

HHS Center for New Media

Social Media 101 Overview: The WHAT and the WHY

This document is meant to serve as an **introductory guide** for HHS offices/agencies interested in learning more about new and social media tools that may be applicable to your missions and work. It is divided into **five sections**:

- 1) [*The Rise of Social Media*](#): What is it? Who's using it?
- 2) [*Benefits of Using Social Media in Our Work*](#): Why should your office/agency use it?
- 3) [*Challenges and Risks*](#): What are they and how can we address them?
- 4) [*Suggestions for Getting Started*](#): Where to begin?
- 5) [*The Social Media Toolbox*](#): Definitions and examples Twitter, mash-ups, etc.

1. The Rise of Social Media

Social media is the use of technology combined with social interaction to create or co-create value.ⁱ

Over the past few years, there has been a significant rise in the number of people accessing and sharing information online and via mobile technologies. See *Figure 1: The Conversation: The Art of Listening, Learning, and Sharingⁱⁱ* below:



With the rise of new tools and technologies, such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, individuals and organizations have begun changing the way they obtain and share information.ⁱⁱⁱ **So what's the uptake and level of use for these tools?**

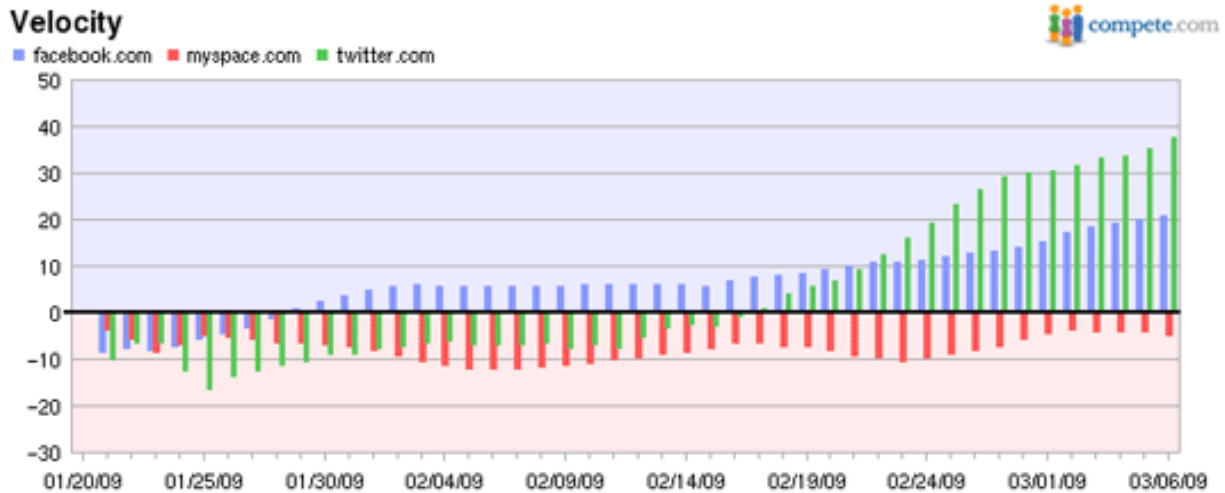
HHS Center for New Media

There were nearly **116 million** US user-generated content consumers in 2008, along with **82.5 million** content creators. Both numbers are set to climb significantly by 2013. (eMarketer, February 2009)

