The What, How and Why of Social Media
A Guide for Local Government

A Report for Sydney Coastal Councils Group

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The Sydney Coastal Councils Group and the Becoming Social Project

The Sydney Coastal Councils Group Incorporated (SCCG) is a voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils representing fifteen Sydney coastal councils. Established in 1989, its mission is to provide leadership through a coordinated approach to sustainable coastal management.

SCCG are part of an exciting project entitled Becoming Social, which aims to develop strategies and tools for local government in the use of social media in relation to environmental issues. More particularly, the project has as one of its goals:

> To increase skills and knowledge in Local Government to utilise social media as a relationship and policy development tool to engage, consult and educate communities in relation to local and regional coastal environmental issues.

The Project is guided and informed by a Steering Committee comprised of social media, environment, local government and other specialists.

Following the establishment of the steering committee, the conduct of a stakeholder survey among the 15 SCCG member councils to explore their current understanding and use of social media, the next stage of this project was to investigate, summarise and synthesise social media and its use in Government engagement, consultation, education and policy development.

This Report addresses all key elements of social media to provide an insight into how it can be harnessed to advance communication and engagement activities.

The New South Wales Government through its Environmental Trust has assisted this project

Howard Partners

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Over the past 15 years, Howard Partners has built a nation-wide reputation for its independent, objective, and evidence-based approaches that help organisations improve performance and achieve their objectives. The firm combines specialist knowledge, expertise and experience in public policy and management strategy with direct experience in local government.

The firm has also made major contributions to public policy knowledge and program design, specifically in the areas of industry, science, technology and innovation policy.

The Review was undertaken by Anne Howard during April and May 2013. Anne is a professional communication strategist and a Director of Howard Partners.

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Executive Summary

Social media is becoming mainstream, no longer new and trendy and of interest only to niche audiences. It is becoming embedded in every form of online communication, and in the process is having a dramatic affect on people's expectations and behaviour (Yeomans, 2013). People are using social media to engage in numerous behaviours including socialisation, entertainment, self-representation and information seeking (Gallion, 2012).

Social media refers to the wide range of tools that enable instant communication at anytime from anywhere using internet-based technologies including smart phones. People and organisations can create their own messages and content using words, pictures, video and images and share it with friends, colleagues, peers and opinion leaders. Social media is allowing one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many conversations to occur.

According to the IBM Global Institute, social media holds unprecedented potential for companies to get closer to customers and, by doing so, facilitate efficiency and productivity enhancements. Organisations are embracing social media to build virtual communities, improve customer care, and streamline customer research.

This is also occurring in the area of sustainability. Hundreds of global companies now use social media to communicate their record in sustainability, with more than 170 global companies having social media channels, platforms or projects dedicated to communicating sustainability (Yeomans, 2013, SMI., 2012).

For Local Government, social media tools make it possible for councils to communicate with their communities (and other stakeholders) by creating interesting, relevant content that attracts attention; is easily understood (perhaps through producing a short video) and encourages the community to respond and get involved. Members of the community can participate in the conversation by commenting on the content, or passing it onto their networks, in real time, using mobile devices (Gray, 2012).

Councils are learning that they can use social media to inform, educate, consult and engage with their communities. Social media can also be used to inform policy.

Although only a decade old, social media is changing rapidly with new emerging technologies that enable even greater flexibility. For Local Government it is becoming essential to understand how to use social media strategically. There is no 'one size fits all' social media strategy. As with all communication, a social media strategy involves an analysis of the audience and objectives, channel selection, content creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Social media needs to be integrated into council's other communication activities. Not everyone in the community uses social media and it is therefore essential to ensure that social media and mainstream media work together and reinforce each other.

Social media is fundamentally different to mainstream media. It has its own set of demands brought about by the nature of the technology. For example, social media is always 'ON', and this creates a new set of demands

that councils must consider: allocating adequate resources, appointing skilled people to manage social media, developing and adopting social media policies and procedures, and training staff to maximise its value and minimise the risks.

This literature review was undertaken during April and May 2013 and investigated, summarised and synthesised the latest practice in social media around the world. Social media offers Local Government, and particularly the SCCG councils enormous potential to facilitate greater understanding of environmental issues, policies and programs and in the process contribute to sustainable coastal management.

1   The Becoming Social – Social Media Project

This is a Report provided in response to a request from the Sydney Coastal Councils Group to undertake a literature review that investigated and summarised the nature of social media and the use and strategies required for Government engagement, consultation, education and policy development.

The Review draws on a diverse range of literature covering relevant books, journal articles, newspaper articles, historical records, government reports, theses and dissertations, websites and blogs. It addresses key resources.

The Review also draws on a body of work completed during 2012 by the same author that sought to understand how Local Government across Australia is using social media to engage with citizens, published as *Connecting with Communities: How Local Government is Using Social Media to Engage with Citizens* (Howard, 2012a). (See:

http://www.howardpartners.com.au/assets/connecting-with-communities---how-local-government-is-using-social-media-to-engage-with-citizens.pdf

1.1   The Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc.

The Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc. (SCCG) was established in 1989 as a voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils to provide leadership through a coordinated approach to sustainable coastal management. The Group consists of 15 Councils adjacent to Sydney marine and estuarine environments and associated waterways.

Member Councils include Botany Bay, Hornsby, Leichhardt, Manly, Mosman, North Sydney, Pittwater, Randwick, Rockdale, Sutherland, Sydney, Warringah, Waverley, Willoughby and Woollahra.

The Group represents over 1.4 million Sydneysiders. The SCCG covers 1346 km^2 and encompasses the waterways of the Hawkesbury River, Broken Bay, Pittwater, Port Jackson, Middle and North Harbours, the lower Lane Cove River, Botany Bay, the lower Georges and Cooks Rivers, and Port Hacking.

1.2   Background to the Project

The Sydney Coastal Councils Group are part of an exciting project entitled Becoming Social, which aims to develop strategies and tools for local government in the use of social media in relation to environmental issues. More particularly, the project has as one of its goals:

To increase skills and knowledge in Local Government to utilise social media as a relationship and policy development tool to engage, consult and educate communities in relation to local and regional coastal environmental issues.

The Project is guided and informed by a Steering Committee comprised of social media, environment, local government and other specialists.

Following the establishment of the steering committee, this element of the project was to investigate, summarise and synthesise social media and its use

in Government engagement, consultation, education and policy development.

This Report addresses all key elements of social media to provide an insight into how it can be harnessed to advance communication and engagement activities.

The New South Wales Government through its Environmental Trust has assisted this project.

1.3 Structure of this report

This report provides a structured overview of the essential elements of social media. It is divided into six key sections plus introductory and concluding sections. Resources / references are addressed throughout the report and are also listed alphabetically in the Bibliography.

