

Information Management Advice 57 Managing Social Media Records Part 3: Determine what records need to be kept

Introduction

Organisations use social media in a variety of different ways, and they use it for various different types of business operations. Some forms of business are low risk and need minimal levels of documentation. Others are more high risk, and need to be supported by more rigorous forms of recordkeeping.

For low risk forms of business that are moving to social media, the information generated by this business generally has limited ongoing value and can be safely left in your social media application. High risk forms of business, however, will need to be supported by good information that has been extracted out of social media applications and into corporate business systems.

If your organisation is:

- *Distributing business information through social media channels*
- *Receiving business-related communications through social media*
- *Building an official business presence in any social media system*

Then your organisation has legal (including under the Archives Act 1983) and business requirements to be able to account for the business it is transacting via social media.

You don't need to keep everything ...

It is worth stating that government bodies do not have to keep records of every tweet, or every 'like' or every minor social-media based interaction. You **do** need to identify your organisation's high risk business processes, identify the business systems that support these, and ensure that these systems can make and keep records to document and support these high risk processes.

In social media applications, government business is taking place in external, third party hosted, web-based platforms. For the first time, key business information is not residing on internal IT systems, but is possibly owned and hosted by others. For high risk processes, these systems are not going to keep your data for you, for as long as you have need for it. There are few longevity guarantees in social media systems, and when your data is gone from these applications, it is gone. Where relevant, active plans have to be made to export data from these external platforms and bring it into corporate systems.

How do I know if my business is high risk and if I need to keep records of my social media activities?

To determine whether you need to keep records of your organisation’s social media business you could ask:

- Are business processes that are regarded as high risk, strategic or of core business value moving to social media?
- Will decisions made or communicated via social media commit the organisation to specific actions?
- Are key business processes that used to be performed by in-house business systems, now being performed by social media?

Are members of the public relying on the information you are posting to social media for advice, or to inform their own actions or decisions?

- Will there be times that you will need to be able to demonstrate what specific information you posted on social media?
- Will you need to perform regular or annual reporting on your social media activities?
- Will the business want to reuse the information content you are generating using social media?
- Is there a lot of traffic on your social media site?

If you answered yes to many or all of these questions, then it is likely that significant business operations in your organisation are moving to social media, and you will need to develop a social media information strategy to ensure this important business information is captured and kept as a corporate asset.

Comparing different levels of business risk in social media

Here are examples of different Twitter accounts with different levels of business risk attached to them.

These are included as examples of how different recordkeeping strategies can be deployed in your social media environments, based on the levels of risk that apply to the business you are performing.

Department of Immigration – @SandiHLogan	
Business performed on this account:	The Media Relations Manager at the federal Department of Immigration runs a very active Twitter account. This account is used to respond to media enquiries about the Department’s activities, including enquiries about immigration policy and detention centres.
Types of records generated:	Tweets from this account are generally individual questions and responses on Immigration issues. The account generates and receives many individual tweets each day.
Do records need to be kept?	Yes, it is important that records are made and kept of this Twitter account because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this Twitter account deals with a very high risk area of Government business • Immigration is a government function that is subject to high levels of media and public scrutiny • individual business questions are asked and answered via this channel • the Department will need to refer to its public statements on Immigration policy and practices for significant periods of time • the Department will need to report on the enquiries it has responded to

State Records NSW – @FutureProofNSW	
Business performed on this account:	This account is used to promote and disseminate advice on good digital recordkeeping practice.
Types of records generated:	<p>Tweets are posted approximately once a week. The majority of tweets are auto-generated via an RSS feed, based on updated content posted on the Future Proof blog. There is infrequent user engagement with the Twitter account, with most of the activity being re-tweets of content, not specific questions or discussion.</p> <p>Some comments are made by users, however, which is useful feedback on the quality of State Records products, and the extent to which they meet the needs of the NSW jurisdiction.</p>
Do records need to be kept?	<p>State Records is making and keeping records of its Future Proof Twitter account but it is a low level, low risk account that does not need a comprehensive recordkeeping strategy. Most of its content is replicated on the Future Proof blog site, and this site does have a comprehensive recordkeeping strategy. Twitter comments are however fed back into content development and reporting processes, and so recordkeeping processes support these workflows.</p> <p>Keeping the records of blog content which are duplicated on Twitter is a lesser priority. State Records does however keep a watching brief on the account, and will update its recordkeeping strategy if use of the account changes.</p>

State Records NSW – @srnsw	
Business performed on this account:	<p>This Twitter account is very dynamic. Its tweets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote different parts of State Record’s archival collection • respond to research enquiries received through Twitter • engage with different allied archival institutions both in Australia and internationally • promote archiving and the archiving profession.
Types of records generated:	This account is one of the key archival Twitter accounts, in Australia and overseas. It has thousands of followers. Many tweets are sent and received through this account each day.
Do records need to be kept?	<p>Yes they do. Given the official organisational business that is performed on this account includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • marketing of State Records’ collections and services • liaison with clients and other archival institutions • responding to specific customer enquiries • receiving user feedback and advice <p>and is not replicated elsewhere, official business is being performed on the @srnsw account, and records need to be made and kept of this.</p>

How do I Decide which Social Media Records to make and keep?

Talk to staff

Talk to the business, communications or customer service staff who are using social media in your organisation. Understand the nature of the business that is being performed and what information, accountability or business requirements may apply to it. This will help you to determine what information you may need to support your business operations.

Start by being Risk Averse

When you are just starting to use social media, and when you may not have a full understanding of what information you require to support your social media business, it may be worth adopting a comprehensive information strategy.