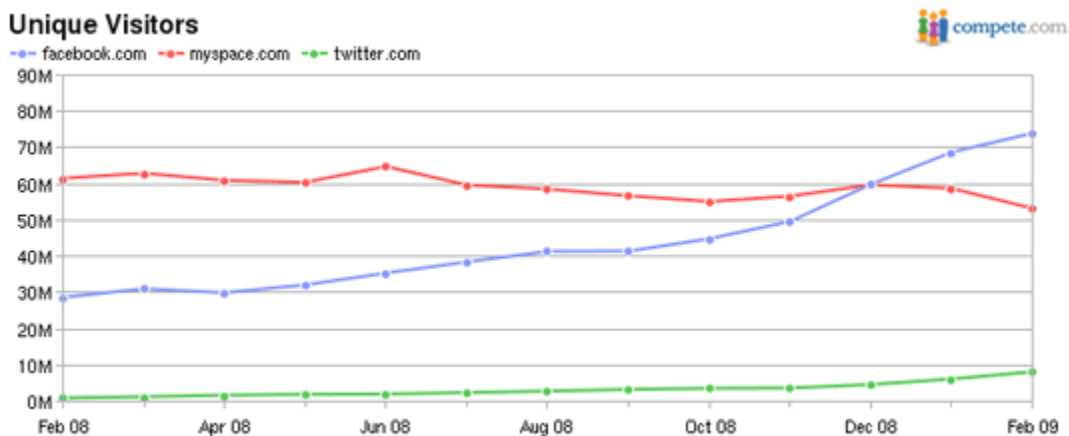
Consider that the high number of users in the top three social media sites in 2008: **Blogger** (222 million unique worldwide visitors), **Facebook** (200 million unique worldwide visitors), and **MySpace** (126 million unique worldwide visitors).^{iv} In addition:

- **One in five** Americans have ever listened to an audio **Podcast**.^v
- **One in three** Americans have a profile on a **Social Networking Site**. More than 4 in 10 with a Social Network profile visit those sites every day or more.^{vi}
- As of February 2009, **Twitter had 7 million unique visitors**.^{vii}
- As of March 2009, **YouTube had 89 million unique viewers** in the U.S.^{viii}

In terms of rapid growth, *Figure 2: Velocity of Attention Jan-Mar 2009^{ix}* below shows the relative change in daily attention a website receives, with Twitter exponentially outgrowing Facebook and MySpace:

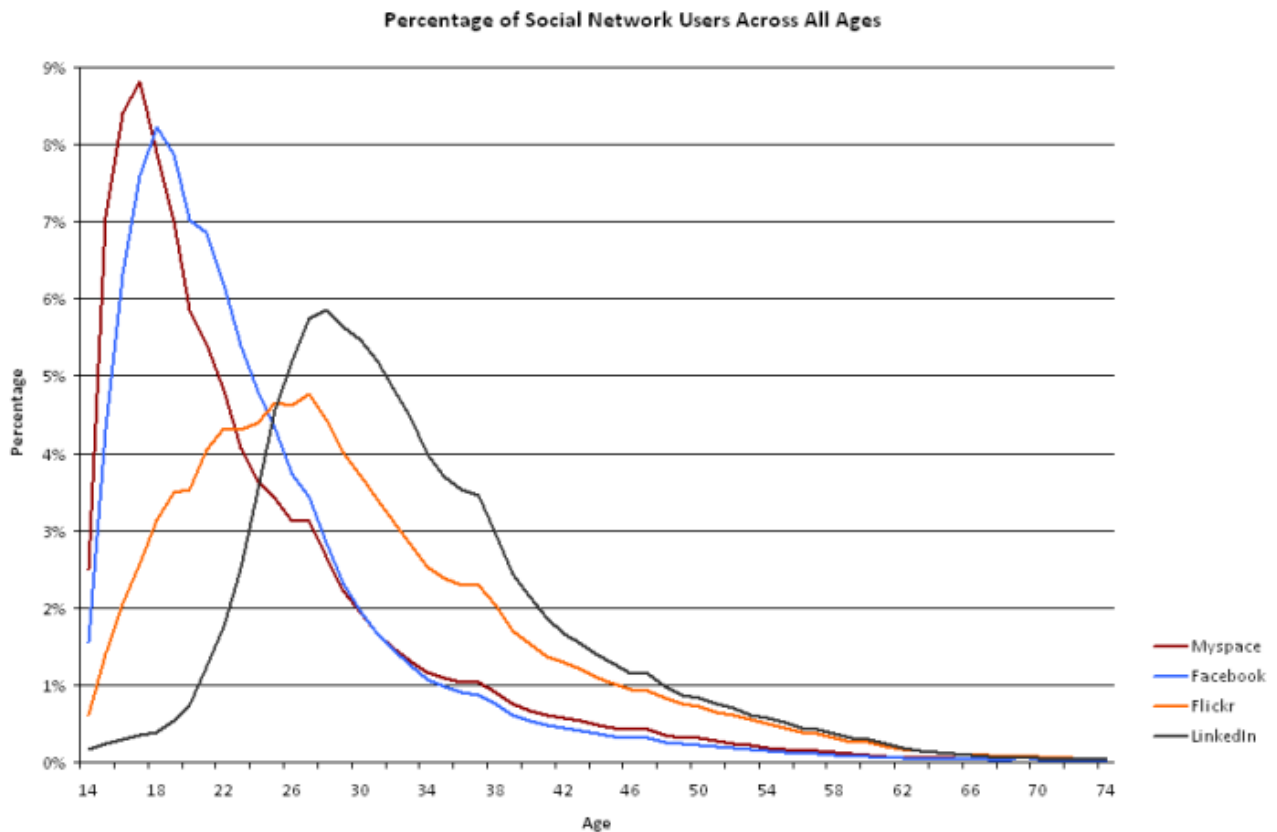


However, it is important to remember the relative size of MySpace and Facebook to Twitter, as *Figure 3: Unique Visitors Feb 2008 – Feb 2009^x* shows (that's unique visitors in millions):



HHS Center for New Media

In terms of age groups, *Figure 3: Percentage of Social Network Users Across All Ages*^{xi} below shows that as of June 2008, different social networks have a greater appeal for different age groups:



2. The Benefits of Using Social Media in Our Work

If it can be public, and is of interest to the public, it should be public.^{xii}

Using social media tools can help us in our work by enhancing the government's ability to:

- a. **Ensure transparency and expand our reach** by sharing information with stakeholders and being responsive to their reactions via interactive channels.
- b. **Increase public engagement and participation** by obtaining input from citizens and others outside the government.
- c. **Increase our effectiveness** by collaboratively sharing information within and across departments and agencies.

By May 21, 2009, the Office of Management and Budget is expected to release an Open Government Directive that details how federal agencies will adopt innovative tools such as Twitter and other social media sites to enhance inter-agency collaboration, increase transparency and foster citizen participation in agency decision-making.^{xiii}

HHS Center for New Media

3. Challenges and Risks^{xiv}

Despite the headway being made by some departments, agencies, and offices across the government (see [Section 5](#) for examples), there are still many questions to answer in moving forward with a broader more consistent implementation. The main issues we are beginning to tackle include:

- Developing **guidance and standards for social media** both for offices/agencies to use and for HHS staff to follow as individuals
- Developing **training opportunities** to help integrate these new technologies
- Addressing **restricted access on government servers** while meeting **IT security** standards
- Meeting **privacy** requirements, including the **Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act**, **permanent cookies restrictions**, **Privacy Impact Assessment**, and **data collection** requirements
- Developing **records management** guidance and standards for new content on social media sites
- Meeting Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act to ensure **accessibility to people with disabilities**
- Meeting the **Federal Advisory Committee Act**

4. Suggestions for Getting Started

Less about tool, more about technique.^{xv}

Regardless of the current challenges we all face in this ever-changing landscape, there are still ways to get started:

1. **ON YOUR OWN: Begin using social media tools yourself.** It’s important to understand the benefits of these tools first-hand in order to develop successful strategies for them in your work. A few examples of the many social media sites and tools that may be interesting to begin “playing” with include:
 - *Free texting service:* [ChaCha](#) is a free mobile answers service that allows users to send in a question via text (e.g., “next movie time at Z cinema in DC”) and receive a response via a text message within a few minutes (from a ChaCha guide – a real person!). Try it: Text your question(s) to 242-242.
 - *Interest-based social network site:* [Good Reads](#) is a free social networking site where you can catalog and review the books you’ve read and connect with others (either invite your friends to join or “friend” people with similar interests).
 - *Interest-based social network site:* [Knitting Network](#) is a free social networking site where you can connect with others interested in knitting and share information, experiences, photos, etc.
 - *Content-aggregator:* [Pandora](#) is a commercial-free internet radio service that works via automated music recommendations. Just type in an artist or song you like, and the site will play songs that are musically similar. You can approve or disapprove of songs as they play and the site will take that into account for future selections.