What is Social Media

Adoption and Application

Strategy

Platforms and resources

Risk management & Intellectual property

Management systems

2 The nature of social media

This Section addresses the nature of social media. It describes social media, its historical development, underlying concepts, and likely redundancies across social media platforms. Finally, it looks at how people are using social media, and in particular, how organisations are communicating about the environment and sustainability.

2.1 What *is* social media?

Social media refer to the wide range of tools that enable people to communicate online using mobile and web-based technologies. It is distinguished from more traditional communication (such as newspapers) because social media enable interactive, one-to-one, or many-to-many communication, in real time, regardless of location (Smith and Wollan, 2011).

Social media therefore describes a convergence between human interaction and technologies such as mobile and video (Forrester, 2013). Social media tools (also known as sites or channels) enable people and organisations to create their own content using words, pictures, video and images and share it with friends, peers, influencers and collaborators (Solis, 2010).

There are literally hundreds of individual social media sites globally. The most famous media site to date, Facebook, is an example of a social networking channel that enables people to create a personal profile and interact to become part of a community of like-minded people who share information. Social networking is just one type of social media (Scott, 2010). Other media sites, such as blogs and wikis, podcasts and online forums, enable other types of uses such as those described below.

2.2 Historical development

The first use of social media can be traced to 1979 when Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis from Duke University created Usenet, a worldwide discussion system that used telephone modems to enable messages and files to be exchanged between computers. Internet users were able to post and read public messages, similar to a bulletin board system (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, Bonnett, 2010)

Twenty years later in 1998, "Open Diary" was launched. This was an early version of social networking that brought together online diary writers into one community. In 2003 the social networking site MySpace was created, and in 2004 Facebook was launched, along with the new term, 'social media' (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Since then, a multitude of social media tools and applications have been developed throughout the world, with most being available free of charge or at minimal cost. Also, modern standards-based web technologies (such as the HTML5 platform) are becoming widespread and used to drive social media and other websites (Fisher, 2013).

There are sites dedicated to social networking, business networking, private secure enterprise networks, blogging and micro-blogging, collecting and sharing images and videos, online forums that enable people to post and

respond to messages, and member-only online communities of interest where members are permitted to create and share knowledge.

Globally, Facebook is by far the best known social networking site with over one billion users worldwide in October 2012 (Yung-Hui, 2012). In Australia, Facebook is also the most popular site reaching 10.8 million users in April 2012, however, there are reports that its popularity may have peaked, demonstrating the dynamic nature of social media platforms (or that it has reached market saturation). Other popular social media sites include the free blogging platforms Blogger and Wordpress, microblogging network Twitter, as well as LinkedIn, Tumblr, Google+, Wikia, Pinterest and Myspace. (Jackson, 2012).

2.3 Web 2.0 and User-generated content

Two concepts that underpin social media are Web 2.0 and User-generated content:

- Web 2.0 refers to technologies that facilitate interactions between people and organisations and enable networking, community building and information-sharing (Howard, 2012a).

- User-generated content describes the various forms of media content created by people and organisations that are publicly available. It can include posts and comments on social networking sites, images and videos uploaded to image/photo/film-sharing sites, articles on crowd-sourced wikis, blog sites that invite comments and responses, mobile text messages, message boards, emails, etc. The BBC describes user generated content as 'citizen journalism' or 'participatory media' (BBC, 2013, Australian Copyright Council, 2013).

2.4 How people use social media

Social media is no longer new and trendy and of interest only to niche audiences. Rather, it is embedded in every form of online communication to the point of becoming mainstream (Yeomans, 2013). In the process, it is having a dramatic affect on people's expectations and behaviour. People are using social media to engage in numerous behaviours including socialisation, entertainment, self-representation and information seeking (Gallion, 2012).

Organisations are also turning to social media to communicate directly with specific audiences. For example, rather than writing a media release about a news item and sending it to journalists on a distribution list in the hope of being published in mainstream media, social media can bypass the journalists and enable a direct communication channel with the target audience (Scott, 2010). The audience in turn is able to respond immediately and interact with both the organisation and other audience members.

The way that people and organisations use social media can be categorised as follows (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010):

- **Collaborative projects** - such as wikis and social bookmarking sites, that enable the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many end users

- **Blogs** – that allow the possibility of interaction with others through the addition of comments
- **Content communities** – such as photos on Flickr and videos on YouTube, are sites that share media content between users
- **Social networking sites** – such as Facebook, LinkedIn and MySpace, enable users to create personal information profiles and invite friends and colleagues to have access and interact
- **Virtual game worlds** – where multiple users can interact with one another as they would in real life using personalised avatars
- **Virtual social worlds** – that allow inhabitants to live in a virtual world through an avatar.

Social media is an important element in open innovation, crowdsourcing, and innovation contest approaches to finding and testing ideas for innovation and improvement in local government (Howard, 2012b).

People also use social media to contact and interact with local government and there are numerous examples of the way that councils and citizens engage using social media (Howard, 2012a). Social media brings with it a degree of openness and transparency that councils are finding can help humanise, personalise, and change a council's image and the public's perception of it.

Social media also makes it possible for councils to hear directly from the people who are impacted by their decisions – both positive and negative – and councils can explain or defend decisions in response to questions or concerns. People can also contribute to the policy development process (Fisher, 2013).

2.5 Social media, the environment and sustainability

In the area of environmental communication it is now commonplace for government, universities and research institutions, non-profit organisations and business to use social media as an integral part of their communication strategies to connect with stakeholders. This can include using social media to inform, consult, educate and engage. It can also include crowdsourcing for ideas and information from interested stakeholders.

Social media and sustainability share similar principles such as authenticity, transparency, community, collaboration, learning, innovation and creativity that many believe are a perfect fit (Yeomans, 2013, Verdonck and Clark, 2013).

2.5.1 Social media promotes research

Social media is proving a powerful tool for involving people and sharing environmental and sustainability knowledge (SMI., 2012) An example is a research project being run by The Royal Botanic Garden in Sydney, which is tracking the movements of the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, a well-known inhabitant of Sydney. The researchers tagged the birds' wings and then released them in The Royal Botanic Garden. At the same time, they developed a dedicated email address and web page with information about the project.

The researchers also created a "Cockatoo Wingtag" Facebook page to promote the project and get people involved. Soon people were following "Cockatoo Wingtag" on Facebook, providing sightings, photos and even assigning 'nicknames' to the birds. Followers can follow an individual bird's sightings, as well as comment and interact with others who have seen it. Social media has resulted in giving the community a sense of ownership of the birds, as well as a chance to interact personally with both the project findings and the researchers (Davis, 2012).

2.5.2　Global companies use social media to communicate sustainability

A recent European study that analyses best practice social media sustainability of 400 global companies found that they now use social media to communicate their record in sustainability. It also found that more than 170 global companies have social media channels, platforms or projects dedicated to communicating sustainability (Yeomans, 2013, SMI., 2012).

