HHS Facebook Guidance

This information applies to the entirety of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Operational Divisions and Offices within the Department may create guidance and establish policies that are more restrictive if the appropriate management so chooses.

Last updated: August 8, 2011 | Directory of HHS Facebook Accounts[1]

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[1] http://newmedia.hhs.gov/tools/facebook.html

INTRODUCTION: FACEBOOK BASICS

Facebook is a free web-based network that helps people connect with other individuals, organizations and ideas. The Facebook ecosystem is made up of hundreds of separate networks based around schools, businesses, regions, and other shared interests. It generates revenue from applications and advertising based upon users' networks and activity.

How does it work?

Individual users have accounts called "Profiles" that they update by posting pictures, comments, and videos for others to view. Users can also read a "News Feed" of updates from other people in their network. Users grow their networks by requesting other users to become "friends," or by "liking" accounts held by organizations or public figures.

Organizations and public figures, including government offices, don't have Profiles but instead have Pages. Pages are similar to profiles, but pages represent an official professional presence. Visit http://www.facebook.com/government[2] to view Frequently Asked Questions about Facebook and Government. Download the detailed Pages Manual[3] for step-by-step instructions on how to create a Page now.

If you would like to know more about how it all works, we suggest you open up your own personal account and dive in. If you need help, the HHS Center for New Media will be happy to assist.

For more detail on the different features of Facebook profiles, visit http://www.facebook.com/help/[4].

Reach and Demographics: Who uses Facebook?

Facebook has more than 750 million active users worldwide, i.e., those who have returned to the site in the last 30 days[i]. This makes it the largest online social network in the world.

1. As of April, 2011, **the largest age group on Facebook in the US was 18-34 year olds**, comprising 42 percent of over 141 million US-based users. The second largest age group of US-based users was 13-17 year olds (22% of US-based users), trailed slightly by 35-49 year olds (20% of US-based users).
2. Facebook attracts users in a variety of income brackets: 32% of users earn over $100k, 30% earn between $60-100k, **24% earn between $30-$60k**, and 14% earn between $0-30k.
3. Facebook users are extremely engaged: **50% of active users visit the site daily**. People that use Facebook on their mobile devices are twice as active on Facebook as non-mobile users.[ii]

What are the benefits of organizations using Facebook?

Five major benefits of using Facebook include:

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[2] http://www.facebook.com/government

[3] https://facebook-inc.box.net/shared/9e5jiyl843

[4] http://www.facebook.com/help/

1. **Broad reach potential** – Reach more people through Facebook's network, encouraging and facilitating the sharing of information between users and their networks.
2. **Mobile Access** – Reach your audience when they are not at a computer through Facebook's mobile compatible site, application, and even SMS texting. Of the 750 million users, 250 million access Facebook via mobile devices, and 200 mobile operators, in more than 60 countries, are working to market Facebook mobile products[5] [iii].
3. **Interaction** – Build a relationship with your audience and connect beyond a static web page.
4. **Feedback** – Understand your target population(s)' behavior based on the comments and content they share.
5. **Monitoring** – See what others are saying about your organization and the issues you address.

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[5] http://www.facebook.com/mobile/?ref=pf

APPROVAL AND SET UP

Your Office's presence on Facebook should be part of a broader communications plan. It should strategically enhance your efforts to meet your organizational mission and specific objectives. In order to obtain clearance to create a Facebook Page, your Office needs to:

1. Create a **Facebook Plan** and incorporate it into an existing communications plan that identifies a target audience and specific objectives, activities, and necessary resources allocated. Bring a copy of our 1-page document entitled Social Media Considerations: Questions to ask before jumping in (PDF – 106KB)[6] to your planning meeting.
2. Obtain **approval** from your Office/Agency's program management and the appropriate communications office.
3. Contact the **HHS Center for New Media** at newmedia@hhs.gov[7] to have your Page added to the Directory of HHS Facebook accounts[8]. The HHS New Media team may be able to provide recommendations on your plan, assist with promoting your effort, and also provide suggestions on collaboration opportunities with other Offices/Agencies in the department.