This would involve exporting a full range of records out of your social media applications and into your corporate business systems. This full set of information will enable you to fully benchmark your social media strategies, track the business performed in them and assess their impact.

This will provide an effective risk mitigation approach and this strategy can be re-evaluated on a 6 monthly or annual basis to determine whether this level of information management is helping to meet risk and business requirements, or, if on assessment, the risks posed by a specific social media account are not great, whether a less comprehensive information management approach would be advisable.

Keep your plans focused on business requirements

Recordkeeping compliance should not be the focus of the information strategies you develop to support social media.

Instead your strategies should be developed to capture the information your business needs to sustain and account for its actions, and to continue to deliver outcomes to clients.

The qualities that make a good social media record

State Records Guideline / Records Management Principles says that to be full and accurate:

- Records must be made
- Records must be accurate
- Records must be authentic
- Records must have integrity
- Records must be accessible and useable

Full and accurate principle:	In a social media context this means:
<p>Records must be made</p> <p>‘A public office must ensure that records are made that document or facilitate the transaction of a business activity.’</p>	<p>To be made social media records need to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regularly exported out of social media applications as records in native social media applications may have limited longevity • regularly imported into corporate business systems
<p>Records must be accurate</p> <p>‘All records made by the public office must be a correct reflection of what was done, communicated or decided. An accurate record is one that can be trusted as a true representation of the transactions or events which it documents.’</p>	<p>To be accurate social media records need to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protected so that they can always be trusted as an accountable, reliable source of information. Making information ‘read-only’ is one possible way to achieve this, as are system controls, audit logs, user permissions or other functionality enabled by an electronic document and records management system or other business system, to help demonstrate that records are protected and are authentic • maintained so that you can rely on the fact that the information presented in the records, is the information that was transacted or recorded at the time
<p>Records must be authentic</p> <p>‘An authentic record is one that can be proven: to be what it claims to be, to have been created or sent by the person claimed to have created or sent it, and to have been created or sent at the time claimed.’</p>	<p>To be authentic social media records need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify what social media channel they were received through • identify the user account names of those involved in the communications • provide a time and date stamp for the communication • be routinely captured into official recordkeeping systems
<p>Records must have integrity</p> <p>‘A record with integrity is complete and unaltered, now and in the future. It can be proven to have been managed appropriately through time.’</p>	<p>To have integrity social media records need to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protected against unauthorised or inappropriate destruction stored in appropriate systems
<p>Records must be accessible and useable</p> <p>A record must be understandable, complete, retrievable and available through time.</p>	<p>To be useable social media records need to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • linked to the business context • linked to records relating to the same business activity or transaction • accessible for as long as they are required

When do I need to capture social media records?

Social media systems are dynamic and the information in them is often subject to frequent change, addition or revision.

Where you need to make and keep social media records, you may need to identify the specific points at which you need to make records.

Example: Rather than capturing each specific tweet, State Records NSW runs a monthly report of its tweets, re-tweets and likes, and captures this report as its official record.

Example: State Records NSW captures an email record of each comment received on its Future Proof blog, as these comments are received and responded to.

Consider what application-specific information components may make your records more full and accurate, and more useable

You may need to define the type of records that you want to export. For example, a range of information is available on Twitter including:

- your profile
- your tweets
- @ mentions (when someone has mentioned your Twitter account specifically)
- favourites (when someone has nominated one of your tweets as their favourite)
- re-tweets (when someone has forwarded your tweet to all their followers)
- direct messages (when someone has sent you a specific message)
- followers (the name, picture and profile information of the accounts that follow your Twitter account)

You should consider which of these components you may need to keep information about in your Twitter records.

You may need to make similar decisions about other applications, such as Facebook or Google+, depending on the nature of the business you are performing in these environments. On Google+ you could consider whether you need to capture:

- your profile
- public posts
- comments
- details of your friends
- Google analytics data
- private posts
- photo albums
- circles showing connections between your various friends

Many of the cloud-based social media backup tools listed in the section 'How do I keep social media records?' will allow you to configure reports or backups, and select which of these application-specific information components you require in your records.

To help you decide which records you might need to keep, imagine a worst-case scenario

To help you determine what records you might need to make and keep of your social media operations, it might help to consider a worst-case scenario. Ask yourself, if one of the social media channels you use were to disappear, what types of information might you require for your ongoing operations that currently is only kept on your social media sites.

For example:

- Are some photographs only contained on your Facebook account and nowhere else?
- Are copies of corporate videos stored elsewhere other than YouTube?
- Do you need to know who were your friends or followers at a particular point in time?
- Have all necessary comments been exported?

Do the Social Media Records that I make and keep need to look exactly like they did online?

No they do not. First and foremost, recordkeeping has to be achievable and sustainable. It also has to present information in an accessible, human readable way. Capturing data exactly as it looked in the system is desirable but not as important as achievability, sustainability and accessibility.

Some social media formats and presentation styles will be too difficult to replicate and keep. AJAX, the format that Facebook pages are presented in, is very complex. It is excellent for presenting dynamic, mixed content but could create a complex legacy problem if you wanted to manage data in this form indefinitely.

What is important is ongoing access to the business information for as long as you need it. Part 4 of this advice, *How to Capture Social Media Records* will provide some advice on how this can be achieved.

If it is important to keep a record of how your social media site looked at a particular point in time for your business purposes, then you can use screenshots saved in PDF, as one way to make and keep this information.

Further Advice

For more detailed advice, please contact:

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