Social Media Content as Government Records

What is social media?

Social media may be defined as websites and applications that enable users to create, share and comment on content quickly and in real time. It includes sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Social media allows government organizations to engage with their stakeholders, provides a useful tool to build audience trust, and can give useful insights on public sentiment to help inform government decisions and public policy.

Social media applications such as Yammer and Microsoft Teams can also be used by government organizations as internal collaboration tools, or across several government organizations to discuss issues and facilitate solutions.

Is social media content a record?

The State Records Act 2000 does not limit the definition of a record by its format, therefore any business-related content created by a government organization using social media is subject to the same recordkeeping requirements as information created by other means. Whilst some posts will be ephemeral in nature, or duplicate content from elsewhere, other posts may form part of the organization’s business activities and will need to be kept accordingly.

When determining what needs to be kept, consider asking yourself the following questions:

- Are you posting on behalf of the organization?
- Does the social media post generate a lot of interest from the public and media?
- Does the social media post communicate decisions and/or commit the organization to an action?
- Does the social media post seek feedback regarding organizational issues on governance, policies and procedures?
- Does the social media post share information addressing issues of safety, security, etc.?
- Does the social media post relate to sensitive or contentious activities?

If the answer is “Yes” to any of the above questions, the organization’s social media policy should address strategies for ensuring that social media content will be captured and retained accordingly.

Capturing social media content

The question of what content and context should be captured for social media posts to be full and accurate records, is a risk management decision. Government organizations should determine if the social media post alone is an accurate record, or if the post together with other users’ exchanges forms the most accurate record.

Methods of capturing social media content as a record may vary according to the applications being used. Capturing may be as simple as saving a screenshot along with relevant details, or using an automated application or external service provider to capture posts. Some social media sites such
as Twitter and Facebook allow for the download of posts that can then be captured into a records management system. Leaving the content on an external social media site is not a sufficient records management strategy as the organization has no control over the site and in worst case scenarios information can be lost, or the site can shut down.

The ability to integrate the type of social media platform used and the way in which data can be exported should be considered in line with existing recordkeeping systems and responsibilities.

**Retention of social media content**

Organizations are required to maintain social media records in a readable format for the minimum period specified in the organization’s approved Disposal Authority.

For further information, contact the State Records Office on (08) 9427 3661 or via email at sro@sro.wa.gov.au.