Creating Your Government Page

As a best practice, organizations should **not** use a personal account to create an official Page for an office. Organizations can create the page without creating or associating it with an individual's personal profile. You will be asked to provide an email address and date of birth (for legal purposes), but you will not be asked for any other details about the person setting up the page. This method of creating accounts with a general login is helpful if other people must manage the account as a back-up administrator (admin), or if a future admin does not have a Facebook profile. Additional admins can also be added to the page using personal profiles after the page is created, and are not permanently associated with the account. Admins are not publicly disclosed; being an admin won't show up on one's personal profile and does not appear on the Page itself.

NOTE: The Federal Terms of Service (TOS) for Facebook[9] only governs the use of Pages. When setting up official government pages, offices should **not** activate the optional Profile that comes with it.

How to Set up a Government Page on Facebook

1. Make sure you are not logged in to a personal account.
2. Go to Facebook.com/page[10].
3. Select "Company, Organization, or Institution" and select the "Government Organization" category option, or, if this is for an individual and not the office, select "Artist, Band, or Public Figure" and create a "Government Official" page. (When you agree to create a Page, the signed agreement between GSA and Facebook supersedes the site's terms.)
4. Enter the name for your Page. (**NOTE: You will not be able to change this name.**)

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[6] http://newmedia.hhs.gov/resources/hhscnm_before_jumping_in_03-12-2010.pdf

[7] mailto:newmedia@hhs.gov

[8] http://newmedia.hhs.gov/tools/facebook.html

[9] http://forum.webcontent.gov/resource/resmgr/terms_of_service_w_socmed/facebook_amended_tos_4.13.20.pdf

[10] http://www.facebook.com/page

5. You will be asked to create a Facebook account. Select "I do not have a Facebook account." This will allow you to create an Organization Page that is not associated with a personal profile. You will be asked to provide an email address and date of birth for legal purposes, but you will not be required to provide your name or any other details about your identity.

6. Once you've created a Page, edit the settings to make the Page unpublished (not visible to the public) until you choose to publish it. The default settings make the page publicly visible.

7. Review the Pages Manual[11] to set up the Page and add other admins.

8. Make sure to include necessary policies as you set up your Page.

9. **REQUIRED**: Email your Page URL to USgovernment@facebook.com[12] and request that ads be removed.

10. **REQUIRED**: Link to your .gov domain on the Info tab. (Why do I need to do this?[13])

11. Facebook will respond to you once this request has been processed.

12. Then you can publish!

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[11] https://facebook-inc.box.net/shared/9e5jiyl843

[12] mailto:USgovernment@facebook.com

[13] http://forum.webcontent.gov/resource/resmgr/terms_of_service_w_socmed/facebook_amended_tos_4.13.20.pdf

Customizing Your Page

As you are building your page, explore creative ways to customize your Facebook presence, such as adding a welcome video or custom tab. Facebook is moving away from fbml and towards the use of iframes. There are 2 ways in which you can add a tab:

1. Host the content on your own servers and render it through the iframe onto the Facebook Page.
2. Utilize a Facebook application that will host your html code for you. (**NOTE:** Even if you go this route, you will need to host your images somewhere.)

Explore other Facebook Pages[14] for inspiration. Be aware that other applications are created by third-party vendors and may have a separate Terms of Service or may pose security risks. Carefully evaluate any application before adding it to your page.

After your page has acquired 25 followers, you can select a username for your Facebook Page. Usernames are short URLs that make it easier for people to find and interact with your Page.

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[14] http://newmedia.hhs.gov/tools/facebook.html

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND EFFECTIVE USE

Understand the Platform's Culture

Facebook is a space for individuals to express their personal lives, tell their stories, and give their opinions on issues that matter *to them*. In general avoid promoting your office and focus on promoting what your office does. For example, few people may be interested in the Office of the Inspector General, but just about everyone is interested in fighting Medicare fraud and catching the bad guys who steal from the American tax-payers. Name your Page something interesting, and avoid using acronyms unless they are identifiable by the mainstream public.

Make Your Updates Interesting

The vast majority of the time users spend looking at your content will be within their news feed, not on your Facebook Page. People will read your updates among those from family and friends.

Write your updates in such a way that people will find them interesting. Consider how you might share the content with a neighbor, friend, or family member. Connecting updates to timely or relevant events, like seasons and holidays, can make your content more relatable.

