

Introduction to Social Media

What is social media?

Many people are using the term "social media," and it means different things to different people. We will use the meaning from Wikipedia:

"Social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. The term refers to the use of Web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue."

Two things make social media different from other material on the Web: it involves two or more people and usually includes some form of talking. For this module, social media will include:

- forums and message boards
- chat rooms
- blogs
- social networking web sites (Facebook, MySpace, etc.)
- Twitter
- Apps

Be careful

With all that social media offers, there are some risks, such as in the areas of security and privacy. You need to look at both risks and benefits.

Legal concerns

Before starting any social media service, think about possible legal issues. Get legal advice about the laws in your country. Study how others have set up policies that limit the control you have over the information being posted. Ask about what you need to put on your Web site to lessen your risk.

Privacy issues

Some social media sites may allow only people who register to look at what others have said and to add messages. Other sites can be read by anyone but only those who are registered can take part in discussions. Some sites may be open to all. It is important for a CIS setting up a social media service to make it clear to users who will be able to see their posts, and to remind them that they may not want to give out information that tells others who they are. You need to have a clear statement on your social media site about privacy.

It's good practice to have a section of your social media site that talks about terms and conditions and that asks users not to post personal details about themselves, but rather to use an alias or "nick name." You'll need to keep all personal details of your administrative system for the social media site stored securely in line with local data protection/privacy laws.

How will everything work together?

As you start thinking about adding social media to your communications program, you need to plan how it will fit in with your other programs. Think about:

- your main goals for using different social media channels
- what they will add, and
- what resources you will need to develop, moderate, and maintain your social media

It is especially helpful to add social media to your strategic plan, defining your objectives and purposes for using it and thinking through *in advance* how you will deal with various problems.

It's exciting to use new technology for cancer information and support, but only if it will add benefit to your program or your audiences. Social media will be only one part of a communication program for a CIS that could include information web sites, or telephone and e-mail services.

In deciding if and how you are going to add social media to your CIS, you will need to think about:

- what social media adds to your present services
- whether your staff/volunteers will work on the new channels or if a new team will be needed
- how your present services will work with the new channels to provide a full service
- what resources—funding, staff, time—will be needed to run the new channel over time
- which new channels fit best within your service and which would be better suited to publicizing existing services
- how the new channels fit with your present ones, including formats and quality monitoring
- how to coordinate this new service across your organization

Which social media to use

Social media channels give us exciting new ways to engage and connect with people. Each channel has different strengths and weaknesses. You need to study them carefully. For example, understand the amount of text you can use on the channel and the people who use it. You may feel that 140 characters, when using Twitter, is not enough to answer complex medical questions, but that you could use this channel for getting people to know about your service.

Social networking sites may not be the best place to talk about confidential medical problems, but they could be good for publicizing your organization and bringing new users to your services.

The following sections deal with all the issues described above in more detail. The ICISG Tool Box also includes samples of social media being used and lessons we have learned.