

Service Contractor

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Social Media and the Government

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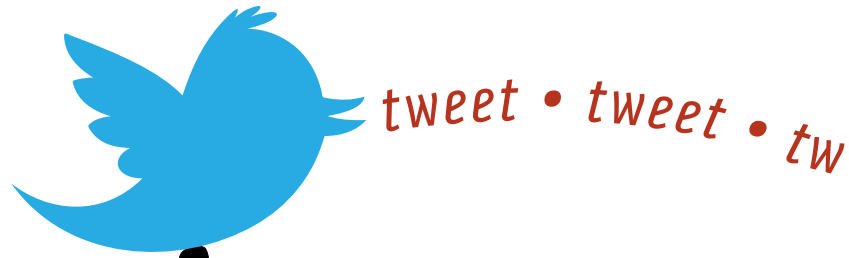
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Social Media Use EXPAN

Agencies, Contractors
Show Different Priorities



by **Monica Mayk Parham**
Market Connections, Inc.



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Obstacles to federal employees' use of social media for work are declining. According to Market Connections Inc.'s new Public Sector Social Media Study released Oct. 18, just 19 percent of agencies surveyed reported they ban access to some or all social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, down sharply from 2010, when 55 percent of agencies banned access.

With use becoming more ubiquitous and accepted across the government, vendors need to know the right ways to engage with their federal agency customers.

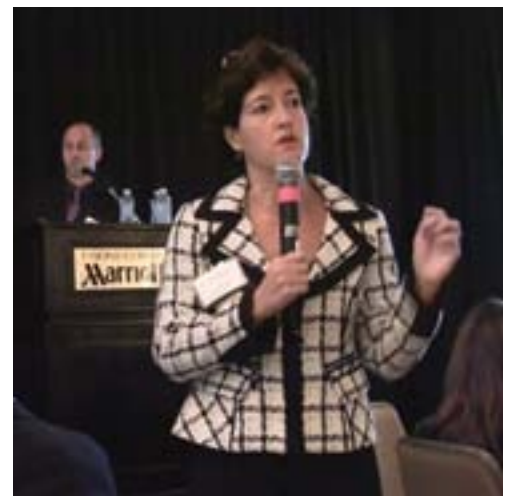
The study found that federal employees are using social media to inform decision making, educate the public, access information and increase collaboration, but generally do not want contractors to use networks as a means of pitching products or services. By contrast, contractors view the important benefits of social media as tools for marketing, the promotion of thought leadership and increased collaboration.

Further, blogs are the No. 1 social media type federal agencies turn to for information, with 35 percent of respondents saying that they use blogs to inform decision making. Non-government specific social networks came second at 24 percent. Surprisingly, video did not even rank in the top five. While 56 percent of contractors said they were using blogs for promotion, 53 percent said they were using video.

Additionally, growth in the use of mobile devices to stay connected is expanding the use of social media, which in turn will affect the form and content of information on the Internet.

"We are seeing mobile usage driving social media," said Lisa Dezzutti, president and founder of Market Connections, during the Oct. 18 release briefing. "There are implications for us as marketers in terms of how we're delivering content. . . . Is it mobile-friendly? A 500-word blog post isn't necessarily something people are going to want to read on their phones."





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Lisa Dezzutti, President & CEO of Market Connections Inc., addresses contractors at the Oct. 18 event releasing the new report.

Photo courtesy of Market Connections.

Sites Used Most During the Past Month

| | 2010 Federal Govt | 2011 Federal Govt | 2011 Contractors |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|  | 72% | 86% | 88% |
|  | 61% | 80% | 87% |
|  | 32% | 70% | 93% |
|  | 30% | 55% | 70% |

Federal agencies saw a significant year-over-year increase in the use of all social media sites, with LinkedIn realizing the largest growth, while the contracting community continues to use all social media at higher rates.

Social media in general saw significant increases in both public sector and contractor use, and government agencies are beginning to narrow the gap between themselves and contractors using social media. LinkedIn and Twitter showed the biggest gain among social media sites being used by federal respondents—LinkedIn grew from 32 percent using it in 2010 to 70 percent this year, while Twitter increased from 30 percent last year to 55 percent this year. Facebook and YouTube continue to grow in popularity as well. Last year, 72 percent of federal respondents said they use Facebook, growing to 86 percent this year, while YouTube increased from 61 percent last year to 80 percent this year.

While all social media sites saw big gains in usage, government-specific sites such as GovLoop and GovTwit grew significantly; 35 percent of government respondents said they use GovLoop, up from just 11 percent last year, while GovTwit grew from 5 percent in 2010 to 30 percent this year. Roughly 30 percent of federal respondents reported using additional government-specific social media sites GSAInteract, GovWin and TFCN, which were not measured in 2010.

