



WHITE PAPER

# Proving the Value of Social Media Across the U.S. Government

A Hootsuite White Paper

Hootsuite®

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# Proving the Value of Social Media Across the U.S. Government

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## Executive summary

Citizen outreach and engagement are costly government line items. Federal agencies in the United States spend \$1.5 billion on public relations and advertising alone each year.<sup>1</sup>

Much of the spend is for public education and awareness—consider the publicity that was required by the Centers for Disease Control in 2016 to educate the public about the Zika virus. And last-generation approaches to these efforts are inefficient: of the \$1.5 billion spent, as much as \$1 billion is allocated to advertising agency contracts.

These expenses are a drop in the ocean compared with the costs of engaging with citizens to deliver services via call centers and service centers. It costs an average of \$1.03 per minute to handle in-house customer service calls within the U.S.<sup>2</sup> In just one example, the Social Security Administration answered 53.3 million calls last year.<sup>3</sup> And 83 percent of calls are longer than 5 minutes.<sup>4</sup>

That means, at a conservative estimate, just one agency is spending at least \$275 million on a call center annually.

Under the Trump administration, inefficiencies like this will come under the microscope very soon. The administration aims to make government lean, accountable, and more efficient.

*“Agencies should identify opportunities where adopting new technology will automate processes and result in increased efficiency and budgetary savings ... agencies should assess how technology may have changed or eliminated the need for some positions. Agencies should build in flexibility to adapt to ongoing technological advances while offering separation incentives as needed to create openings.”*

*Memorandum from Mick Mulvaney,  
Director of the Office of Budgetary Management*

To accomplish this, the government has enacted federal hiring freezes to reduce the size of the government workforce. The plan explicitly outlines requirements for government agencies to improve performance and deliver high-quality and timely services to citizens, and it encourages the use of new technologies to meet these mandates. Government dollars are going to be shifted towards these modern, mission-centric initiatives.

Social media will play a role in the evolution of citizen engagement and service delivery across government. In fact, it's already happening.

The widespread appeal of social engagement is speeding its adoption in the government sector, but more work needs to be done to ensure governments are engaging effectively with citizens on social. In fact, while citizens are demanding digital and social access to government information, 4 in 10 citizens are still not satisfied with the services they receive.<sup>5</sup>

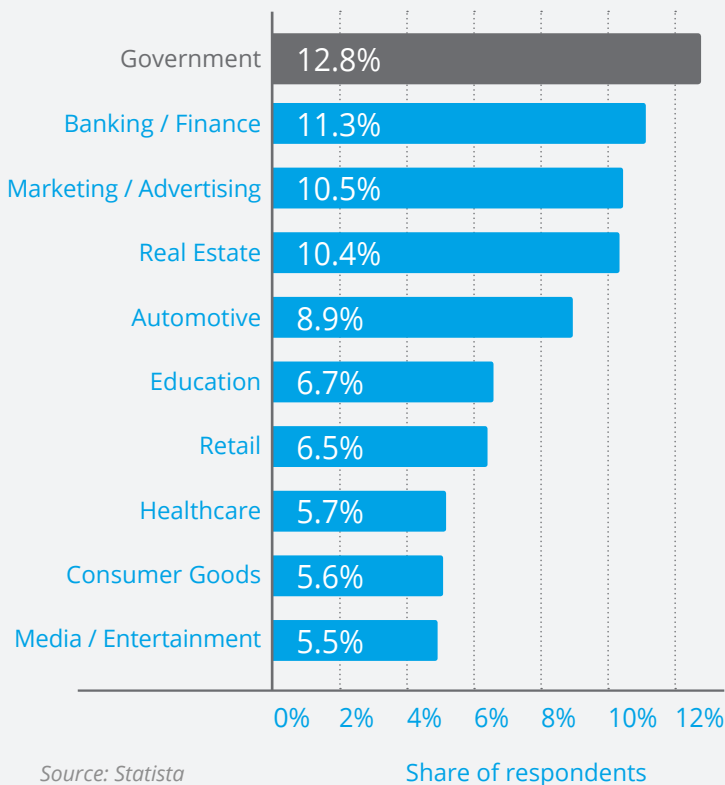
Never before has government had such a powerful and efficient solution for engaging citizens as they have with social media. Yet maximizing the investment in social media requires a strategic approach to social engagement. Government agencies that are doing it well have mastered a way to adopt a human-centric

approach when engaging with citizens on social. But there's a lot of work still to do—government is still perceived as being the most annoying industry on social media.<sup>6</sup>

Now more than ever, state, federal, and local governments that are looking to embrace the power of social media must adopt tools to ensure good outcomes. Social media management solutions can simplify social engagement and pay for themselves in the form of operational efficiencies, streamlined service delivery, and improved citizen satisfaction with government interactions.

