

# Digital Media in the News

the **InformationWeek**



## [How Social Media Changes The Way Citizens Talk To Government](#)

Posted by Mitch Wagner  
February 19, 2009

An interesting article in *Federal Computer Week* looks at how social media are changing the face of public participation in government. Traditional public comment has citizens talking to government, and government (hopefully) listening. But social media involves people talking to each other, with government in the mix participating in the discussion.

Traditional "public comment" is a term of art describing a top-down procedure with formal rules for participation, Kim Patrick Kobza explains. Social media is peer-to-peer and messy. But both are necessary, Kobza argues.

As the new administration takes shape, a debate has begun over the role social media will play -- or should play -- in public participation processes. There is rising tension and confusion over the appropriate place for social media alongside traditional public comment.

Both sides have their vocal proponents, but in my view, Government 2.0 needs both. Each has its purpose.

"Public comment" is a term of art -- a legal standard that requires comments to be relevant, free of profanity, and offered with full attribution and identity.

I added the emphasis there. Those four characteristics of public comment are pretty much the perfect, geometric opposite of what you get on social media. Social media comments are often irrelevant, laced with profanity, inarticulate, semi-literate, and anonymous. Often, they seem to have been posted by rageaholics who really should be placed under armed guard.

But social media comments are sometimes brilliant -- often enough to make the whole thing worthwhile. And services like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn provide simple mechanisms for separating the worthwhile participants from the goofballs.

Kobza, who heads social media vendor Neighborhood America, notes another way that public comment is different from social media: Public comment is designed to allow citizens to talk to government, while social media is designed for people to talk to each other.

Both are necessary, Kobza says:

We must provide a means for engagement that enables simple citizen-to-government communication. On the other hand, peer-to-peer communication through the use of social media will enable government agencies to take advantage of the value inherent in citizen networks and will welcome even more citizens into the process.

The formal nature of public comment makes it off-putting for regular citizens to participate. It's a lot of work -- or it's perceived that way, and packed with lobbyists, lawyers, and other professionals who are competing with regular citizens for government's ear. But anybody can participate in social media, contributing a little or a lot, depending on what they're capable of.

Excerpted from:

## CHICAGO **SUN-TIMES**

### [Daley channels YouTube](#)

CITY HALL | Mayor using video clips to promote himself, city

By Fran Spielman, City Hall Reporter

February 23, 2009

What do Mayor Daley, Queen Elizabeth II and Pope Benedict XVI have in common?

Their very own YouTube channels [...]

With pro-bono help from officials at Google Chicago, whose parent company owns YouTube, the mayor's site is already up and running at <http://www.youtube.com/mayordaley> [...]

"It's all new technology. You have to understand that. ... Politics has changed. Business has changed. If you don't change, you live in the past. And if you live in the past, you're gonna die," Daley said.

Excerpted from:

## Chicago Tribune

**chicagotribune.com**

### [Politicians using Twitter in growing numbers](#)

John McCain among members of Congress who are updating their social messaging pages

By James Oliphant, Washington Bureau

March 2, 2009

John McCain has started Twittering.

No, that's not a neurological disorder. He's fine.

For a candidate famously mocked last year for not being able to use a computer, the man seems to have decided to ride the tech tide in a big way. He's embraced Twitter, the social messaging activity that connects users through 140-character updates. In fact, on Monday he spoke on the Senate floor about Twittering, saying he was tweeting earmarks in a spending bill under debate.

Dozens of members of Congress are doing the same, documenting their hour-by-hour, sometimes minute-by-minute activities and allowing you, the public, to know the innermost thoughts of our elected representatives [...]

Right. Got it. Thx. But some ideas, frankly, deserve a more expansive form of communication [...]

Imagine what Franklin Roosevelt's most famous address might have sounded like: "Psyched to be at Capitol. Cold. Gonna be giving a speech in 5 min. IMHO, only thing we gotta fear is fear itself. Tweet later!"

Excerpted from:



[Military uses social networking to reach public](#)

By Audrey McAvoy, The Associated Press  
Saturday Feb 14, 2009

HONOLULU — You too can become a friend of the U.S. Pacific Command, the people who manage U.S. security interests from Hawaii to India. Or you could “tweet” your thoughts to the Northern Command, which is responsible for defending the continental U.S.

Both commands are using social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and MySpace to reach the public and tell their stories to those less likely to read the newspaper and watch television news [...]

