

Using Social Media in the Public Service

A Short Guide for Public Servants



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/birgerking/4731898939>

An introduction to social media

Social Media 101 is designed to take a positive approach towards staff use of social media, outlining important issues and expected standards of behaviour. It refers to guidelines such as the Australian Public Service Commission's [Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online](#).

Finance's guidelines treat employees' personal use of social media at work in a manner consistent with other internet access, which is covered by existing departmental ICT usage policies and broader APS guidelines such as those mentioned above. The guidelines also recognise the difference between personal and work-related use of social media by distinguishing between three different kinds of social media accounts Finance employees may have:

- **Official** accounts used when employees are commenting in their capacity as a Finance official. These accounts may require official clearance before any information is shared.
- **Professional** accounts for when employees comment in a personal capacity but also in light of their expertise in a given field – the guidelines give the example of an accountant working at Finance who comments on an accounting blog.
- **Personal** accounts for non-work-related use which does not fall under either of the above two categories.

It is possible that there will be some crossover between accounts you may share your professional expertise on your twitter account whilst also tweeting about your love of football & fishing. It is very important to identify yourself and the account type correctly. Some organisations recommend that you add some form of 'safe-harbour' text such as, *'any opinions shared on this platform are my own'*, to your bio.

Activity

Organise the following twitter accounts into **Official**, **Professional** or **Personal** types.

@piawaugh Open [government culture source knowledge] geek, musician, martial artist and freedom fighter! Working for @AusGovCTO but these thoughts are my own.	@AusGovCTO This is the official Twitter site of the Australian Government CTO. Tweets are from John Sheridan, unless ending TCTO (for Team CTO). RT is not endorsement	@telstra We're here to provide customer support and answer any Telstra questions you might have whenever it works for you - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week!
@sherro58 Husband, father, public servant, ex-Army Officer, IT executive, rugby union fan, reader. Views are my own, unless noted otherwise. RT not = endorsement	@Gawker Today's gossip is tomorrow's news- gawker.com	@allan_at_rogue Allan from @Fashionising.com, your new personal hero and occasional shutterbug. Any opinions are my own.
@Sandra_Sully	@Microsoft	@TheEllenShow

Ten News Senior Editor Journalist & Broadcaster Network Ten #TenNews	The official Twitter page for Microsoft consumer products and your source for major announcements and events.	Comedian, talk show host and ice road trucker. My tweets are real, and they're spectacular.
@aus_media The latest media news from the media section of The Australian newspaper and The Australian Online	@DBCDEgov Manages the Au Govt's priorities for broadband, digital television and broadcasting, the digital dividend, the digital economy and consumer issues.	@abcnews Latest news updates from the Australian Broadcasting Corp. This is an official @abcaustralia account.
@instagram A fast, beautiful & fun way to share your photos with friends and family. Need help?	@CBAWomenInFocus Women in Focus is Commonwealth Bank's team dedicated to opening doors by inspiring, informing & connecting women in business.	@daisylowe i like dancing around in bright colours, standing in front of cameras sometimes and bouncing off walls occasionally :)
@ActuallyNPH I act some. Dig variety acts, Pixar, puppets, theme parks and great meals.	@KateLundy Minister for Sport, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister Assisting for Industry and Innovation, Labor Senator for the ACT.	@mashable News, resources, inspiration and fun for the connected generation. Tweets by @mashable staff.
@JuliaGillard Official Twitter account of the Prime Minister of Australia. Tweets by the PM are signed JG.	@TonyAbbottMHR Leader of the Opposition, Federal Member for Warringah	@FlyingSoloAU Articles, forum highlights and business leads from Australia's solo & micro business community.

[Social Media 101: A Beginner's Guide for Finance Employees](#) is available on the Finance website, and is reviewed and updated as required.

Use of social media websites by public servants is governed by the APS Values and Code of Conduct (<http://www.apsc.gov.au/values/conductguidelines.htm>). Finance employees are expected to maintain the same high standards of conduct and behaviour online as would be expected elsewhere. This includes:

- being apolitical, impartial and professional
- behaving with respect and courtesy, and without harassment

- dealing appropriately with information, recognising that some information needs to remain confidential
- being sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public
- taking reasonable steps to avoid conflicts of interest
- making proper use of Commonwealth resources
- upholding the APS Values and the integrity and good reputation of the APS.