This white paper explores the value of social media as an agent to drive efficient, effective, and citizen-centric government engagement.

**Leading most annoying industries on social media according to social media users worldwide as of July 2016**



## The social government

### Interacting with communities

Social media continues to attract a multigenerational audience hungry for real-time information and engagement. As a case in point, 67 percent of Americans are active on social media, with two-thirds of them having a profile on one or more social networks.<sup>7</sup>

**85 percent of local government agencies are using social media. Unfortunately, only 63 percent of these have an enterprise-wide social strategy.<sup>8</sup>**

While government agencies are using social media to disseminate information, many are focusing their efforts on using it as a broadcasting tool, resulting in one-sided conversations that don't result in meaningful engagement with citizens. As a result, citizens have a less-than-satisfying experience, which does nothing to improve their view of or relationship with government entities.

In addition, government employees are not empowered to use social media to engage with citizens, despite the demand to do so. In an era when one in every two Americans expects open data to improve the quality of government services, a new approach is needed to improve the ways that government engages with citizens.<sup>9</sup>

### Simplifying government operations

Compared with traditional methods like the telephone, mail, in-person contact, and email, social media provides government agencies a cost-effective way to communicate with a larger audience.

Federal and state agencies can use Twitter and Facebook to issue alerts and expedite the speed of information sharing—from traffic restrictions and weather alarms to missing persons alerts. The U.S. Department of State, for example, is using YouTube to share press briefings; Environment Canada is using social media to share local weather alerts; and the U.S. Marine Corps is leveraging social to effectively target potential army recruits, sharing “day in the life” examples of real marines in the field.<sup>10</sup>

With so many ways to engage on social, it’s no wonder that as many as 85 percent of local government agencies are using social media. Unfortunately, only 63 percent of these have an enterprise-wide social strategy.<sup>11</sup>

### The role of social in digital transformation

Hootsuite has developed a Digital Maturity Assessment. While the sample size for government is small, early indications show that government agencies range from early to mid-maturity in the digital transformation journey. Social media is one of several elements crucial to transformation, offering government agencies a relatively quick win in terms of enhancing the citizen experience.

Hootsuite’s Digital Maturity Assessment has benchmarked over 200 organizations to date. Our research has helped define the following five stages of maturity:

1. **Siloed:** Social is often limited to a marketing use case and the champion for digital is a marketing manager.
2. **Collaborative:** Multiple teams or departments are enabled by a single social media management platform and the champion for digital is a director.
3. **Integrated:** The organization is leveraging a combination of social media data and CRM to provide an enhanced experience across the customer journey.
4. **Strategic:** The organization has moved beyond social media metrics to understanding how digital is driving business ROI.
5. **Transformative:** Customer-facing and internal initiatives are planned, executed, and measured with a “digital-first” mindset.

Government agencies range between Siloed and Integrated in their maturity.

### Social Trends

**6,000**

Tweets sent every second

**100 Million**

Daily active users of **Snapchat**

**1 Billion**

Daily searches on **LinkedIn**

**80 Million**

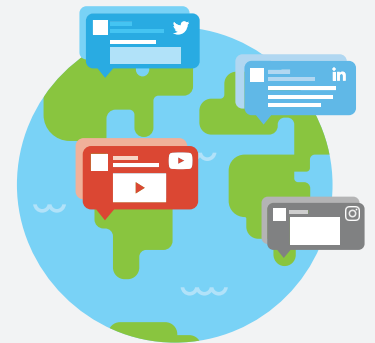
Photos shared on **Instagram** daily

**1 in every 6 minutes**

Amount of time spent daily on **Facebook**

**4 Billion**

Daily views on **YouTube**



Source: Hootsuite

### Investment in social

Agencies that have adopted social media effectively are reaping the benefits by digitally connecting citizens with their government services. Unfortunately, government research has found that some groups continue to use systems with components that are as much as 50 years old.<sup>12</sup>

More than 2.8 billion people globally were using social media by the end of 2016, up 21 percent from 2015.