In Australia, businesses are also using social media to promote sustainability initiatives (Gladigau, 2012). Popular social media channels include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, sustainability blogs and magazines, Pinterest and Flickr (SMI, 2012).

In Australia, local councils are using similar social media tools to educate, engage and collaborate with their communities in the development of local environmental solutions and forming local Communities of Practice (CoP) around specific environmental issues to assist in the development of policy (Hughes, 2012).

2.6　Likely future developments

Technology is integral to all social web platforms and staying up-to-date with technology will be key in understanding and interacting with users who are increasingly finding themselves tied to the digital world (Abhinav Girdhar, 2013).

In a globally connected world, data is increasing exponentially. The way that data is managed will become even more relevant to everyday life (Sayre, 2011). Web analytic tools that can accurately understand niche markets and assist organisations to communicate with them will continue to grow in importance as essential tools for councils.

Technologies including cloud computing, increasing wireless broadband and virtual reality technologies that together enable anyone to interact at anytime, anywhere will continue to flourish. The continued integration of these technologies will impact how social media is used to educate, consult and engage communities (Burrus, 2012).

By 2015, six billion objects in the world will be connected to the internet. At the same time, the objects are learning and adapting to the behaviour of the user (Fisher, 2013). The semantic web, which is a way of describing things so that computers can understand things, will also see the creation of innovative new technologies and applications (Web, 2012).

Social media's future will be focused on mobile and related technologies. Predictions are that by 2016, more than one billion people globally will be

connecting to social media sites using their smart phones and tablets (Schadler, 2012).

In Australia, the number of people accessing social media through fixed line connections and desktop computers is declining in favour of smart phones and tablets. This is particularly prevalent amongst Gen Y (those born between approximately 1980 and 2000) who are constantly connected and accessing mainstream social media programs through their mobiles, not on PCs (Stafford, 2013).

Mobile devices are providing greater functionality with in-built high-resolution cameras and global positioning systems (GPS), while mobile editing and social apps enable people to produce sophisticated content while they are 'out and about'. Thus, smartphones and tablets allow for instantaneous connections (Peters, 2012).

Social apps have experienced rapid growth. In early 2013 it was the third largest category in terms of monthly app revenues in the iOS store (Apple on-line app purchasing site), rising from 12th spot just a year earlier. The most popular social media apps relate to existing web services, such as free apps from Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest (Louis, 2013).

A major implication of the growth in mobile is the need to ensure that all content is accessible on mobile devices. If a link is posted on Twitter, for example, it will need to be optimized for a mobile site or fewer people using their smart phone will read it (Stafford, 2013).

Other developments particularly relevant to government websites is the issue of web accessibility, which is about creating content in ways that support and maximise accessibility by all users. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.0 are available for all government websites and cover a wide range of recommendations for making Web content more accessible. (Australian Government, 2011)

2.7 Likely redundancy in and across social media platforms

There are two primary reasons that new technology is adopted by society. Firstly, it meets an unmet need; secondly, people listen to the recommendations of their friends, family and peer-networks. People therefore adopt technologies, including social media at different rates (Rogers, 2003). Some segments of society were early adopters of social media and have been using it regularly for some time. Others are only just discovering different ways that they can participate.

Social technologies are also changing rapidly. Some people are claiming that email is becoming obsolete, particularly with young people who favour using social networking (Fitzsimmons, 2013).

There are also reports of businesses banning email, as they believe too much time is wasted reading, processing, managing, organising, and responding to it. Instead these companies are opting to introduce chat-type collaborative social networking sites, and using text messaging (Hughes, 2012, Samuel, 2011). Email however is still one of the most popular ways of communicating for business and government. It is a fairly 'low tech' format, which allows people to easily respond and interact (King, 2012).

Some social media sites also risk falling out of favour with users as new social media platforms enter the market. Examples include the early social networking leader, MySpace that fell away quickly after reaching its peak in 2008 in favour of Facebook (Despres, 2012).

During recent months Facebook has begun losing millions of users every month as they turn to alternative social networks (Garside, 2013). Part of the exodus has been blamed on complicated privacy settings, unwanted advertising, constant re-designs and boredom (Rogers, 2013).

The world's largest professional network, LinkedIn is growing rapidly. Part of the reason for this rate of growth is that users of LinkedIn are changing their behaviour from merely passive users and taking a more proactive approach as they discover how to use LinkedIn and how it can benefit them professionally (Verdonck and Clark, 2013).

3 Social media adoption and application

This Section addresses the adoption and application of social media. It considers the benefits of using social media as well as some of the barriers councils face, as well as examining the various ways that social media can be used to meet communication objectives.

3.1 Application of social media

The SCCG Councils use social media to meet a variety of communication objectives in relation to environmental matters, including to

- Educate, consult, collaborate, and engage the community
- Inform and communicate, especially in emergency situations
- Promote activities and create general awareness
- Encourage community to monitor and report
- Assist in the development of policy (Purser, 2013):.

These objectives can be grouped into the following categories.

3.1.1 Information

Local councils use social media to create awareness and disseminate information to citizens about exhibitions, activities and services, issue warnings such as beach and weather reports, promote Library talks, market days and community events. In other words, social media can be used as a highly effective broadcast channel. For example, councils are able to create a single message and send it in multiple forms as a press release (through email and Twitter), text message, through apps and other forms of social media (Rich, 2013).

Social media can target specific audiences in chosen locations, in real time with content that has been created and designed with those audiences in mind. A further difference is that by using social media, councils can turn a one-way communication activity into a two-way, or even multi-way interaction where audiences respond to council – thus creating opportunities for council to engage with its community.

3.1.2 Education

A number of SCCG Councils are using social media to educate the community about environmental issues. Some of the Councils are pursuing education objectives by building local communities of practice around specific environmental issues (Hughes, 2012). A community of practice is a learning partnership among people who learn from and with each other about a particular issue (Etienne Wenger, 2011).

An online community of practice supports a group of people who share a concern about a topic with technology-based platforms, tools, features and configurations to engage in joint activities and discussions, help each and share information to develop a repertoire of resources (United States. Office of Educational Technology, 2011).

Communities of practice can inform and educate, share knowledge, promote activities, conduct and disseminate research, produce tools and resources for members, create an environment for participation and

collaboration, and seek ways to partner with other environmental groups. They can also mobilise support for various environmental activities and be a source of advice for government (Schafer, 2012).

Communities of practice can also add value for sponsors and potential sponsors through evaluation and the stories that emerge. Wenger, et al., 2011).

Core qualities of successful communities of practice include:

- A clear purpose and collective identity, with effective leadership and moderation
- Clear policies, practices, and other methods to instil trust
- Sociability, communication and outreach (United States. Office of Educational Technology, 2011).

3.1.3 Consultation

Councils across Australia are using social media to consult with the community over a range of issues. Consultation is a two-way communication involving active interaction where councils seek community reaction to potential initiatives.