APS employees need to ensure that they fully understand the APS Values and Code of Conduct and how they apply to official or personal communications. For more information, you should view the APSC's social media guidance, available via <http://www.apsc.gov.au/circulars/circular096.htm>.

Finance employees **do not need to seek clearance** when talking online about factual, unclassified and uncontroversial matters related to the Department.

Finance employees **must have authorisation from your manager** (including following any necessary clearance processes) before publishing any wider information relating to the Department, especially any comment that:

- commits Finance or the Government to any action or initiative
- attempts to speak, or could be interpreted as speaking, on behalf of Finance or the Government
- relates to controversial, sensitive, confidential or political matters
- could be interpreted as a personal political view or political advocacy;
- could bring Finance or the APS into disrepute.

Often saying something publicly can be taken as official government position unless you clearly state otherwise.

Understanding online engagement

Understanding the difference between:

- **Communication** – getting your message out, or alerts, building a public narrative, setting the public record. Egs – QLD Police, DIAC, Census 2011
- **Consultation** – getting public feedback on something. Egs – Public Sphere, legislative consultations like [Pittsburgh Open Data Legislation wiki](#)
- **Co-development/Crowdsourcing** – developing something with or collecting information from citizens. Egs – Trove, Apps4NSW/GovHack, Emergencies – Unverified vs. Verified.
- **Customer service** – directly supporting citizens online. Egs – DIAC close but not prevalent in government yet, though some good other good examples are DHS & Fair Work.

Online forever

Remember that as soon as you put anything online it's **online forever** and there will be no way to take it back. For those who think it's possible to remove information from the internet need simply to study the [Streisand effect](#);

Mike Masnick of Techdirt coined the term after Streisand unsuccessfully sued photographer Kenneth Adelman and Pictopia.com for violation of privacy. The US\$50 million lawsuit endeavored to remove an aerial photograph of Streisand's mansion from the publicly available collection of 12,000 California coastline photographs. Adelman photographed the beachfront property to document coastal erosion as

part of the government-sanctioned and government-commissioned California Coastal Records Project. Before Streisand filed her lawsuit, "Image 3850" had been downloaded from Adelman's website only six times; two of those downloads were by Streisand's attorneys. As a result of the case, public knowledge of the picture increased substantially; more than 420,000 people visited the site over the following month.

-- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streisand_effect

Online interactions present the impression of anonymity and some services even give you the impression of securing your information. Even if you tweet, blog or comment anonymously it only takes a single exposure to link all previously anonymous content directly back to you. Privacy is quickly becoming the most valuable commodity online, even if you protect your tweets (or have your Facebook privacy settings set to max) all it takes is a screenshot or 'copy and paste' from one of your trusted followers to expose your private narrative. If you don't want it to appear in a newspaper, online or in front of Senate estimates the simple answer is to not write it down.

Don't let this scare you away from online engagement. If you are always honest, forthright and abide by the APS code of conduct in your communications you will not have any issues (aside from the odd troll). Finally remember what your mum always told you; 'If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all'.

Case studies of individuals

- **Indirect Exposure** – The case of Anthony Weiner and 'Weinergate' [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Weiner_sexting_scandal].
- Individual precedent – Greg Jericho
<http://mumbrella.com.au/why-the-grogs-gamut-outing-harms-the-australian-33789>
<http://grogsgamut.blogspot.com.au/2010/09/spartacus-no-more.html>
- SES professional accounts – Sandi Logan [[@SandiHLogan](https://twitter.com/SandiHLogan)] and John Sheridan [[@Sherro58](https://twitter.com/Sherro58)] **Estimates precedent (2010) "TF Meeting". Social Media defended by Secretary:**
...we have a policy in the department where we allow access to Twitter and Facebook and those sorts of things because we think there is value in social media. The government has a policy around Government 2.0. We looked very closely at access of Finance employees to that and we worked very closely with the Public Service Commission on developing the guidelines that Mr Sheridan referred to. We then superimposed onto those our own guidelines. We are monitoring the situation. Sure, you are putting a certain amount of trust in your employees when you allow this sort of thing, and the guidelines there are meant to be the behaviours that people should follow. As a secretary I cannot guarantee that in 100 per cent of cases that is being done appropriately. We monitor the situation. We try and ensure that we get people to behave appropriately. We give them incentives to do so by providing certain freedoms, and there is an element of trust that goes on. I have not come across a serious breach. In fact, I have not come across a breach at all—and, as I said, we do monitor the situation parlinfo.aph.gov.au

