

## Using Social Media for Public Relations

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Welcome to the age of multimedia communication. People are now getting their news and information instantly from their mobile devices via social media websites and applications. Implementing a new, technology-friendly communication policy, which includes social media, can be a great way for you to market your services and communicate with the public.

An essential part of providing any service is communicating with your customers. Since the public are municipal highway departments' "customers", the public is who will benefit from the municipal use of social media. Municipal highway departments can use social media to help achieve a variety of goals, such as maintaining a positive reputation by alerting residents to the great work you do and earning public trust by clearly informing citizens of upcoming projects, regular maintenance, and emergency policies or procedures.

Sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Google Groups are free for public use. They provide an easy and very effective way to communicate with many people with little effort. The public expects and needs you to keep them informed and using social media can help you achieve that goal.

There are several communities in New Hampshire that now use social media as a way of communicating. For example, Kurt Grassett, Director of Public Works for the Town of Hancock, started using Google Groups over a year ago. He said he "was looking for a better way to communicate and discovered that Google Groups had the most positive feedback from current users". He stated that "It has become one of the most effective communication tools that I have used. My customers are now getting important information in a more timely manner. This has helped them manage their plans around road construction, water breaks, and winter weather."

Another community that is utilizing social media is Rochester, NH. They have eight municipal departments on Facebook and it's simple to navigate from one department's page to another. It makes their communication direct, open, and easy.

The use of a new social media can be daunting to some, but the outcome is worth the time it takes to learn the application. Use social media to reach the

greatest amount of people as fast and as easily as possible. Transparency and honesty go a long way in creating and upholding good public relations, and social media is the newest way to accomplish these goals.



Use the American Public Works Association website, at [www.apwa.net](http://www.apwa.net), to research the positive effects of Facebook. Additionally, APWA offers a handout on using social media at [www.apwa.net/documents/meetings/handouts/congress/5687.pdf](http://www.apwa.net/documents/meetings/handouts/congress/5687.pdf)

Here are a few tips to follow when using social media for public relations:

1. Take the time to research all your options before deciding on which social media application to utilize in your department. There are many options and all have unique benefits and limitations.
2. Take the time to familiarize yourself with the application (once you decide which one to use) before publicly announcing it.
3. Keep communications related to business only. Do not post anything personal. Any communication is an extension of your business.
4. Remember to keep updates short and useful. Continuous updates are only effective if they are beneficial to those reading them.
5. Build your list of followers every day. The more "friends" or "followers" your site has, the more people your message reaches.
6. Publicize it! Add a link on your department website that links it to your new page on Facebook or Twitter.

#### References:

- "Social Media for Public Works: How to Implement an Effective Social Media Strategy to Increase Communications and Productivity". 17 August 2010. Retrieved on March 20, 2011 from [www.apwa.net/documents/meetings/handouts/congress/5687.pdf](http://www.apwa.net/documents/meetings/handouts/congress/5687.pdf)
- Broviak, Pam. "Enhancing Public Works Services Using Social Media". Retrieved on March 20, 2011 from [www.slideshare.net/publicworksgroup/enhancing-public-works-services-using-social-media](http://www.slideshare.net/publicworksgroup/enhancing-public-works-services-using-social-media)