

A PIO's Guide to Social Media Strategy, Engagement, and Compliance





Introduction

Gloria stares at the blinking cursor on her screen. She re-reads the sentence she just wrote.

“Farmer’s Market today from 8 – 2. Stop by!”

Facebook’s blue Post button tries to intimidate her, and it’s working. Gloria began managing the town’s social media accounts six weeks ago. Since then, its Facebook followers have only increased by four — one of which is her best friend who lives in a different state but has always supported her career in local government.

With a silent wish that this post finally surpasses ten likes, she clicks Post.

Three hours later, the post has three likes and an unrelated comment from an angry resident complaining about a pothole on his street.

Gloria feels defeated. What is the secret to social media engagement in local government?

She gets the basics. Tweets must be 280 characters, Instagram requires photos — and, okay, Snapchat is a mystery she won’t solve, but why aren’t residents excited to like, share, comment, and retweet her content?

Gloria’s challenge is one that many public communicators face. Beyond the basic tenets of social media management, there are challenges in using this medium — one leveraged by everyone from teens to seniors and startups to mega brands — to foster a culture of engagement, appreciation, and trust in the public sector.

No matter where you are in your experience with social media, evolving trends and platform enhancements make it critical to continually reflect on best practices and pivot your strategy to ensure you reach your community with meaningful and likeworthy content. It is equally crucial to ensure you follow open records laws when archiving your social content (yes, social posts can also be subject to open records requests).

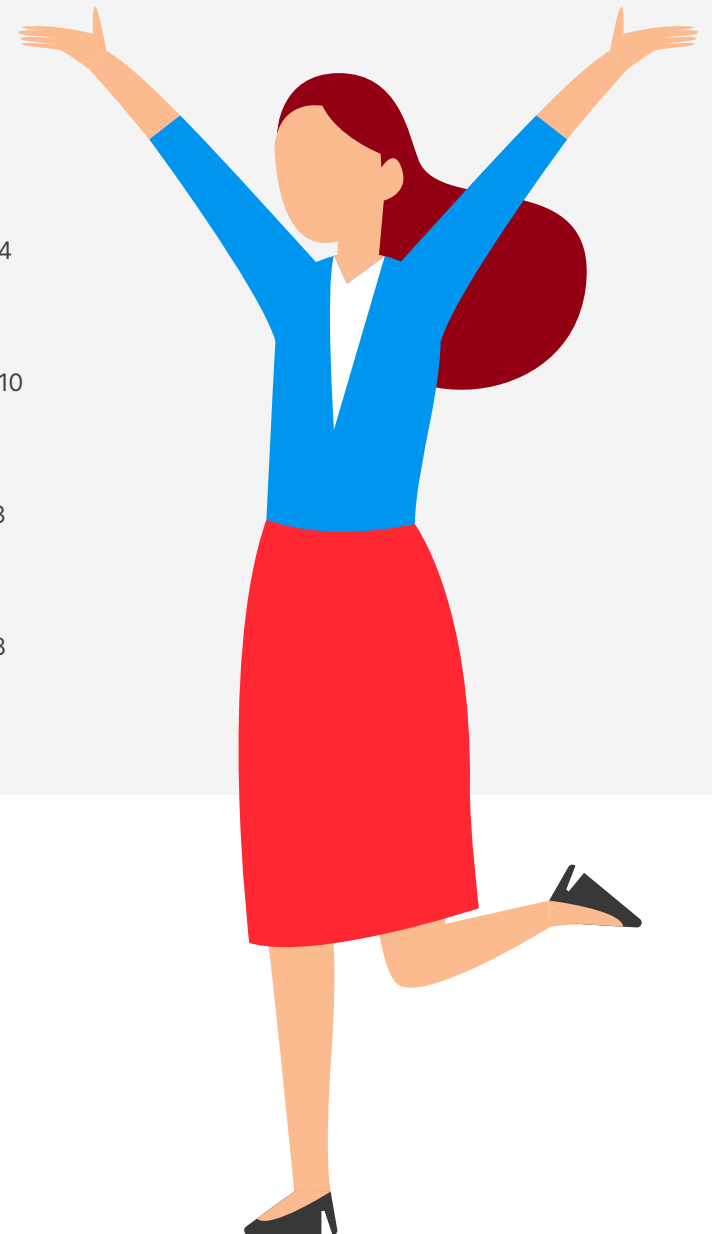
CivicPlus® designed this eBook to help public sector communicators reflect on and strengthen their social media strategy, and create content that engages, fosters social dialogue focused on positivity, and complies with retention requirements.