Building your public narrative (Activity)

Everything you say, particularly everything you say online, forms your narrative. So it is important you carefully consider the narrative you build in order to achieve your personal and professional goals.

Part 1: Some considerations to discuss:

- What do you care about? Why are you online?
- How do you define or separate your personal and professional life? Do you need to separate things?
- How is your position, employment and other general context publicly perceived, and what impact does this have upon your public commentary.
- The rapid speed of narrative.
- The importance of “filling the vacuum” with facts, evidence and credible sources. The imperative of government to be an authoritative source of knowledge in the face of myriad agendas.

Part 2: How would you approach these questions should you be asked them via your social media presence?

- Does your minister have a particular opinion on the issues currently surrounding the work going on the Murray-Darling basin project?
- Your Department supports open data but still requires that non-sensitive information be obtained through the FOI act. Why do you do this?
- The project you are working on at the moment is worthless and a waste of public funds.
- I’m very interested in the new Family Trust Distribution Tax Bill in the House of Reps can you provide more information about it?

Participating in an Online Community

- **Be genuine**- do your own thing for your own reasons
- **Make allies** – identify stakeholders - laud contributions
- **Identifying community fora** – hashtags, communication hubs, tools, etc
- **Be Vigilant** - Monitoring and identifying threats and opportunities

Guanxi [Guan Shee]

Guanxi describes the basic dynamic in personalized networks of influence, and is a central idea in Chinese society. In Western media, the pinyin romanization of this Chinese word is becoming more widely used instead of the two common translations—“connections” and “relationships”—as neither of those terms sufficiently reflects the wide cultural implications that guanxi describes.

[\[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guanxi\]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guanxi)

Skills for online engagement:

- **Community engagement** – encouraging participation, discussion and debate (where appropriate) using a ‘light hand’ approach moderating only when absolutely necessarily and identifying areas of possible engagement.

- **Research and analysis** – using available tools to collate available data into useful forms, deconstructing both the content analysis (themes, ideas, sentiment, trends) and the contextual analysis (relationships, conflicts of interest, affiliations, agendas). This gives you an understanding of how representative a perspective is of the broader community.
- **Collaboration & co-design** – working to develop a solution or policy in an open and transparent way with your community of stakeholders to get the best evidence based policy outcomes.
- **Monitoring and escalation mechanisms** – recognising the difference between genuine complainants with real issues as opposed to trolls seeking a negative reaction. Being able to monitor trends on an ongoing basis and engage with citizens and stakeholders appropriately.
- **Data visualisation** – the ability to distil complex data into an easy to understand visual representation, thereby lowering barriers to entry and encouraging greater engagement.
 - For an example view theopenbudget.org
- **Technology skills** – embracing your (inner) geek, becoming an early adopter and understanding the need to adapt to the ever-evolving online landscape. Or engage a geek in your team. They will be worth their weight in gold.

Activity

- **Part 1:** Identify the skills that exist in your group, how would you supplement these?
- **Part 2:** For one of the communities of interest below identify and list 5 arenas (or fora) for engagement

Gardening	Cycling
Photography	Fashion
Social Media	Open Data
Computer Games	Cooking

Tools for Online Engagement

Please refer to the separate tools document provided.

Activity

- Identify which tools (not necessarily listed) you already use and where you think your efforts would best be leveraged based on the previous activity.

Where to from here

Support mechanisms, other training and skills development options, existing policies, precedent principles resulting from public sector engagement in Australia to date.

- Further readings document
- Support mechanisms including the Cross Agency Social Media Forum on Govdex
- Existing policies and legal advice
- Leverage precedents and principles from public sector to date
- Gov 2.0 community