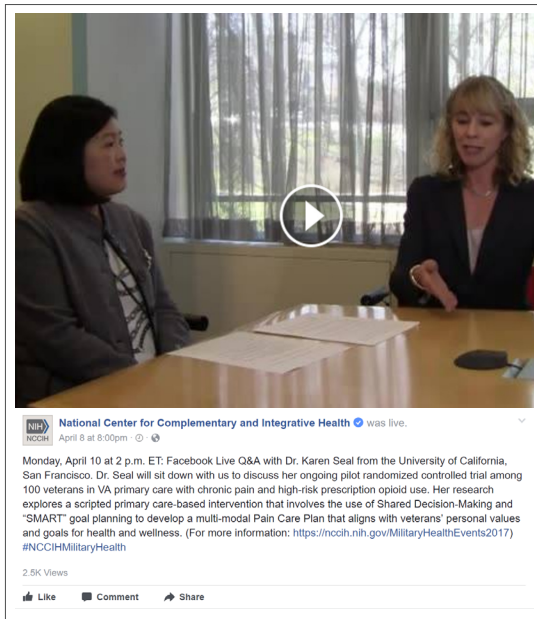
Recognizing the opportunity of social, the U.S. Office of Products and Programs has developed a DigitalGov platform to help agencies build 21st century digital governments using tools like social media. In addition, the Trump administration is proposing a \$1 trillion investment in digital infrastructure over the next ten years, as well as a technology council to modernize the U.S. government’s information technology systems for digital service delivery.<sup>13</sup> In fact, of the \$82 billion in federal IT spending planned for 2017, approximately 78 percent is dedicated to maintaining legacy IT investments.<sup>14</sup>

# The four pillars of a social government

## 1. Citizen engagement

Listening to citizens is the first step in learning what's happening within communities.

Facebook events, polls, lists, and livestreams can be used to gauge and monitor citizen engagement and identify community concerns. In the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, political debates streamed on Facebook Live and YouTube involved more citizens in the voting process.



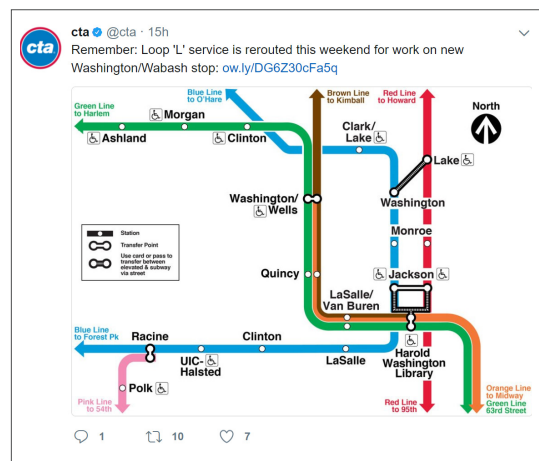
*Facebook Live increased reach and citizen engagement with scientific lectures at NIH that address the U.S. opioid epidemic and chronic pain management challenges.*

## 2. Government service delivery

It's unlikely that digital services will ever completely replace in-person services in government. However, if agencies redirect funding from traditional call centers towards digital service delivery, they can cut customer wait times, increase customer satisfaction levels, and save both government and taxpayers significant money.

68 percent of agencies in a recent municipal 311 survey said they take service requests via social media.<sup>16</sup>

As many as 68 percent of agencies in a recent municipal 311 survey said they take service requests via social media.<sup>17</sup> New York City's non-emergency NYC 311 service is a good example of this strategy. City residents are encouraged to file complaints digitally about potholes, damaged roads, missed garbage collections, and similar issues. Likewise, Kansas City uses customer feedback from its 311 program to improve resident satisfaction with the city's image—and has raised service delivery satisfaction to 56 percent (compared to an average 50 percent for other major cities).<sup>18</sup>



*Chicago Transit Authority uses Twitter to reply to commuters' concerns and reduce frustration when service is delayed or disrupted.*

Other services, such as tax payments, license renewals, and voter registration, can be delivered as do-it-yourself online services. The burden on staff government service centers can be reduced with more effective workflows on social media that shorten wait times and help administrative staff work more efficiently.