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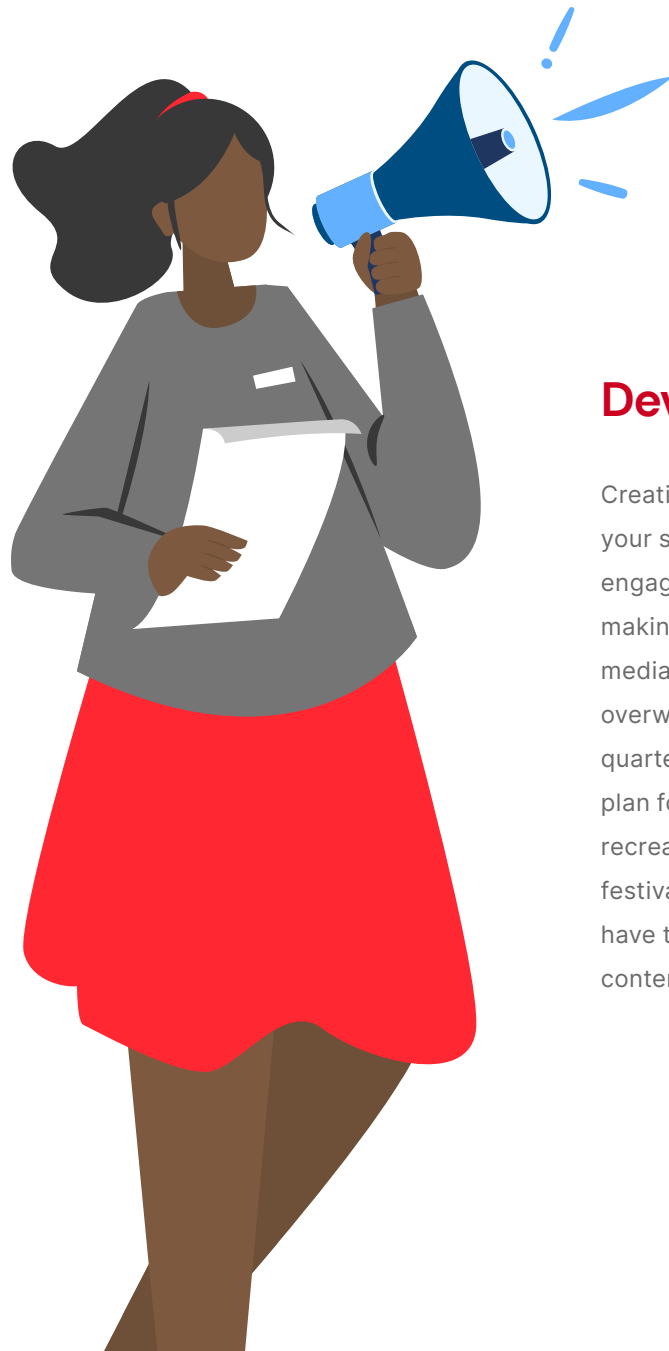
Part I: Strategy

The social media strategy for a public sector entity must be inherently different from that of a retail brand. What follows are the steps you should take to craft a plan unique to your community.



Define Your Target Audience

Who are you trying to reach with your social media content? Are you targeting young adults, families with children, or seniors? The answer should be everyone, which means your content strategy needs to be varied enough to account for the types of news, information, resources, and instructions that matter to all these individuals and what they expect from their local leaders, which leads us to content.



Develop a Content Strategy

Creating a content strategy is vital to ensuring your social media content is relevant and engaging to your target audience. Consider making a content calendar to plan your social media posts. This process doesn't have to feel overwhelming. Commit to building content one quarter at a time. It's long enough that you can plan for important events like council meetings, recreation league tournaments, and heritage festivals but not so overwhelming that if you have to change your planned cadence or content mid-year, you've lost hours of work.