Social media enable councils wanting to consult to package the information into readily understood pieces of content that may include pictures, maps, graphics, and video. It is quite common for councils to provide apps that make the consultation accessible to people using their mobile devices.

Feedback tools can also be designed in such a way as to make it easy for people to quickly and creatively express their views. Social media campaigns such as *Have your say* are particularly popular in encouraging people to participate.

Social media allows anonymity and appeals to people who may be unable, or unwilling to express their opinions and concerns using the more traditional ways of writing letters, making phone calls or attending public meetings.

With any consultation it is important that councils be clear about the scope of the consultation so people understand what will happen with 'their say' and expectations can be managed (Digital Engagement Guide, undated-a).

3.1.4 Engagement

Digital engagement can have many meanings, with the literature discussing engagement being somewhat confused. Some organisations refer to engagement to describe any use of social media, so that it can mean 'anything and everything that involves a conversation online'. Others are quite specific and define engagement to mean how public sector organisations promote participation in policy making (Digital Engagement Guide, undated-b).

From a communication perspective, engagement is collaborative and involves a joint approach to the development of message content and delivery. It connotes partnership, cooperation and the development of alliances (Howard, 2012a). An example could include a council that engages the community in the development of future plans and strategies where the

council position has not been formulated and is committed to a genuine search for ideas.

It is however important that if a council is simply 'opening up' as a receptor for new proposals and ideas, that it manages the expectations of the community that can sometimes go well beyond council's capacity to deliver in terms of resource cost, capacity, and even legally (Howard, 2012a).

3.1.5 Policy development

Social media tools are making it easier for policy makers to receive feedback directly from the people who will be affected by government policies as well as test proposed policy interventions and tap into expert knowledge within the community (Demsoc, 2102). Governments use public consultations, online discussion forums, closed-groups, e-petitions comments on blogs, etc. to inform policy development.

Social media can break down barriers, and lead to increased consultation, engagement and collaboration that will result in citizens being able to influence, comment on and contribute to the decision-making processes (Fisher, 2013).

3.2 Benefits of using social media

Social media presents councils with a number of *benefits* such as promoting events, engaging with specific target groups, undertaking project based community consultations, various library, tourism and economic development activities as well as many other activities. In particular, councils have reported the following outcomes:

- Time and cost savings for councils disseminating information; particularly cost effective in times of emergencies
- Fast, effective and successful way to promote events throughout the community
- Reduces the need for formal, and expensive, market research as social media provides the latest insights into issues that are important to the community. By listening to the social media conversations, and participating in them as appropriate, council staff can tap into the topics that people are discussing
- Enables interaction with hard-to-reach groups within the community
- Facilitates offline activities with community groups and helps trust-based relationships to form
- Able to set the record straight and correct misinformation circulating in the community before it can take hold
- Positive increases in council profile and enhanced reputation (Howard, 2012a).

3.3 Barriers and gaps

Despite the benefits and opportunities that social media offers councils, there are still significant barriers that hinder adoption. In the research into how local government is using social media, several important barriers and gaps were identified (Howard, 2012a). A Nielsen study undertaken at approximately the same time found that the private sector also faced barriers, and many of them were very similar to those faced by councils. These included:

- A need to commit and allocate adequate resources (e.g. funding and staff time to constantly monitor and maintain social media sites)
- Ensuring council had a social media policy, code of conduct and processes
- Need to follow through and ensure all employees understand the policy and processes and monitoring
- Ensuring staff responsible for social accounts receive adequate training
- Understanding the political implications and maintaining a neutral position
- Fear of loss of control
- Processes for managing negative comments
- Record keeping processes to ensure records are kept and stored correctly
- Ensuring all social media sites have a Usage Policy for audiences to ensure they understand what is acceptable
- The need to ensure consistency in message and voice across council
- Risks of groups hijacking agendas and expecting responses from Council that can't be delivered (Nielsen, 2011).

It is worth noting that councils that have taken a strategic approach to using social media and allocated adequate resources are being rewarded with many of the benefits identified above (Howard, 2012a).

4   Using social media strategically

This Section will focus on using social media strategically.

4.1   Digital communication and emergent strategy

Strategy means different things to different people. Some see strategy as *planning* where a deliberate intended course of action has been outlined; others see it as *positioning*, which describes how an organisation wants to be seen in the external environment (branding, reputation); and yet others see it as *perspective*, where the organisational culture will influence the level of risk taking and innovation (Mintzberg, 1992).

There is a view that strategy *emerges* over time and that organisations learn what works through practice (Moore, 2011). This is very much the case today. Emergent strategy is particularly relevant with digital communications, new platforms and mobile technologies changing forever how a society wants to communicate.

There is no 'one size fits all' social media strategy. As with any communication strategy, a social media strategy involves an analysis of the audience and objectives, channel selection and content creation, implementation and evaluation.

4.2   Choosing the right social media channels

There are hundreds of social media channels offering something different. It is not necessary (or even possible) to try and get to know them all. It is however essential to know about the features, functions, characteristics and unspoken protocols of the most chosen channels.

The decision about which social media channel to use will be determined by what the organisation wants to achieve, and importantly finding out which channels the target audience uses. The audience may, for example, be using an existing online community, which the organisation would join and start contributing to. Over time, by contributing relevant content the organisation would build their reputation and credibility (Sheridan, 2013).

Audiences consist of a wide range of community members and other stakeholders who tend to have their own concerns, information needs and expectations. It is important to segment the different groups, noting their demographic and psychographic features and understanding what is important to them, how decisions will affect them, and why they are important to the organisation (Harford et al., 2012).

Listening to the conversations and interactions occurring online (monitoring and evaluation) is key to understanding how audiences use social media and why. The quality of interaction and audience demographics are also key to deciding on a social media channel (Fisher, 2013).

The most popular channels used by Australian local councils include the following:

- Microblogging (e.g. Twitter)
- Social networking (e.g. Facebook and Google+)
- Photo/Picture sharing (e.g. Flickr or Picasa)

- Video sharing (e.g. YouTube and Vimeo)
- Online forums (Google or Yahoo Groups)
- Mobile apps (e.g. Snap Send Solve)
- SMS communication
- Internal microblogging service (e.g. Yammer)
- Blog sites (e.g. Blogger or Wordpress)
- QR Codes (Howard, 2012a)

Further information is in the Appendix.

4.3 Social media content

Social media content describes the text, images, videos and audio that people create and post to social media for others to see and experience. To successfully exploit the potential of social media, councils need to design content and experiences that deliver tangible value in return for customers' time, attention, endorsement and data (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2012). (See also Section 6 that discusses social media risks.)

4.3.1 Content attributes

Bill Gates famously said that 'Content is King' in an essay he wrote in 1996 that discussed the potential for anyone who had a PC and a modem to create content and publish it. In the essay, Gates wrote (Gates, 1996):

> If people are to be expected to put up with turning on a computer to read a screen, they must be rewarded with deep and extremely up-to-date information that they can explore at will. They need to have audio, and possibly video. They need an opportunity for personal involvement that goes far beyond that offered through the letters-to-the-editor pages of print magazines.