HHS Center for New Media

2. FOR YOUR OFFICE/AGENCY: Listen to what people are saying about your issue(s) and about you in the social media space. This will help you identify where your stakeholders (and potential stakeholders) are congregating online, what they know and are interested in, and what gaps you can help fill. It will also acclimate you to the “netiquette” in different web-based spaces.

Start with blogs:

- Start by browsing current [government blogs](#). You may find opportunities to partner on a message or campaign already happening. At the very least you’ll get a better sense of how our fellow government colleagues are using blogs.
- Use a search engine to search for blogs mentioning your office, health issue, and/or target populations. We suggest [Google blog search](#) and [Technorati](#).

Listen on other platforms too:





- You don’t need to create an account to search on many of the social media sites out there. Some examples include: **Twitter:** Go to www.twitter.com and click on “Search” link at the bottom of the page to look up tweets on the topic of your choice. (this one has the hardest-to-find “search” link), **Flickr**, **Delicious** (check how many people have tagged your website), and **YouTube**.
- Lastly, the list of social media definitions below includes some examples of how government is using these tools to interface and collaborate with the public and other stakeholders. Be sure them out and then look for examples more closely related to your specific type of work.

5. The Social Media Toolbox^{xvi}








Ok, tools matter too.

Table 1 below categorizes the most common social media tools and what they are and aren’t generally appropriate for (with the understanding that mission/target audiences take precedence over this):

Table 1: Social Media Categories and Uses

Category (Example)	Generally appropriate for...	Generally NOT appropriate when...
 (Digg)	Increasing the reach of a blog or other often-updated public site	Used to promote a static website
Audio Sharing (BlogTalkRadio)	Broadcasting interviews, discussions, tutorials, etc. Can be one-time or serieses.	You have time-sensitive updates
 (WordPress)	Telling a story, i.e., narrative writing (about a finite event or an ongoing issue/project)	There aren’t resources or content to post regularly
 (RSS)	Sharing Web site content with others, highlighting often-updated site content	Used to promote a static website
 (Twitter)	Providing real-time updates; obtaining feedback; interacting at conferences, etc.	There aren’t resources to participate regularly (as in posting and responding)

HHS Center for New Media

Category (Example)	Generally appropriate for...	Generally NOT appropriate when...
 (Flickr)	Engaging with stakeholders and building community (e.g., for a specific event)	There aren't resources to post photos of your work
 (Delicious)	Sharing multiple links with stakeholders (see Aggregators too)	Used to promote a static website.
 (Facebook)	Engaging with stakeholders and building community; obtaining feedback	There aren't resources to participate regularly (as in posting and responding)
 (YouTube)	Broadcasting events, interviews, tutorials, etc.; building community	The content could be expressed in a podcast (aka "talking head syndrome")
 (Second Life)	Using the platform to interact and build community	There aren't resources to participate regularly
 (embedded videos)	Distributing real-time content; creating interactive interfaces	Used to promote a static website
 (Wikipedia, PBworks)	Collaboratively writing documents among a core group of individuals; crowdsourcing	There aren't resources to manage content

The following is not an exhaustive list, but should help you get started:

Aggregators: Aggregator sites are similar to social bookmarking sites except that their primary use is to share interesting links with other users (as opposed to cataloguing or sharing with a distinct group of stakeholders) in order to increase the reach of a particular article, blog post, or piece of news. Participants on the site can typically vote for or against the proposed link, making some links more popular than others. Many blogs include a link at the bottom of each post for users to submit the post to aggregator sites. Examples of aggregator sites include: Digg and Reddit.