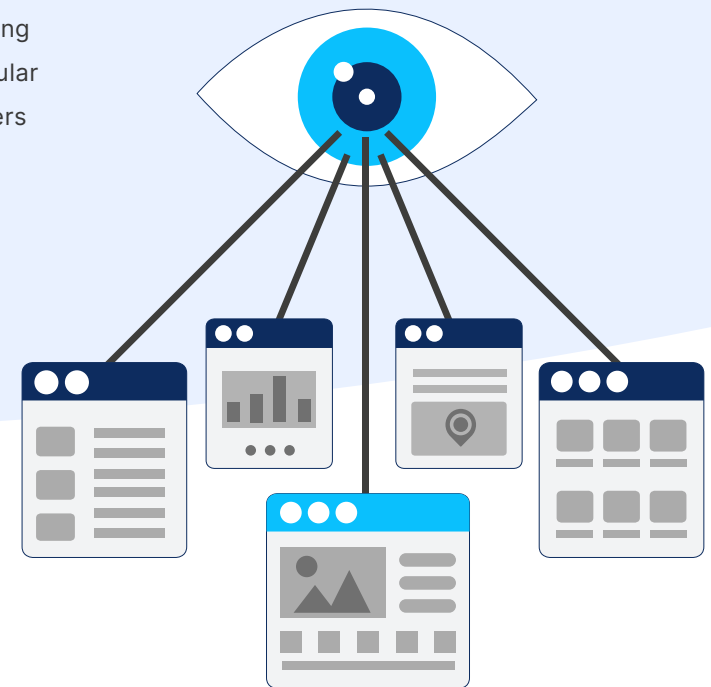
As noted earlier, when developing your content strategy, consider the types of content that will resonate with your audience. For example, to engage families with children, you may want to share information about local parks and playgrounds or family-friendly events in the area. To engage seniors, you may share information about health and wellness programs or community events geared toward older adults.



Use Visuals to Enhance Your Content

Visual content is a powerful tool for increasing engagement on social media. Your community is a beautiful place, so show it off. Use images and videos to enhance your social media content and make it more engaging. People are more likely to engage with content that includes visuals, so consider using photos, videos, or infographics to convey important information. When using visuals, it is vital to ensure they are high-quality and

relevant to your content. Use images and videos that are clear, well-lit, and visually appealing to capture your audience's attention. If photography is not one of your strengths, consider working with a local student intern or asking for regular photo submissions from community members who think of themselves as photography hobbyists — which leads us to the value of user-generated content.



Encourage User-Generated Content

Encourage members of your community to share their own experiences and stories related to your local government initiatives. For example, if you are promoting a local park, encourage community members to share photos of their family enjoying the park or their favorite memories. When the content owners see their pictures and memories on their community's

social media accounts, they will likely share the post with their followers, amplifying your message's reach and introducing your account to potential new followers. User-generated content increases engagement and helps build a sense of community and belonging among your audience.



Use Hashtags to Increase Visibility

For Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, hashtags are a powerful tool for increasing the visibility of your social media content. Use hashtags relevant to your content and your audience to expand the reach of your posts. Consider creating a branded hashtag for your local government initiatives to make it easier for community members to find and engage with your content, for example, “CommunityNameStrawberryFestival” or “LiveLoveCommunityName.”

When using hashtags, avoid using too many or using irrelevant hashtags. For example, generic hashtags like #Fun, #Family, and #SunnyDay likely won’t make an impact in reaching new community members. However, the name of your local park could give relevant posts an ample boost.

What Are Hashtags?

A hashtag is a keyword or phrase preceded by the hash symbol (#), written within a post or comment on certain social media platforms to highlight it and facilitate a search for it. By including hashtags in your post, it can be indexed by the social network so that it can be discoverable to everyone, even if they’re not existing followers.





Engage With Your Audience

Engaging with your audience is essential to building a successful social media presence. Respond to comments and messages promptly and use social media to build relationships with your community members. Consider hosting question-and-answer sessions or live events to allow your audience to ask questions and engage with local government initiatives. By engaging on social media, you demonstrate to community members that their community leaders are responsive and that they care about individual residents' needs, concerns, comments, and questions.

Monitor Your Analytics

Optimizing your social media engagement is critical to seeing the type of improvement that social media managers crave. Reviewing clicks, posts, reach, likes, shares, and other data points can help you adjust your strategy to improve engagement results. For example, if you find that your best-performing video posts are those in which your community leaders provide updates, comments, and information as short video messages, that indicates that you can boost some lower-performing posts by using more video.