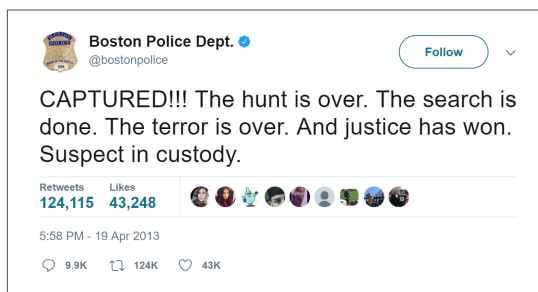
Within five years, social media interactions will be equal to the number of phone interactions, with 70 to 80 percent being service-oriented.<sup>21</sup>

Many government departments could use social media to improve citizen satisfaction with service delivery. The Department of the Treasury, for example, has an American Customer Satisfaction Index score of just 59—one of the lowest American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) scores for a government agency.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is also in need of a service lift, with an ACSI score of just 66.<sup>19</sup> This comes on the heels of a season of bad press for the VA's lack of service delivery, which shocked the country as veterans passed away waiting for VA services and care.<sup>20</sup> Social media is one important way that agencies such as the VA can begin to change public perception.

### 3. Critical response communications

On social media, word of a crisis can spread across the globe in seconds. A strong critical response plan, directed through social media, can be a mitigating factor in containing a crisis. Spending the time and resources to develop a communications plan before an event takes place can allow teams to be quick and efficient with their response.



*The Boston Police Department was using social media within 10 minutes of the Boston Marathon bombing, alerting citizens to what was happening—and combating misinformation.*

Twitter and Facebook updates can alert citizens to power outages, terror alerts, and weather disasters in real time for immediacy and accuracy. First responders can monitor community activity to better understand where citizen support is most needed.

### 4. Government operations

As well as enhancing citizen engagement and service delivery, social media can create efficiencies in other areas of government operations.



*The U.S. Armed Forces use Twitter to engage citizens with the mission of the military and the opportunities for those willing to serve.*

For example, social media can be used to attract and retain highly skilled workers, helping governments compete with millennial-focused company cultures. Younger workers are comfortable engaging via social media. Unlike insular traditional recruitment methods, social media enable open, transparent, and real-time interactions that give citizens an unfiltered understanding of the opportunities and benefits that exist within government employment.



# Examples of social governments in action

## 1. Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)

**Problem:** Citizen reports of inappropriate TV content

When the CRTC saw an uptick in citizen complaints about broadcast content, it turned to social media to address those concerns. Instead of dialing in to a call center to report the offenses, citizens can post to social channels, where a CRTC representative takes a proactive approach to responding to the complaints.

## 2. U.S. Department of State

**Problem:** Citizen passport questions

When the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs wanted to streamline how it responded to citizen passport questions, it turned to social media. Sharing information on a wider scale helps embassies keep policy information current.

## 3. Kansas City 311

**Problem:** Government and non-emergency reports

Kansas City established a 311 call center in 2007 that handles about 10,000 calls per week related to non-emergency concerns like trash collection, potholes, damaged sidewalks, and more.<sup>22</sup> The center now captures resident complaints via the internet, mobile apps, and social media. Residents can track requests on a map and look up the remediation status online.

## 4. Transportation Security Administration (TSA)

**Problem:** Unauthorized carry-on items

The Transportation Security Administration uses Instagram to showcase some of the strangest items people try to bring through security. The Instagram account helps humanize TSA agents and also reinforces what's not allowed on airplanes. It attracted more than 72,000 followers in the first year it was used.<sup>23</sup>

## What's getting in the way of the social government?



### Budget

Aging populations, entitlement spending, and budget shortfalls are putting a strain on the public sector's financial and personnel resources. President Trump proposed \$54 billion in cuts for most federal agencies.<sup>24</sup> Efforts to consolidate services are prompting departments to look at enterprise technology to benefit government users on a wider scale. Also trending is the reallocation of funding from traditional media to social media for cost-effective, targeted messaging.



### Resource shortages

As social adoption rises, so does the number of accounts and interactions that must be monitored, filtered, routed, and responded to. Relying on a single department to manage this without enterprise-strength social media management software is unrealistic and can result in delayed responses, missed opportunities for engagement, poor service delivery, and a negative citizen experience.