- Example: [Smithsonian 2.0 Blog](#)
- Example: [AIDS.gov Blog](#) (see "Share" at the bottom of each post)


Badges and Buttons: Similar to a widget (and sometimes called one), badges and buttons are graphics that can be embedded into a web page and serve to link to online content elsewhere. They typically serve as **content syndication** tools, to lead someone to content on another site.

- Example: [CDC H1N1 Buttons](#)






Blogs: Blogs are websites with regular updates (in reverse chronological order – newest update at the top) and typically combine text, images (graphics or video), and links to other webpages. Blogs are usually informal—taking on the tone of a diary or journal entry. Some blogs are very personal, while others provide mainstream news updates. Most blogs encourage dialogue by allowing their readers to leave comments. Examples of available tools include: Blogger, Wordpress, Typepad

- [Webcontent.gov provides advice on blogs](#)

HHS Center for New Media

Mash-ups: A mash-up is a website “that combines data from more than one source into a single integrated tool”. Data sources often include maps (such as [Google Maps](#) ) and databases (such as business locations). Mash-ups depend on organizations sharing data. They also depend on software developers to create programs that can work together.

- Example: [Johnson County, Kansas' Crime Map Mash-up](#)
- Example: [TweetCongress](#)

Photo Sharing: Photo sharing sites allow you to literally “share photos” online with your friends, family, and colleagues. One of the most common online photo sharing sites is [Flickr](#) . Other popular photo sharing sites include [SmugMug](#) , [BubbleShare](#) , [Picasa](#) , and [Photobucket](#) . These sites share much in common with online social networking sites, such as [Facebook](#) and [MySpace](#)—users can connect with each other, send messages, leave comments, and share photos.

- Example: [Library of Congress Flickr Project](#)
- Example: [AIDS.gov World AIDS Day 2008 Flickr Group](#)

Podcasts (audio sharing): Podcasts (a blend of the terms “iPod” and “broadcast”) are audio or video files that you can listen to or watch on your computer or on a variety of portable media devices (like an iPod, Zune, and certain cell phones). They are usually short, often free, and you can subscribe to receive new podcasts automatically via your computer or other media device.

- [List of government podcasts](#)
- [CDC advice on podcasts](#)

Social Book-marking Sites: A method for Internet users to store, organize, search, and manage bookmarks of web pages on the Internet. In a social bookmarking system, users save links to web pages that they want to remember and/or share. These bookmarks are usually public, and can be saved privately, shared only with specified people or groups, shared only inside certain networks, or another combination of public and private domains. Examples of sites include: Delicious, Fark

- Example: [Holdrege Area Public Library, NE](#)

Social Networking Sites (SNS): Social network sites are online communities that give you opportunities to connect with, or provide resources to, clients, colleagues, family, and friends who share common interests. In each social network, you create a profile that describes you or your organization, and then invite people to join you as “friends.” There are many different types of social network sites, many of which are free, and they range from general to those tailored for a specific demographic or interest area. Examples include Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Friendster, BlackPlanet.com, Eons, PatientsLikeMe (health-focused), DailyStrength (health-focused), Disaboom (disability-focused), RareShare (for people with rare diseases)

- Example: [AIDS.gov on DailyStrength](#)
- [WebContent.gov provides advice on SNS](#)

Texting and Mobile Applications: Text messaging is a way of sending information to and from cell phones and certain personal digital assistants (PDAs).

- Example: [AIDS.gov's KNOWIT Texting Campaign](#)
- Example: [Fairfax County, VA Mobile Initiative](#)

Twitter (micro-blogging): You can think of Twitter as a “micro-blog.” You use your computer or mobile phone to broadcast short messages, or “tweets,” that are limited to 140 characters.

HHS Center for New Media

People can sign up on Twitter to follow your tweets. You can choose to follow people and will receive their tweets, too. Twitter is a “service for friends, family, and coworkers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?”

- [List of government Twitter accounts](#) (from late 2008, not fully current)

Video Sharing: Also called a video hosting service allows individuals to upload video clips to an Internet website. The video host will then store the video on its server, and show the individual different types of code to allow others to view this video. Examples include YouTube, Blip.tv, and Vimeo.

