



Social Media and Preparedness

The internet is buzzing with tweets, diggs, podcasts, widgets, and avatars. With these new social media technologies emerging at such a fast pace, it can be a challenge to make sense of what these developments mean for public health, and to decide how to use them to increase emergency preparedness. However, with some planning, you can incorporate social media technologies into your communication plans to increase the impact of existing strategies, to reach new audiences and to enhance trust among existing ones.



What is social media?

Social media and “Web 2.0” are the terms that describe the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation¹. “Web 1.0” referred to the use of the Web to publish static content. “Web 2.0” refers to its use as a forum for interaction between users and as a place where anyone with an internet connection can publish content. Social media use the “wisdom of crowds”¹(i.e. an online network of many users) to collect information and create content in a collaborative manner. Through social media, individuals or collaborative groups create web content, organize content, edit or comment on content, combine content, and share content².

What are the tools of social media, and how can we use them in public health?*

Tool	Description	How to use?
Blogs	Short for weblog, a blog is a frequently updated website with chronological entries written in a conversational tone. Blogs may have entries of commentary (both from the author and readers), descriptions of events, links to other websites, or other material.	Put a human face on your organization by discussing activities, policies, events, etc. using conversational tone
Social Networking Sites (Facebook, MySpace, etc.)	Online communities where users can connect, interact and exchange information with others who share interests and/or activities	Increase reach to younger/connected audiences
Microblogs (Twitter, etc.)	Short form of blogging that allows users to write brief text updates (maximum 140 characters) and publish for viewing and comment by their network	Seek community input, broadcast emergency messages, news, announcements in real time
Text Messaging	Short messages of text exchanged between mobile devices such as cell phones or PDAs	Send emergency alerts, tips to subscribed mobile users
Wikis	Collaborative webpages that allow all users to add content to or edit	Online document editing/sharing
Podcasts	Web-based audio and/or video content that users can download to portable listening devices, such as iPods or other MP3 players.	Broadcast messages to new audiences, public outreach, education, training

Image/Video Sharing Sites (Flickr, YouTube, etc.)	Sites that allow people to upload pictures or videos. Also allows users to view, link to, and comment on the content that others upload.	Public outreach, education, training, other communication for “connected” and on-line audiences. Post videos to reach target audiences without the filter of the media.
Social Bookmarking (Delicious, Digg, etc.)	Users can bookmark content (much like bookmarks in web browsers); however, these bookmarks are available from any computer with internet access. Users can also share their bookmarks with others users.	Create online resource libraries (for example a collection of links to resources on hurricane preparedness)
RSS Feeds	Short for Real Simple Syndication, notifies users when a website (such as an online newspaper or blog) is updated with new content.	Direct more traffic to your website by alerting your audience when you add new content
Mobile Web Sites	Web sites specially designed to be displayed appropriately on mobile devices such as cell phones or PDAs	Allow mobile users to access organization’s website from wherever they are
Internet Forums	Also called message boards, these online discussion sites allow users to post questions or opinions and obtain feedback from others	Encourage public participation/comment on policies
Virtual Worlds (Second Life, Whyville, etc.)	A computer-based simulated environment where users interact with each other via virtual representations of themselves (called avatars)	Develop disaster simulations, public outreach for kids and niche internet audiences
Widgets	Small applications (or piece of self-contained code) that can be put into a website or program to perform a specific function (for example, announcing blog updates on another website, showing severe weather alerts)	Create applications that allow other sites to share your organizations’ authoritative information with their users (e.g. emergency alerts, preparedness tips, etc)

Adapted from: APHA's Social Media Primer: <http://www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/43246FFD-859C-4590-B07B-F2177370BE62/0/SocialMediaPrimer.pdf> and Matrix of Web 2.0 Technology and Government: http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/documents/Web_Technology_Matrix.pdf

Where can I learn more about using social media?

Social Media and Web 2.0 in Government: This site provides background on social media technologies, their use in government, and best practices:

http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/technology/other_tech.shtml

Sources:

1 Social Media and Web 2.0 in Government: http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/technology/other_tech.shtml

2 http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/technology/other_tech.shtml



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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide preparedness information to public health professionals.

If you have suggestions for future newsletter topics or to comment on preparedness issues, please e-mail us at cphp@yale.edu

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