“It’s part of the way you communicate now,” said Navy Capt. Jeff Breslau, a U.S. Pacific Command spokesman. “There’s no reason why we can’t talk directly to the public and now we have the tools to do it.”

The Pacific Command’s Flickr photo collection — which debuted this week — shows American B-52 bombers flying in formation with Japanese fighter jets during exercises off Guam. Its Facebook page features news articles about international drills in Thailand [...]

Northern Command and the North American Aerospace Defense Command gained over 3,000 followers when they posted Twitter updates on Santa’s whereabouts last Christmas Eve.

NORAD has been keeping children informed about Santa’s sleigh since 1955. But this was the first time it used Twitter.

“Santa and his sleigh just zipped under the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, CA! Did anyone spot him through the fog?” one of the notes said [...]

“During Hurricane Katrina, while cell phones didn’t work, text messaging and e-mail worked through Blackberry,” Kucharek said. “This is one more way of getting information to people in the event of an emergency.”

U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. troops in the Middle East and Central Asia, isn’t yet on Facebook. But officials are interested in venturing there and similar sites.

“It’s audience that you can’t reach any other way. That’s the whole point — there are folks who get their information and news through the Web,” said Air Force Maj. John Redfield, Central Command spokesman. “They don’t watch CBS and ABC and NBC. Not that there is anything wrong with that — that’s just how they choose to get their information. And we have to choose to reach them.”

## Lessons From The Trenches

By Fast Company Staff

March 17, 2009

### **Don't set up a network just to exploit it; let it mature.**

The Web world may seem instantaneous, but patience remains a virtue. "The best practices in direct mail are different than in email, different still where video is used," says Joe Rospars, who ran the Obama campaign's new-media unit. As Rospars and Hughes built a growing list of online supporters for Obama, the campaign's fund-raisers wanted to hit the group up for cash. Rospars persuaded them to wait until his email team could "create a narrative that let people know they were part of the campaign."

### **The right tech ain't cheap, but that doesn't mean it won't pay off.**

The efficiency of the voter-registration site that Hughes finally got the resources to build -- 1 million voters signed up by a handful of part-timers in just a few months -- more than paid for the investment. If the short-term everything-for-lowa mind-set hadn't delayed resources, who knows how many voters the site would have acquired?

### **If your competition is using a medium, you'd better know how to use it too.**

The campaign responded to the uproar created by YouTube videos of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright on the same platform, and tagged its videos the same way. "A person searching for the negative stuff would have found the campaign's response, too," observes Monte Lutz, SVP of digital public affairs for the consulting firm Edelman.

### **Take customers' online feedback seriously.**

When a big group of Obama supporters revolted during the campaign over his vote on wiretapping, the candidate neither reversed his position nor ignored the naysayers. He penned a direct response and posted it online. "People now expect to be able to communicate their concerns with you," Lutz explains. "If you respond, they'll keep coming back to you."

### **Authenticity is priceless.**

"Our research shows that regular employees are more trusted than CEOs," says Lutz. "By letting regular people speak for the Obama campaign authentically, the groundswell they created was also authentic." Adds Matt Cohler, an early Facebook executive who is now a general partner at Benchmark Capital: "This is about trusting your brand and identity to your customers, partners, and the world at large. It does carry risks, sure. But the world is going to do things with your brand, whether or not you participate in the process."



## Social networks more popular than email

By Ed Baig

March 9, 2009

This probably won't come as a shock to anyone hanging out on Facebook, but social networks and blogs have moved ahead of personal e-mail among the most popular online activities, and are fourth most popular overall. That's according to a report released Monday from The Nielsen Company.

Time spent on these sites is growing three times faster than the overall Internet rate, the report says. More than two-thirds of the world's online population now visits social networking and blogging sites, with such "member communities" growing twice as fast as the other leading online sectors (search, portals, PC software, e-mail). In all, one in every online 11 minutes is spent in one of these sites.

Nielsen Online examined nine global markets. Among these, penetration for social networks and blogs was highest in Brazil where 80% of the online audience visited such sites. That compares to 75% for runner-up Spain and 67% for the USA. As the most popular social network globally, Facebook is visited monthly by three in 10 people across the markets in the report.

As you might also imagine, mobile access to social networking destinations is also on the rise, with 10.6 million people in the US reaching such sites through their handsets. That's a jump of 156% from a year ago.