Another sign of increased acceptance of social media sites: In this year's study, 37 percent of federal government respondents said they are permitted to use social media as representatives of their agency, versus just 9 percent last year. Conversely, only 13 percent said this year they are not allowed to use social media as representatives of their organization, a significant drop from the 46 percent who said last year they could not.



No one social media tool stands alone; marketing and communications campaigns need to be integrated across all these tools, just as with traditional media channels.

Dezzutti emphasized the need to consider all these tools together, not as individual channels. “You’ve got to look at the bigger picture,” she said. “How are you linking them, integrating them, making them work together?” Other key takeaways included:

- Leverage where and how social media is being used. “Social media has become integrated into the fabric of our lives, both personally and professionally,” Dezzutti said. “Personal versus professional use is not the question. People are using it. You have to be where they are.”
- Focus your efforts. Build presence in a few key areas and execute well.
- Have clear objectives for implementation and a plan for measuring ROI. “Know what you’re trying to accomplish. It doesn’t have to be complex to be measurable,” said Dezzutti.
- Promote your success stories, even if only internally, to help build the business case and maintain momentum around social media.

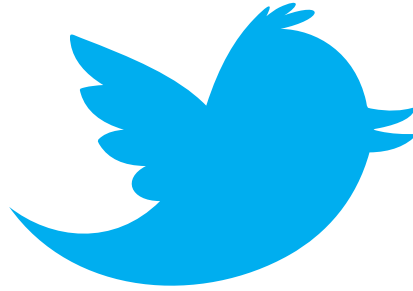
Strategic Communications Group (Strategic), a public relations firm specializing in the use of social media, collaborated with Market Connections on the study. Marc Hausman, Strategic’s president and CEO, said, “The findings of the survey show how vital it is for government agencies to use social media wisely. Companies looking

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to serve government customers need to understand how to deliver value to their social media audiences and achieve return on their marketing investment. This study is a good foundation for identifying how to do so.”

A panel of government and industry experts—people with hands-on experience implementing and managing social media programs—spoke about what they have learned about using social media in the public sector market.

“A lot of superiors may come to you and say they want to do [social media],” said Steve Lunceford, senior manager at Deloitte.



three pinned down, then you pick the tools,” Caulfield said. “We had to fully evolve all those other channels and tools because we might decide a blog wasn’t the tool of choice.”

Even the Department of Defense, which has different needs and limitations than civilian agencies, sees social media as a way to reach the public with more information less influenced by mainstream media editing.

“This is a new environment in which we need to learn to live,” said Jack Holt, former senior strategist for emerging media at DoD and now director for policy analysis at Blue Ridge Information Systems. “We had very little share-of-voice.”

Market Connections released a case study resulting from an in-depth-interview with Holt covering how the DoD used social media tools like YouTube to reach bloggers and push out what the DoD considered more factual information about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq than traditional media’s coverage of events.

“Bloggers showed up and asked questions that were very well thought out, very well researched. They had listened to the press and all of the other questions officers had been asked. The information that we put into the public debate through those blogger’s roundtables, we believe, over time changed the dynamic between the military and the public,” Holt said.

Social media presents challenges to government contractors, too, said Meredith Lawrence, director of U.S. federal marketing for Polycom. In a large company such as hers, first she had to convince corporate marketing that social media needs to be in the mix, and then she had to explain “why we needed a unique federal one. You can’t just do a find-and-replace for ‘enterprise’ to ‘agency.’”

The DoD case study and one on GSA’s experience setting up GSAInteract, along with an executive summary and report overview, are available online at www.marketconnectionsinc.com/socialmedia.

Monica Mayk Parham is marketing director for Market Connections Inc., a firm offering market research services in the areas of federal, state and local governments; information technology and telecommunications; education; healthcare; and associations and non-profits. For more information, please visit: www.marketconnectionsinc.com.



As familiarity grows with all social media tools, federal agencies and contractors alike are easing restrictions, allowing employees to use social media as representatives of their organizations.

“As marketers your first response should be to push back and say why, because it has to fit into an integrated strategy.”

D.J. Caulfield, GSA branch chief in the Office of Customer Accounts and Research, Communications and Portal Services, agreed with Lunceford: “We came to realize early on, this is not a back-of-the-envelope kind of implementation,” Caulfield said. When agency leadership asked in early 2009 about creating a blog, rather than simply doing that, the project leaders developed a methodology.

“Who are the people you want to talk with—the target audience; what objectives—what do you want to achieve; and how are you going to get there? Once you have those