With so much to gain, organisations need to understand how to "break through the noise" and offer customers a reason to reach out to them via social media (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2012).

Content must be short, lively, engaging and relevant to its audience. It should also be regularly updated and current. In a council's case, the aim is to enhance council's reputation as a highly credible 'source of truth' within the community demonstrating through its engaging content as well as regular and consistent posting that council is transparent, accountable and interested in what the community has to say.

As with all council communications, it is important that messages are clear and consistent, and designed for the particular social media channel and its audiences. Also social media channels are part of the overall communication strategy, and while the preparation and presentation of content will be different to how it will be delivered offline, the messages should be aligned.

4.3.2 Listen and learn

Listening to the community and finding out which social media channels they use is vital. Sometimes just listening can be as valuable as engaging (Fisher, 2013). It is only by listening to the online community conversations that organisations can appreciate the topics, points of view, issues, and concerns

that the audience wants to discuss, and the style of language they wish to use (Solis, 2010).

Some of the issues that the SCCG Councils are using social media to engage with the community include:

- General sustainability issues
- Transport and energy use
- Bushcare
- Climate change mitigation
- Water catchment issues (Hughes, 2012).

4.4 Marketing council's social media sites

Marketing principles are just as important for social media sites as they are for other forms of marketing communications. Promotion is a key component of social media activity. Council should aim to build awareness of its social media presence and actively promote it at every opportunity, both online and offline.

Council should also aim to be perceived as a credible and trusted source, by posting interesting and relevant content regularly and consistently, interacting with users and responding in a timely and helpful manner. Maintaining this level of credibility takes commitment, resources and time and is important for both the reputation and image of council.

The colour and design of sites is a vital consideration both from an accessibility point of view, as well as being appealing to the target audience.

4.5 Integrating social media into council's current communications

Social media is becoming a vital part of an organisation's communication mix. It is important that social media is integrated into council's other communication activities and aligns with council's corporate communication strategy.

Not everyone in the community uses social media. Councils need to ensure that all communication channels, both offline and online, work together to achieve the desired outcomes. Integrating social media into council's current communication activities will help build relationships with stakeholders (Fisher, 2013) and bolster and expand an agency's communication efforts (Sheridan, 2013).

Social media channels consist of several different channels (for example, Facebook, YouTube, blogs, online communities, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.) and councils must ensure that these online channels are coordinated and consistent with their messaging. The goal for council is to ensure that its credibility, image and reputation as a 'source of truth' is reinforced with every message, every channel either online or offline, and every interaction with individual citizens.

An important consideration with social media is its ability to turn members of the community from being passive consumers of information into both consumers and producers. By ensuring that council communications are fully integrated and consistent in messaging, quality and timeliness, council will be

providing clarity for its community, and making it easier for citizens to interact and engage.

4.6 Monitoring, measuring and evaluating social media strategies

All communication strategies, including social media, should include monitoring and evaluation processes that are tied to goals and objectives. Measuring social media initiatives is not straightforward and can consist of a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data. Understanding what to measure, how and when should be mapped out up front when the strategy is being developed in order to be useful in evaluating whether outcomes have been met.

4.6.1 Standards

Currently there are no accepted social media measurement standards (Brynley-Jones, 2013). In 2011 a voluntary group known as the SMMStandards Conclave (www.smmstandards.com) was formed to set initial standards to address the confusion around measuring social media. The Conclave includes professional groups (e.g. Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), Digital Analytics Association (DAA), media Ratings Council and others), together with client participants such as Dell, and Procter & Gamble Thomson Reuters, and a number of major communications agencies.

The Conclave has produced a framework for a consistent way of measuring data with six areas of measurement:

- Content sourcing and methods
- Reach and impressions
- Engagement
- Influence and relevance
- Opinion and advocacy
- Impact and value.

Ultimately the effectiveness of social media initiatives will depend on how well they have met the organisation's objectives. This means identifying key performance measures in advance and building them into the strategy in the planning stages.

4.6.2 Backcasting as an evaluation tool

Backcasting is a concept that defines a future point of success, and then takes the most effective steps to arrive at that point. This compares to forecasting where past information is used to find trends that are projected into the future (Step, Undated).

At the World Economic Forum in Davos 2013, a 'backcasting' exercise required 200 Young Global Leaders to immerse themselves in 'our bleak' world in 2025, and to ask what they would do differently if only they could go back to 2013 and do it right. The Forum revealed a critical need for collaboration and cooperation and the need to embrace the mentality that 'we are all in this together' (World Economic Forum, 2013).

Social media, with its instant, decentralised and global communication platforms that encourage collaboration and cooperation as well as providing

a means of organisation for civil society groups is proving instrumental in changing the way people communicate and work with each other (Brynley-Jones, 2013).

5 Platforms and resources

This Section addresses the following issues:

- Free and paid tools and resources
- Resources necessary for internal management
- Computer hardware and software requirements
- Capacity required

5.1 Computer hardware and software requirements

Computer hardware and software are both essential to using social media. Hardware describes the physical devices, such as computers, laptops, keyboards, smart phones, tables, etc. required to enable people to use social media. Software, on the other hand, describes the program data or code, such as different social media platforms, stored on the hardware and used to perform different activities, such as social networking.

During the early days of social media, and prior to the ubiquitous use of mobile technologies to access social media, many government organisations were concerned about potential risks to security, reputation and staff productivity, and placed technical restrictions on accessing certain types of websites, including social media sites.

Social media and the wider internet however are proving to be important business tools for government, and beginning to change the way government works (Fisher, 2013). Even so, some government agencies can still experience access problems to social media due in part to legacy versions of web browsers that don't support modern web technologies used to drive social media and other websites, such as HTML5 (Fisher, 2013).

Many Australian local councils have been issuing mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets to senior staff and councillors (Purser, 2012). However, not all organisations issue devices and there has been a growing trend globally to 'Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD), where employees bring their own laptops, smart phones and tablets to execute enterprise applications and access data. A recent report from Gartner predicts this trend to rise significantly and points out that employees often use a business device for non-work purposes as well as using a personal device in business (Gartner, 2013).

5.2 Free and paid tools and resources

Today, as a result of recent advances in technology, there is a wide range of free and paid social and community tools and resources available. It is now easier to link tools and platforms together and share and coordinate content and activity across them. However, it does require both organisational as well as technical coordination (United States. Office of Educational Technology, 2011).

The range of tools, many available through free open source software and designed to assist in managing social media, include scheduling content updates, monitoring conversations, tracking mentions, cleaning up accounts, predicting best times for publishing content to capture peak attention from

target audiences, helping to never miss a message on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn through to sophisticated analytical tools (Zeevi, 2013).

