

'Liked':

Social media integral to agency communications

By Regina Galvin, Office of Corporate Communications

IN THE "OLD DAYS," COMMUNICATION BETWEEN government agencies and the public was primarily one way – public affairs professionals disseminated information, and the public received it.

The old days are gone.

Today, via social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, agencies, including the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, actively engage their stakeholders and the general public. Comments, "likes," "dislikes" and "shares" are now part of the social media dialog agencies have with the public.

In fact, nearly every U.S. federal agency and all of the U.S. armed forces have embraced at least one social technology platform, according to HootSuite, a social media management site.

As of May 2013, 72 percent of online adults were social networking site users – up from 8 percent in 2005, according to the Pew Research Center, a Washington, D.C., think tank. And in a 2010 study, Pew found that 30 percent of online adults used some sort of social platform to learn about government activities.

More and more, communicators at government agencies know that to reach the public, they must use the media the public uses. And there lies the dilemma for the agencies comprising the U.S. intelligence community.

Within the IC, security considerations are heightened, and social media activity varies from agency to agency. However, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence is on social media's cutting edge with a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and Tumblr.

"Over the last year, we've adopted new procedures that make social media an implicit and vital part of every major ODNI external communications effort," said Shawn Turner, ODNI's public affairs director. "Social media engagement is no longer a special case for ODNI – it's standard operating procedure."

NGA has an active social media presence on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and has established a more limited presence for possible future development on other sites, like Google Plus. Similarly, the Defense Intelligence Agency actively uses Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. The National Security Agency has focused their social media efforts on a recruiting Twitter account and Facebook page and a page for their National Cryptologic Museum, according to its public affairs office.

The use of social media by individual employees within the IC varies as much as the agencies, themselves. Zina Henshaw, for example, is an NGA employee who has never visited the NGA Facebook site.

"I don't like Facebook or Twitter," said Henshaw. "I was in the Navy for 21 years doing cryptology. You just didn't talk about things."

But more and more people in the intelligence community are using social media, including NGA Chief Operating Officer Ellen McCarthy.

"The U.S. government is committed to operational transparency, and the long-standing Department of Defense policy is to make accurate and timely information available to the public," said McCarthy. "Social media is a very effective tool for meeting these obligations."

Equally important, social media allows NGA and the public to engage in a two-way conversation, which promotes accountability and allows us to receive feedback."

As NGA and the IC grow their social media presence, the balance comes in deciding what to post and what to protect, said Christine Phillips, NGA's chief of News and Information within the Office of Corporate Communications. She and her team manage NGA's various social media sites with help from others within OCC.

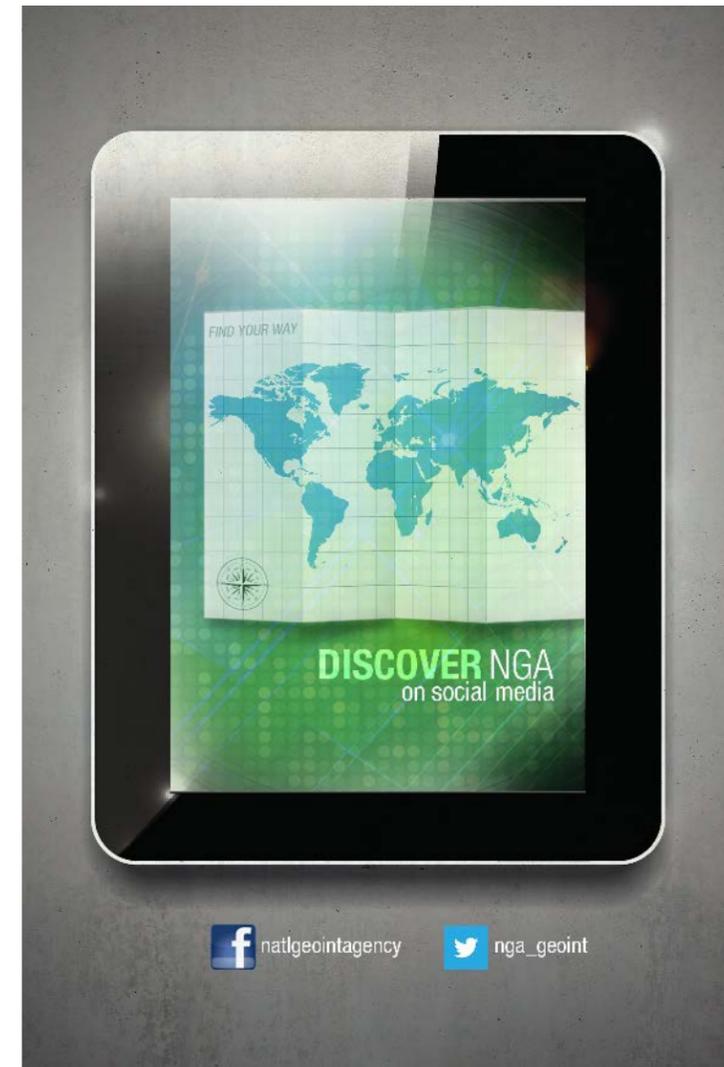
"We work closely with others around the agency to find ways to highlight the important work NGA does, without giving our adversaries information they can use," said Phillips. "There will always be a security concern, and we take that very seriously. But we must communicate with the taxpayers who pay our salaries and fund our programs if we want them to understand what we do and why it matters, and social media is increasingly where they go for information."

Security concerns should be important to any social media user, and operational concerns are added factors for government employees, said Air Force Capt. Shawn West, NGA cyber defense watch officer.

"It's not wrong to use social media sites," said West. "Users just need to be cognizant of the things they post, links they click and files they download."

Users should carefully consider their privacy settings and check them frequently to ensure the site has not made changes that caused them to change, said Phillips. They should also consider how information they post could be used to cause harm and avoid posting too much information. For example, it's a bad idea to post detailed vacation plans, as doing so informs would-be intruders that your home will be unattended.

"Post the vacation photos after you get home," said Phillips. ✨



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