- Example: [HHS YouTube Channel](#)
- Example: [CDCstreamingHealth YouTube Channel](#)
- Example: [Virginia Government YouTube Channel](#)
- Example: [EPA YouTube Channel](#)

Virtual Worlds: A virtual world is a computer-based, simulated reality or fantasy environment where people can socialize, connect, and create in an infinite number of ways. Participants can develop digital representations of themselves, known as avatars. In a virtual world, you can be whomever (or whatever) you want to be.

- Example: [CDC in Whyville and Second Life](#)

Widgets: Supposedly short for ‘window gadget,’ a widget is a graphic control on a Web page that allows the user to interact with it somehow. Widgets can also be easily posted on multiple Web sites, have the added benefit of hosting “live” content, and often take the form of on-screen tools (clocks, event countdowns, auction-tickers, stock market tickers, flight arrival information, daily weather etc).

- Example: [CDC widget for H1N1 Flu](#)

Wikis: The term “wiki” comes from the Hawaiian word for “fast.” Wiki technology creates a webpage that anyone with access to it can modify—quickly and easily. A wiki is essentially a webpage with an edit button.

- [WebContent.gov provides advice on wikis](#)

ⁱ <http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/blog/2008/09/25/the-definition-of-social-media/> The Definition of Social Media, September 2008 (blog post). Accessed on April 30, 2009.

ⁱⁱ By Brian Solis and JESS3

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://m2bp.pbworks.com/> Media 2.0 Best Practices Project (wiki), March 2009. Accessed on April 30, 2009.

^{iv} <http://www.techcrunch.com/2008/12/31/top-social-media-sites-of-2008-facebook-still-rising/#comment-2581823> Top Social Media Sites of 2008, December 31, 2008. Accessed on May 5, 2009.

^v <http://www.edisonresearch.com/Infinite%20Dial%202009%20Presentation.pdf> Edison Research, April 2009 report on “The Infinite Dial 2009.” Accessed on May 5, 2009.

^{vi} <http://www.edisonresearch.com/Infinite%20Dial%202009%20Presentation.pdf> Edison Research, April 2009 report on “The Infinite Dial 2009.” Accessed on May 5, 2009.

^{vii} http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/twitters-tweet-smell-of-success Twitter’s Tweet Smell of Success, March 2009. Accessed on May 5, 2009.

^{viii} http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/march-video-streaming-soars-nearly-40-compared-to-last-year/ March Video Streaming Soars 40% Compared to Last Year, April 2009. Accessed on May 5, 2009.

^{ix} <http://www.digitalbuzzblog.com/new-twitter-growth-charts/> Blog Post Published March 9, 2009. Accessed on May 12, 2009.

HHS Center for New Media

^x <http://www.digitalbuzzblog.com/new-twitter-growth-charts/> Blog Post Published March 9, 2009. Accessed on May 12, 2009.

^{xi} http://www.rapleaf.com/company_press_2008_06_18.html Published June 2008. Accessed on May 12, 2009.

^{xii} http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/reqs_bestpractices/laws_regs/priorities_reqs/process.shtml OMB Policies Suggested Process for Developing Priorities and a Web Publication Schedule. Accessed May 4, 2009.

^{xiii} <http://www.networkworld.com/news/2009/030909-feds-twitter.html?page=1> NetworkWorld article from April 9, 2009. Accessed on April 28, 2009.

^{xiv} p 65 of Government and Social Media Presentation by Bev Godwin, USA.gov on March 2008.

http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/documents/Government_and_Social_Media.pdf

^{xv} http://geneticalliance.org/ksc_assets/training/sfs28apr09_media_tools.pdf Weinrech Communications PowerPoint from April 2009 webinar. Accessed on April 30, 2009.

^{xvi} <http://blog.aids.gov/new-media-toolkit.html> AIDS.gov New Media Toolkit. Accessed on April 28, 2009.