Other tools support specific community activities (such as a discussion board), or provide bridges between different types of activities, while social analytics software can provide information about how effective social media efforts are (United States. Office of Educational Technology, 2011).

5.3 Resources necessary for internal management

Social media requires a manager to ensure compliance with rules and procedures and alignment with strategy. This could be undertaken in a specialised unit or a dedicated position. The role should be to monitor, measure, and report on the progress of social media initiatives. Several publications have been released on social media metrics (Sterne, 2010).

5.3.1 Social media activities

Social media management requires ongoing commitment that also involves resources that include:

- Researching, creating and reviewing content that is accurate from across council
- Responding to feedback from users
- Monitoring sites for inaccurate or inappropriate information and responding quickly
- Monitoring and evaluating whether the social media is meeting objectives
- Ensuring IT support is available (Western Australia. Public Service Commission, 2011).

Social media is always 'on'. This means that people can post commentary about a council outside office hours. Councils need to decide the hours that they will monitor and participate in social media, and make this clear on their social media sites.

The rapid growth in social media has also generated huge volumes of information and data that for many organisations, are impossible to absorb. There are however technological solutions such as Hootsuite and TweetDeck that save people time and effort in organising and managing social media messages.

5.3.2 Social media manager

As with other corporate communication activities, social media should be a strategic decision and supported with adequate resources to ensure appropriately trained staff and tools are available. Managing social media strategically will save time (Smith, 2013).

As social media becomes more widespread in organisations, dedicated social media managers are being appointed. The skillset for social media managers is beginning to be more clearly articulated, as can be seen in the following list:

- Professional communication expertise, with sound understanding of

planning and strategy
- Strong interpersonal and networking skills
- Sound understanding of business objectives
- Ability to craft effective calls to action
- Customer-centric approach
- Clear understanding of monitoring software and the ability to set up effective campaign tracking
- The ability to interpret data and gain insights
- High level of creativity and personality
- Up to date knowledge of guidelines for all chosen platforms
- Excellent copy writing skills, particularly the ability to write good headlines
- The ability to create custom graphics to accompany posts
- Excellent time management skills and high level of focus management (Ubershell, 2013).

6   Risk management

This Section will address risk management strategies with particular attention to:

- Social media culture, policies and staff training
- Minimising liability for third party content and other risks
- Ownership of the intellectual property in online content including user generated content

6.1   Social media policy

One of the most important steps an organisation can take to minimise risk is to develop its social media policy. The policy is a strategic document that defines the organisation's public-facing culture (Zimmer, 2010).

The social media policy will assist employees by outlining the processes and procedures concerning access to and use of social media (Howard, 2012a). Employees know what is expected of them when they engage in social media conversations, which can impact upon the organisation regardless of whether they are using social media in an official, professional or personal capacity (Telstra) (NSW. Department of Education and Training, 2011).

Organisations should also develop a Terms of Use document to display on their social media sites to guide users on the comment policy, response rates, official and unofficial content, etc. (Zimmer, 2010, BBC, 2013) Letting users know the ground rules for being allowed to post comments makes it easier for councils to avoid potential complaints if content is removed (Heaton, 2013).

A 2011 study undertaken by the Altimeter Group reported that almost two-thirds of companies surveyed say that social media is a significant or critical risk to their brand's reputation, yet 60 per cent of companies never train their employees about their corporate social media policies (Webber et al., 2012).

A recent national survey of Australian local councils revealed that less than half of all councils have developed a social media policy (Purser, 2012). Equally concerning is the lack of staff training that is provided to ensure that employees are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and how the policy affects them (Howard, 2012a).

The lack of social media policies appears to be a global phenomenon. A recent University of Technology Sydney study (Macnamara, 2012) that looked at 200 private and public sector organisations in Australasia (and indirectly in Germany) revealed a similar finding and concluded that there was a concerning lack of governance and strategy.

There are numerous examples of social media policies available online as well as social media code of conduct guidelines that have been developed specifically to assist organisations prepare code of conduct best practice policies when working and operating within social media (Communications Council, 2012, Telstra, NSW. Department of Education and Training, 2011)[1]. There are also step-by-step guides available for organisations developing their social media policies (Zimmer, 2010).

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[1] Telstra's social media policy is at http://www.telstra.com.au/abouttelstra/download/document/social-media-company-policy-final-150409.pdf?red=/at/m/d/smcpf150409pdf

6.2 Addressing positive and negative feedback

One of the strongest measures of success of a council's social media activity is to attract comments and feedback from the community. Feedback and comments from citizens can provide councils with an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to openness, transparency and accountability.

6.2.1 Having a plan

Councils need to decide up front if they will allow the public to post comments in social media channels. This decision will depend on whether the council has the resources to deal with comments in a timely manner. If council lacks this capacity it is recommended that this function be disabled (Western Australia. Public Service Commission, 2011).

If a council does allow the public to post comments then a plan is needed on how to deal with comments, regardless of whether they are positive or negative. For example, Councils may decide to introduce a pre-approval process where public comments will be vetted prior to being posted, or they may opt to monitor the site and remove inappropriate comments retrospectively (Western Australia. Public Service Commission, 2011).

A typical plan could include the following:

- Identifying the type of negative feedback
- Deciding how to respond
- Deciding how to handle such comments
- Negative comments made by staff
- Monitoring outside sources.

 Further information is available at www.publicsector.wa.gov.au.

6.2.2 Staying on message

'Staying on message' is very important for those employees with responsibility for managing a council's social media, particularly when responding to comments or feedback. For example, council can be exposed to risk if a 'well-meaning' employee inadvertently shares incorrect information, deletes valid criticism or uses the wrong messaging when responding to comments (APA, 2013). A strong social media policy and appropriate training is vital to managing these potential risks.

In the case of positive feedback, councils often thank the person and pass the feedback on to the relevant area in the organisation. When such comments are made on a council's site it is a clear endorsement of council's work.

6.2.3 Being part of the conversation

Sometimes a council will be mentioned in blogs or communities of practice that are not controlled by council. By putting in place appropriate monitoring mechanisms, council can be notified if comments are being made on other sites.

Although no council enjoys receiving negative feedback, councils often contend that it is far better to know what is being said about it as it gives the

council the opportunity to join in the conversation and put its point of view. This often results in significant positive outcomes including fixing what's not working and in the process converting detractors into strong supporters of council. They can understand and guide conversations that may be taking place whether or not they participate.

There are no hard and fast rules about responding to feedback, with some authorities recommending that it depends on the comment and whether one or both will gain from the exchange (Fisher, 2013). If councils receive feedback that is clearly incorrect, then responding quickly and correcting the misinformation can prevent a situation from spiralling out of control and also presents an opportunity to embrace what can't be controlled (Kerpen, 2011, Sheridan, 2013).

On occasions, councils have also reported that they have not found it necessary to respond to negative feedback and comments at all, particularly where the feedback was unfairly critical of council, as the community had quickly responded on council's behalf.