Multimedia makes great content for Facebook (maps, illustrations, photos, videos, audio interviews or podcasts[15]). Think of other content from your website for inspiration, such as featured stories, announcements, or accomplishments. Remember, not everything should go on Facebook! Press Releases are generally written for a press audience, and can be used as inspiration for updates, but should not be simply reposted to Facebook.

Don't Overload It!

Being bombarded with information is bad. Clutter is bad. Not being able to keep up is bad. Therefore, limit your new content to a handful of items/status updates per day or per week. Once again, remember that people do see this in their news feed. If they're annoyed by constantly seeing items from your page, they'll un-"Like" you.

Give Them a Reason to Go to Your Page

A successful Facebook page is much more than an extension of your website. Use properties that are unique to the platform to help your Page stand out on its own. You may want to also add tabs at the top of your Page based on major areas of content that you work with. For many, your Facebook Page has the potential to be their portal to your agency. Treat it that way!

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[15] http://newmedia.hhs.gov/tools/podcasts.html

PLANNING FOR YOUR FACEBOOK PAGE

Facebook Content Manager

Your office should designate a Facebook Content Manager that will be responsible for the day-to-day activities and overall progress related to your Page. Plan to have a back-up manager in the event that the primary manager is out of the office.

Managing Content

Identify your primary source from which you will pull content to post on your Facebook Page. Does your office have a blog or newsletter with regular postings? Will you provide a tip of the day or a countdown of facts leading up to an event? Consider creating a chart with content sources or an editorial calendar to ensure that you will be able to keep your Page fresh and updated.

Content Clearance

Facebook should not be a source for completely unique/original content. Instead repackage content that can be confirmed on your primary site and has already been cleared. Consider using the same process by which website content is currently approved to clear Facebook content.

Engagement

Your office may or may not choose to engage directly with the users connected to your Page. Without direct engagement, Facebook Pages can still become a platform on which conversation occurs among your followers. Do not respond via Facebook to any media inquiries. Direct any media-related inquiries via Facebook to your usual media contact within your Office/Agency.

For further guidance, see the HHS Guidance on the When and How to Engage over New Media Platforms (PDF – 60Kb)[16].

Comment and Photo Moderation

Facebook does not allow comments to be moderated before they are published. Comments can, however, be removed after they are posted. Problematic users can be banned from your Page entirely. As such, you must post a comment policy on your Facebook Page. To comply with OMB 10-22[17], build a Privacy and Comment Policy tab for your page. See Facebook.com/HealthCare.gov for an example. Learn more about tabs and boxes in the Pages Manual[18].

In the event that you need to remove a post that violates your comment policy, take a screenshot of the entire thread in order to also preserve the context in which the offending post was made prior to deleting it.

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[16] http://newmedia.hhs.gov/resources/hhscnm_guidance_on_when_and_how_to_engage_over_new_media_platforms_05032010.pdf

[17] http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/memoranda_2010/m10-22.pdf

[18] https://facebook-inc.box.net/shared/9e5jiyl843

Facebook also gives the option to allow users to add photos to your page and tag photos of your Page. These options can be used to increase interaction with your community; however, if either of the options is allowed they must be moderated like comments. If you will not have adequate time to moderate photos as well as comments, or if you want to enable the features, simply edit your photo settings.

To change the options click:
- "Edit Page" --> "Apps" --> "Go to Apps" in the "Photos" section.

Read more on Facebook Pages[19] and creating, administering & editing your Page[20].

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[19] http://www.facebook.com/FacebookPages
[20] http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=904

DEFINING SUCCESS

Consider the benefits discussed above, and describe what a successful Page might look like for your office. What is the ultimate outcome you hope to achieve? Determine which metrics can best demonstrate progress in accomplishing your objectives.

Quantitative Metrics

Various **quantitative metrics** are able to be calculated and reviewed over time. Key numbers to track include but are not limited to:

- Number of fans
- Total number of comments posted by fans
- Number of positive/negative comments posted by fans
- Number of 'likes' by fans
- Number of comments removed per your comment moderated policy

Qualitative Metrics

Important **qualitative measures** should be evaluated as well. These include but are not limited to:

- The depth of comments posted. How much value does that comment add to your Page and the conversation taking place?
- The level at which fans are interacting with each other on the Page. Is there dialogue and interaction occurring between individuals beyond the Like button and generic comments?