### Skills gap

A technology talent gap in the public sector puts IT transformation and digital optimization at risk. For instance, despite President Trump's technology initiatives, government agencies are struggling to hire and retain skilled people to make change happen. A mere 38 percent of government officials believe they have the leadership skills to succeed in social activities, while only 33 percent feel they have the resources to obtain the skills.<sup>25</sup>



# Getting it right: Proving the value of social

## Simplified social outreach

Social engagement can be used to enhance agency outreach by delivering a unified communications strategy that's on-brand and consistent.

A single platform for managing social media can centralize social outreach and engagement at the state and federal levels for efficiency and ease of procurement. It can also empower teams at local and department levels to maintain their brand voices. Automation features that allow users to schedule social posts help keep engagement flowing with less time invested in the process.

## Consolidated social monitoring

Social listening helps agencies learn what's on the minds of constituents. Likes, dislikes, and concerns are posted in real time, giving governments insight into relevant discussions. Listening to these conversations sets up agencies to respond to messages, brand mentions, and comments across all social channels, helping them resolve problems and maintain brand reputation.

## Solid metrics to prove value

Measurement of success is key to proving the value of social and increasing budget for social initiatives.

To measure success, agencies need to start by defining what success means to them. Hootsuite defines social media ROI as "the sum of all social media actions that create value."<sup>26</sup> Activities on social media that create value for governments might fall under categories such as citizen engagement, brand perception, citizen experience, recruitment, and security and risk mitigation.

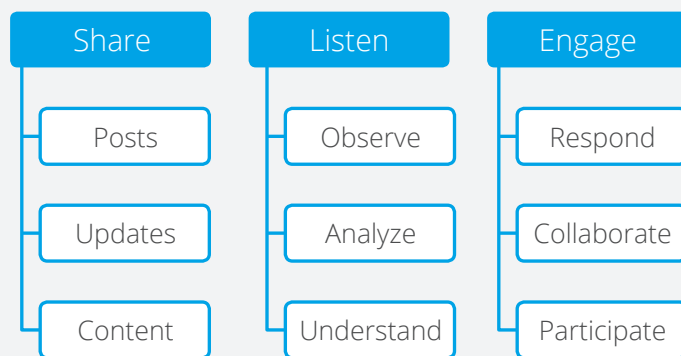
Hootsuite's Digital Maturity Assessment reveals that the most digitally mature government organizations—those at the Integrated stage of maturity—prioritize (1) brand protection and risk mitigation, and (2) customer satisfaction, as key social media objectives. With a well-established definition of success in place, agencies can use social media management software to measure and demonstrate progress toward program objectives.

## Security and process

Few things can be more damaging to perception of a brand than a negative social post that turns viral. A centralized social media management platform makes it easy to recognize and address potentially damaging social content. Staff access can be managed

across departments with secure logins, publishing approval workflows, and flexible permission levels. This allows for consistency across departments, agencies, and locations, and ensures that posts are reviewed, approved, and compliant.

## Engaging with citizens: A multilayered approach



## Bringing the value of social government to the surface

- **Advance public sector missions:** An effective social media campaign to communicate the goals and benefits of government initiatives can help get constituents advocating on your behalf. Social conversations on Twitter and Facebook, viral videos on YouTube, and image shares on sites like Pinterest and Instagram all help drive awareness of—and engagement with—government causes. A social media management platform can provide enterprise-strength social media capability in an affordable solution to advance these initiatives.
- **Streamline agency operations:** Social media management tools can speed government response to emergencies to safeguard constituents and communicate in a timely manner. Governments can post emergency alerts and instant updates across several social channels from a single dashboard while monitoring responses and inbound communications.
- **Reduce costs of citizen outreach:** A shared platform for social media campaigns can unify and speed social interactions, reducing redundancies and making information more transparent and available for citizen and inter-agency consumption.

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## Conclusion

Government social media use satisfies citizen demand for real-time information, makes citizen engagement easier, and streamlines government operations. Using social media, governments can control costs, increase transparency, earn greater public trust, and create positive public sentiment.

Effective social outreach requires that government users listen as much as they post, and that they respond quickly to comments and mentions. Investing in a citizen engagement platform (such as Hootsuite) to streamline and coordinate social media across departments and agencies is a critical step in ensuring successful social media adoption that delivers real value to government.

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# About Hootsuite for Government

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation



Hootsuite is the most widely used platform for managing social media, loved by over 15 million people around the globe and trusted by more than 800 of the Fortune 1000. Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era and scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and regions. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of social networks complemented by 250+ business applications and integrations, allowing organizations to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

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