Every organisation is different, with different cultures and expectations. As with the social media policy, it is important that employees with responsibility for creating content, moderating and responding on behalf of council have guidelines and training in keeping with council's business practices and culture.

6.3 Capturing social media records

Social media has given rise to a large volume of additional data that councils need to consider for record keeping purposes.

The International Standard on Records Management (ISO 15489) states that to be evidence of action, records must have the characteristics of:

- Authenticity: the information is what it purports to be
- Integrity: the record is complete and unaltered
- Reliability: the contents can be trusted to be a full and accurate representation of the transaction
- Usability: the record can be located, retrieved, presented and interpreted.

The Municipal Association of Victoria notes that (Kelly, 2010):

> Like any communication created or received as part of the duties of a public sector employee, materials authored and posted on social media are deemed to be public records and subject to public records requirements. For records management the introduction of social media for conducting business is a big development arguably akin to the introduction of email or websites in councils. The particular challenge will be in capturing potentially voluminous records hosted on external sites.

Capturing social media records is still evolving, and at this stage there is no defined, best practice ways for making and keeping social media records (Cumming, 2013). As digital records of government are vulnerable to degradation, alteration and loss through time, State Records established the Future Proof strategy in 2007 to help ensure the protection and management of digital Government records (NSW. Future Proof Strategy, 2013). It is

regarded as the most authoritative source for digital recordkeeping. (See http://futureproof.records.nsw.gov.au/strategies-for-managing-social-media-information-how-do-i-capture-social-media-records/).

6.4 Third party liability

Minimising liability for third party content is an area that councils must manage. Councils may be held responsible for content that is misleading. It is therefore essential to regularly monitor social media sites and remove any misleading or inappropriate content immediately (McLeod and Segal, 2012).

Businesses that use their social media sites to advertise products and services can be found liable for comments or claims made on their social media sites by third parties (Goodman Law, 2013).

It is possible that users may post abusive, inappropriate, offensive and defamatory comments on a council's social media. It is paramount to have the Conditions of Use policy prominently displayed on all social media sites to prevent such behaviour, and to indicate in advance actions that council will take if inappropriate content is posted (Heaton, 2013). In addition, council can use complaint tools (such as alerts, and complaint links) on the social media pages to allow users to contact the organisation and complain about offensive user-generated content, or content that may infringe copyright, is defamatory or is unlawful in anyway (BBC, 2013).

6.5 Intellectual property (copyright)

An important consideration for all councils is the issue of copyright.

6.5.1 Terms of Service

All social media sites have Terms of Service and privacy policies that users need to agree to. It is important for councils to be aware that in many cases, agreeing to the Terms of Service on different social media sites can mean that councils assign all of their rights in their content to the website owner. This can equate to granting the website owner a 'non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free, worldwide license to use' that content. In addition, some of the large social media sites are based overseas and not subject to Australian law (BBC, 2013, Powers, 2012) .

6.5.2 Creative Commons (CC)

Creative Commons (CC) is a non-profit organisation that has developed free, easy-to-use copyright licenses that provide a standardised way to give the public permission to share and use creative work. Creative Commons (CC) licences work alongside copyright. Creative Commons enable people and organisations to publish content with modified copyright terms that best suit their requirements and grant people the right to share, use and even build upon creative work (Creative Commons, Undated).

Creative Commons is used widely n Australia, particularly in Government. For example, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology has used a Creative Commons licence to launch its official *Improving Water Information Program* website that aggregates government information into the National Water Account. They are also building licensing tools and metadata into the Australian Water Resources Information System (CC Wiki, 2011).

6.5.3 Further information

The Australian Copyright Council has published a detailed practical guide *User Generated Content*, which is available from its bookstore at www.copyright.org.au/bookstore

For further information on the approach being promoted by the entertainment industries, see the "Principles for User Generated Content Services", available at www.ugcprinciples.com.

For further information about copyright ., visit – www.copyright.org.au.

7 Relationship to management systems

This section addresses the principal management systems used in organisations are Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Enterprise Resource Planning systems.

7.1 Social Media integration with CRM systems

Over the past few years the term Social CRM has come into increasing use to describe an integration of social media with customer (client) relationship management systems that have been developed for sales, marketing and publicity purposes. It is regarded as the "next frontier for organizations that want to optimize the power of social interactions to get closer to customers" (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2012).

With the worldwide explosion of social media usage, businesses are feeling extreme pressure to be where their customers are (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2012). The same consideration applies in service oriented public sector organisations – including Local Government.

Social networks and social media have revolutionised communication channels and transformed traditional one-way business-to-customer and business-to-business interactions. Marketers, sales people and customer service professionals are increasingly making use of social media as part of their roles. Social CRM integrates CRM software with the most popular and ubiquitous social media tools—Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, InsideView, and Google BlogSearch. The most popular systems are:[2]

- Salesforce.com
- Bloomfire
- Jive Social Business
- Socious Online Community
- GreenRope
- Marketo Lead Management
- SugarCRM
- Spark by Marketo
- LogicBox for CRM
- SAP – CRM

SAP, which is widely used in Government, offers social media analysis software to help organisations identify consumer trends and preferences; track success of social media marketing campaigns; perform sentiment analysis from data in Twitter and Facebook, and other platforms.

7.2 Social Media integration with ERP systems

In the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) domain (finance, project management, human resources and data management), industry analysts and research firms see a potential convergence of social applications like Twitter, Facebook, and Yammer with traditional ERP systems like SAP, Oracle, and Microsoft Dynamics (Kimberling, 2011). But the way in which two very different technologies will be aligned is still a matter for debate:

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[2] Software Product Finder Buyer's Guide http://www.softwareadvice.com/crm/social-crm-comparison/?layout=var_c

> One the one hand, you have informal and unstructured consumer-oriented social media tools like Facebook and Twitter where anyone can say about anything they want without any real controls or structure. On the other hand, you have large structured enterprise systems with controls surrounding master data, security profiles, and standard workflows. One is simple, flexible, and supportive of a flat organization, while the other is more conducive to a larger and more controlled organization (Kimberling, 2011).

The key consideration is about the extent to which highly structured enterprise software like SAP or Oracle can co-exist with unstructured social media tools like Twitter and Yammer.

Nonetheless in a modern ERP system it is now possible to send reminders directly to Twitter, Facebook or Outlook, as well as being able to search for information with a Google-type search interface. It is suggested that with more people using mobile as business tools, ERP systems will need to ensure that all staff, regardless of their location, can access vital information in order to carry out their tasks (Epicor Software, 2012). Mobile Apps are being developed for this purposes.

It is reported that vendors such as SAP, NetSuite and Microsoft are actively building ERP App stores to provide smartphone access to ERP data. As these ecosystems mature, it is envisaged that there will be more native apps built out to connect ERP systems to smartphones. But in contrast to CRM systems, observers find it difficult to tell whether social functionality is something that will make a discernible difference in ERP (Rob, 2012).

