more FTEs devoted to it, as well as the time of other staff members.

Staff members using social media should be familiar with the platforms on which they are active, and it is proposed that all members of Comms and Marketing at Organisation X who are not already

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[14] It is not possible to control what others tweet, or retweet, on Twitter.
[15] Queensland Government – Official use of social media guidelines v1.0.0 http://www.qld.gov.au/web/social-media/policy-guidelines/guidelines/
[16]CSIRO House Rules https://www.facebook.com/pages/CSIRO/142468583842?sk=app_23744633048

active on these platforms develop at least some engagement in order to develop familiarity and facilitate the training of other staff where necessary/applicable.

> *"Establishing an official social media account creates an expectation of an ongoing dialogue and engagement with government. Before establishing social media accounts, agencies should assign appropriate resources in preparation for the continuing relationship expectations of the community. Officers with access to official social media accounts should be appropriately skilled in the use of social media and briefed on their role and responsibilities.*
>
> *The immediacy with which social media content is distributed challenges hierarchical approval methods and it is recommended that social media officers be appointed with delegated authority to represent the agency and supported by appropriate reporting and escalation processes."[17]*

CONCLUSION

Social media is not simply a way to disseminate releases – it has been remarked that very few organisations other than those with the credibility of the BBC (for example) can get away with it. Instead, social media is an ongoing conversation with stakeholders.

> *"'We get the return on social media we deserve. The so-called failures of social media to deliver are misplaced; rather they are the result of our own failure to commit – to sustain an online presence in more than a fleeting, one-night stand.'"[18]*
>
> *"Pushing information out to your target audience does not guarantee that it will be read and used. Information is useful only when it is received by the right person, who is looking at the right time. Using social media tools as vehicles helps to get your messages to the right people.*
>
> *The true value of social media lies in its ability to form communities organically."[19]*

Additionally, social media specialists have argued that "social media [can] not be controlled and most argued that organisations should not attempt to control content and interaction, as this runs counter to authenticity and dialogue which are hallmarks of social media communication.". Further, "PR and corporate communication practitioners engaged in social media are, to a significant extent, focussed on the wrong issues, such as attempts to control information distribution, brands and…see social media as "another marketing and promotion channel" with less focus on two-way

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[17] Queensland Government – Official use of social media guidelines v1.0.0 http://www.qld.gov.au/web/social-media/policy-guidelines/guidelines/
[18] Are you a Social Organisation? http://insight.media140.com/en/2010/11/are-you-a-social-organisation/
[19] Using social media to communicate research outputs http://www.ciard.net/pathways/using-social-media-communicate-research-outputs

engagement, listening and collaboration. Thus, the unique benefits of Web 2.0-based social media and networks are not being fully realised."[20]

And social media engagement, as mentioned by the organisations to whom we've spoken personally, is an iterative process.

> *"**Don't be afraid to experiment**: This is tightly linked to the point above, and you have to try relentlessly. You **will** fail, but the point is to **fail fast and forward**, and learn from your mistakes before trying to automate anything. Key here is to start small first, learn from your experiments and grow from there."[21]*

Other interesting articles/resources

- Social Media Governance: Empowerment with Accountability by Chris Boudreaux (website) http://socialmediagovernance.com/
- Tweet this Book! http://tweetthisbook.posterous.com/
- Nov 2011 - Superstar physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson answering questions on huge social bookmarking site reddit: http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/mateq/i_am_neil_degrasse_tyson_ama/
- Nov 2011 - 12 lessons about social media, politics and journalism learned from covering technology and open government (a post and conversation posted on social media platform Google+) https://plus.google.com/u/0/107980702132412632948/posts/8ZEpz3ZZzuk
- July 2011 - Why is social media different than traditional marketing? http://tradesmeninsights.com/2011/07/05/why-is-social-media-different-than-traditional-marketing/
- May 2011 - Be human - the first rule of social media for organisations has now been proven http://www.rossmcculloch.com/be-human-the-first-rule-of-social-media-for-o
- Nov 2010 - How to Write a Social Media Press Release http://www.inc.com/guides/2010/11/how-to-write-a-social-media-press-release.html

For those interested, a number of additional links are available here – simply click on each subject to see the related articles underneath it. This is also a living collection, so it's continuously added to/curated.

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[20] Social Media Strategy and Governance, http://www.communication.uts.edu.au/centres/acpc/docs/social-media-research-report-online.pdf
[21] Social Media Analytics: Three lessons for success http://socialmediatoday.com/sapountzis/385341/social-media-analytics-three-lessons-success