APPLICABLE FEDERAL POLICIES

Facebook Terms of Service Agreement

A Facebook Terms of Use[21] agreement has been negotiated by the General Services Administration signed by HHS and applies to all entities within the Department, providing two major benefits:

- Legal restraints removed – Working with the federal government means that certain federal laws apply to agreements related to federal activities.
- Ads removed– Ads on government Pages are removed once the request is sent to Facebook. Ads promoting Facebook are not removed.

PII and the Paperwork Reduction Act

An April 7, 2010 OMB memorandum (PDF – 84KB)[22] clarifies the definition of "information" as it pertains to social networks. General solicitation of information over Facebook is considered the equivalent to in-person public meetings which do not require OMB involvement. The following excerpts of that memorandum have particular implications for your Facebook Page:

- Under current OMB policy agencies do not trigger the PRA's requirements by hosting a public meeting. For purposes of the PRA, OMB considers interactive meeting tools—including but not limited… social networks, and online communities—to be equivalent to in-person public meetings. (page 5)
- Online trivia contests are not subject to the PRA under 5 C.F.R. 1320.3(h)(7), which excludes "examinations designed to test the aptitude, abilities, or knowledge." (page 4 footnote)
- If, however, agencies post surveys of any kind, including web polls and satisfaction surveys… the PRA does apply. (page 4)
- Because Facebook is (essentially) a public forum, **do not discuss any private or personal information** or respond to inquiries that would divulge such information on this platform.

Section 508 Accessibility

Facebook has worked to make its network more accessible to those with disabilities by providing a full HTML version of the site, enabling Facebook Chat to work with screen readers, and creating several shortcut keys to navigate to key areas of the site.

Because Facebook is not your Office/Agency's primary source of content, it is not bound as strictly by Section 508 requirements. However, you should know that:

- You need to caption any pictures you put on Facebook, so the description is available to screen readers.
- All videos posted to your Page must be captioned.
- Facebook provides an Accessibility and Assistive Technology page[23] with FAQs and ways to contact Facebook with accessibility troubleshooting.

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[21] http://forum.webcontent.gov/resource/resmgr/terms_of_service_w_socmed/facebook_amended_tos_4.13.20.pdf
[22] http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/inforeg/SocialMediaGuidance_04072010.pdf
[23] http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=440

Record Keeping

The records produced as a result of using Facebook for official Federal business are considered official Federal records. Consult your records official[24] to learn more about the required schedule for maintaining web records.

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[24] http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/agency/departments/health-and-human-services.html

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Changes to Facebook

HHS's use of Facebook Pages is still evolving and this guidance may be updated to reflect future developments. We are collectively learning best practices, and your comments and suggestions will improve this guidance.

Great Information! But I still need one-on-one consultation

Facebook is a complex social network that can be used effectively on the most basic and most intricate of levels.

Technical and strategic training and brainstorming is available from the HHS Center for New Media.

This list of resources will all help you improve your agencies presence on Facebook.

- Facebook.com/help[25]
- Facebook.com/security[26]
- Facebook.com/government[27]
- Facebook.com/brandpermissions[28]
- Facebook.com/facebookdc[29]
- GSA Webinar: Facebook: Strategies and Stories from Successful Government Agencies[30]
- HHS on Facebook: A Directory of Accounts[31]

There are a number of government groups available as well, including the HHS-NewMedia ListServ[32], which is open to all individuals with an email address from the HHS family of agencies.

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[i] Facebook statistics as of July 2011. http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics
[ii] Facebook statistics as of July 2011. http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics
[iii] Facebook statistics as of July 2011. http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics

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[25] http://www.facebook.com/help
[26] http://www.facebook.com/security
[27] http://www.facebook.com/government
[28] http://www.facebook.combrandpermissions
[29] http://www.facebook.com/facebookdc
[30] http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/wmu/newmedia/spring2010/facebook.shtml
[31] http://newmedia.hhs.gov/tools/facebook.html
[32] https://list.nih.gov/cgi-bin/wa.exe?SUBED1=HHS-NEWMEDIA&A=1&X=6D10FA126AEF0E5972