8 Conclusions

Social media is transforming the way people and organisations communicate. Digital technologies that enable people to communicate in real time from anywhere are now mainstream. This Report set out to investigate, summarise and synthesise the latest practice in social media to serve as a guide for Local Government.

The Report examined some of the risks and opportunities that social media offers. Social media is very different from traditional media. It has its own set of demands that require commitment, resources and capability, both to minimise potential risks but also to be able to capture its full potential.

Social media can extend the reach for councils of their communication activities. It can communicate with hard-to-reach groups, create communities of interest within the broader community, be a springboard for ideas, provide feedback and comments on proposed activities, promote events, and more. Social media offers Local Government enormous opportunities to communicate with citizens in ways not before possible.

The dynamic nature of social media means that councils are now able to engage with the community, learn more about them, develop relationships and in the process raise the profile of Local Government as it moves towards Constitutional recognition.

Looking ahead, there are major opportunities for councils to improve their communication and interaction with communities and at the same time enhance opportunities for greater efficiency, effectiveness and innovation.

Appendix: Social media platforms

In *Connecting with Communities: How Local Government is Using Social Media to Engage with Citizens* (Howard, 2012a), it was pointed out that there are many different types of social media platforms, each one designed to provide a specific service. In addition to email, which is also classified as social media, some of the popular social media platforms are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Social Media Platforms

Platform	Properties
Wiki	A special type of website that enables groups of people to work collaboratively on projects. Wiki software enables people to add, delete or change the content. There are wikis for all occasions with the most popular wiki being Wikipedia. Other wikis are in use in schools, communities, corporate intranets, or even families and friends.
Social Networking Sites	Websites that encourage people to join a group or network of friends, family, or professional associates to share content. Each member of the site creates a personal profile to become part of the community. Well known social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.
Internet Forum	An online discussion where people post messages which are displayed as threads. People post messages and respond to others producing a conversation around the subject area.
Online Communities of Interest	Practitioners in a particular area of interest who come together online to create and share knowledge. Members must usually meet certain criteria and can be located anywhere in the world.
Blogs	Shorthand for 'Weblog'. Anyone can create a blog using free software to write a personal diary, express an opinion, upload photos, videos, or other material they may wish to share with others. Blog readers can comment on the content of the blog. Bloggers can build quite large and loyal audiences if the content is regularly updated and a level of expertise in the subject area is displayed.
Photo Sharing Sites	Online photo management and sharing applications that help people make their photos easily available to family and friends. They do this by providing storage, different categories, sets and collections. The most popular site is Flickr, although there are several dozen sites on the market.
Video Sharing Sites	Provide online tools that allow users to upload videos, and share them with family, friends or thousands of people around the world. YouTube and Vimeo are two of the most popular sites. The sites enable easy browsing to find and watch a video.
Social Bookmarking Sites	Allow people to store, classify, share and search for content online using bookmarks. Bookmarking sites enable people to keep track of webpages they may find useful at a later date and share these links with others. People also add descriptions of the content to help add context to the content. Tags or shared vocabularies (known as folksonomies) are also developed to assist with organisation. There are several online bookmarking sites available.

Widely used social media formats

There are hundreds of individual social media technologies in use around the world. Some of the most widely used social media sites for business and private use in Australia are listed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Widely used social media formats

Format	Characteristics
LinkedIn	The world's largest professional network on the internet with three million members from Australia alone in March 2012, and 135 million members in over 200 countries worldwide. It is seen as a safe place to 'collect' a lifetime of

	business connections (Golden, 2011). Further interactions occur through common interest groups by posting or answering questions.
Facebook	The most popular social networking site that connects people with friends and others who work, study and live around them. By the end of 2011, Facebook had in excess of 800 million users. It facilitates group discussions and is easy to use, particularly as a photo-sharing and conversation hub. Average user age is above 40. Facebook Groups and corporate company pages can be conducive to building engagement.
Yammer	A simple, scalable way of letting employees share and connect with co-workers in a private, secure enterprise social network.
Twitter	Twitter is a forum that consists of a running thread if 140 (or less) character postings called 'tweets'. Users subscribe to 'follow' people of their choice. There is a vast amount of information —from the annoying and mediocre to the excellent. Twitter has become an important source of information and news for mainstream media, as well as a real-time information network for members. Most business users share tips and links to articles and news to spark interest in a conversation. Monitoring Twitter is a wise public relations activity: positive mentions can be thanked and negative ones corrected. Waiting for a negative mention before setting up a Twitter account is 'sub-optimal'. A staff member Twitter presence can be a worthwhile marketing initiative for the purpose of public engagement and brand management.
YouTube	YouTube provides a forum for original content creators and advertisers.
Pinterest	Pinterest is a pinboard-style social photo sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, hobbies and more. Users can browse other pinboards for inspiration, 're-pin' images to their own collections and or 'like' photos. Pinterest's mission is to "connect everyone in the world through the 'things' they find interesting" via a global platform of inspiration and idea sharing. Pinterest allows its users to share 'pins' on both Twitter and Facebook, which allows users to share and interact with a broad community.
Flickr	Flickr is an online photo management and sharing application which helps people make their photos easily available to friends and family. In addition Flickr enables people to organise photos and videos collaboratively.
Blogs and RSS Feeds	Blogs are distinctly structured websites that contain short, conversational style articles (posts) each housed on a separate URL and can be commented on by readers. They are used widely by professionals. Blogs can replace or supplement email content distribution. They are 'alive' and available anytime. RSS feeds (short for Really Simple Syndication) are able to automatically send updated website content to subscribers' browsers to save them the trouble of having to constantly return to a website and search for new information. RSS feeds can be web-based, desk-top based, or delivered to a mobile device.
Cloud based hosting services	Dropbox is a Web-based file hosting service that uses cloud storage to enable users to store and share files and folders with others across the Internet using file synchronization. In October 2011, Forbes estimated that that Dropbox has 50 million users, of which 96 per cent were using a free account. Other services include Box.net, FilesAnywhere, CloudMe, CrashPlan, Egnyte, iCloud, Mozy, SpiderOak, SugarSync, TitanFile, Ubuntu One, Windows Live SkyDrive, TeamDrive, Wuala and ZumoDrive.
Mobile Applications	Social media also includes Mobile Applications (Apps) developed for smartphones. Apps are being developed by third party providers (Snap, Save, Send) and by councils for their own purposes. Instagram is a fast and enjoyable way to share photos of activities with friends through a series of pictures. Users simply snap a photo with their iPhone, choose

| | a filter to transform the look and feel, and send it to Facebook, Twitter or Flickr. It is also free. |
| | Foursquare enables people to check in and share where they are located in real time such as when they are visiting a library, venue, landmark, restaurant, meeting with friends. |

(Howard, A., 2012)

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