Part II: Engagement





12 Tips for Creating a Thriving Online Community Using Social Media

Some of these tips are practical, while others will challenge your creativity. All of them, however, will help contribute toward creating and maintaining a thriving online community that is better connected and informed.

1. Share Fun and Informative Things

Remember, not everything you share needs to be serious — have some fun with your social media output and try to share entertaining and informative messages. If you want to see your post like and share reach epic proportions, consider asking your local firefighters to show off their skills with the latest dance challenge.

2. Share Activities and Class Registration Details

Every time your parks and recreation department opens a new class, course, or league for registration, promote it via all your social media channels to reach as many people as possible. Include a link to register online directly using your recreation management software.

3. Encourage Participation in Town Halls and Council Meetings

Leverage your social media accounts to inform residents about upcoming town halls and council meetings and encourage more attendance.

4. Share Video of Important Events

Record portions of important community events and share the footage to create greater resident cohesion and engagement. Remember, a picture tells a thousand words, so imagine how much you can communicate with a video.

5. Share Local Articles and Blog Posts

Keep residents well-informed by regularly sharing stories of interest published on your local government website.

6. Create Bios for Public Facing Community Leaders

If you haven't done so already, you should create bios for your community leaders and promote them individually via social media.



What Is Facebook Events?

Facebook Events is a tool that allows users and business pages to create dedicated landing pages for their events. On each of your event pages, your audience can learn more, RSVP, and interact with your profile and other guests. The tool empowers you to:

- Offer more opportunities for your audience to engage with your brand, virtually and in person
- Obtain a headcount estimation
- Increase your events' visibility
- Achieve better turnouts by keeping your guest lists engaged
- Sell tickets

7. Create Facebook Event Pages for One-Off Events

For individual community events and one-offs, create an event page to promote the occasion and allow residents to RSVP that they will be attending.

8. Consider Paid Ads for Important Community Events, Classes, and Courses

Consider paid Facebook advertising to promote your most important community events, classes, or courses, especially those that are revenue generators for your community.

9. Share Your Best Photos on Instagram

Instagram is an impactful way to engage with younger community members. Use it to upload photos taken at recreation events in your community. Use hashtags and add location identification tags for your community facilities like you would on Twitter. Encourage those who attend events to tag your community profile to increase shares and followers.

10. Expand Your Social Platform Strategy to Include YouTube

Once you have a strategy to create and produce quality video content, consider adding a YouTube channel to your social plan. YouTube has a diverse demographic within its subscriber base, including the 65+ age group. The searchable nature of this platform ensures your content reaches your target audience. Use key search terms in your video post title and description to help amplify the reach of your social video content.

11. Get Feedback With Facebook Polls

Solicit feedback using Facebook polls. Ask community members what classes and events they'd like to see offered in the future using an easy-to-manage Facebook poll.

12. Stream Key Community Events on Facebook Live

Use Facebook Live to stream live footage of key community events, like the final five minutes of the junior basketball league play-offs or part of a demonstration of glass blowing from one of your art classes.



Part III:

Creating a Social Culture of Positivity

Social media platforms empower people to share their most important life moments. Unfortunately, they also give people a platform to gripe, vent, and complain. As a social media and communications manager, you must always leverage your conflict resolution skills to address negativity. Still, you can also build a social strategy that elevates the positives and ensures your profiles focuses on content that brings value and smiles to followers.

Community program successes, employee milestones, and local humor all have a place on your social media pages. Sharing these positive stories about your community can build trust and give community members more insight into your achievements. And if you do it right, you will boost your engagement rates, improving the reach of those emergency messages you want everyone to read. If you'd like ideas about what kinds of positive stories to post for your agency, get inspired by the following examples.



Example 1: Celebrating Employees' Hard Work

An Oregon school district highlights its employees' hard work on its social media pages. They regularly use Facebook to highlight what teachers are doing in the classroom. Recently, one of their counselors collected student artwork and published an online "zine" to celebrate Pride Week and showcase student talent. The school district posted the link to the zine and some images of the art inside, giving credit to the counselor for his idea and the students for their contributions. Sometimes civil service feels like all criticism and no praise, as controversial stories are likelier to make the news. Public agencies and school districts give employees positive

recognition by sharing their accomplishments and milestones on social media. These posts also humanize governments. Community members gain more insight into the people who keep governments running, which can increase their trust in the institutions themselves.

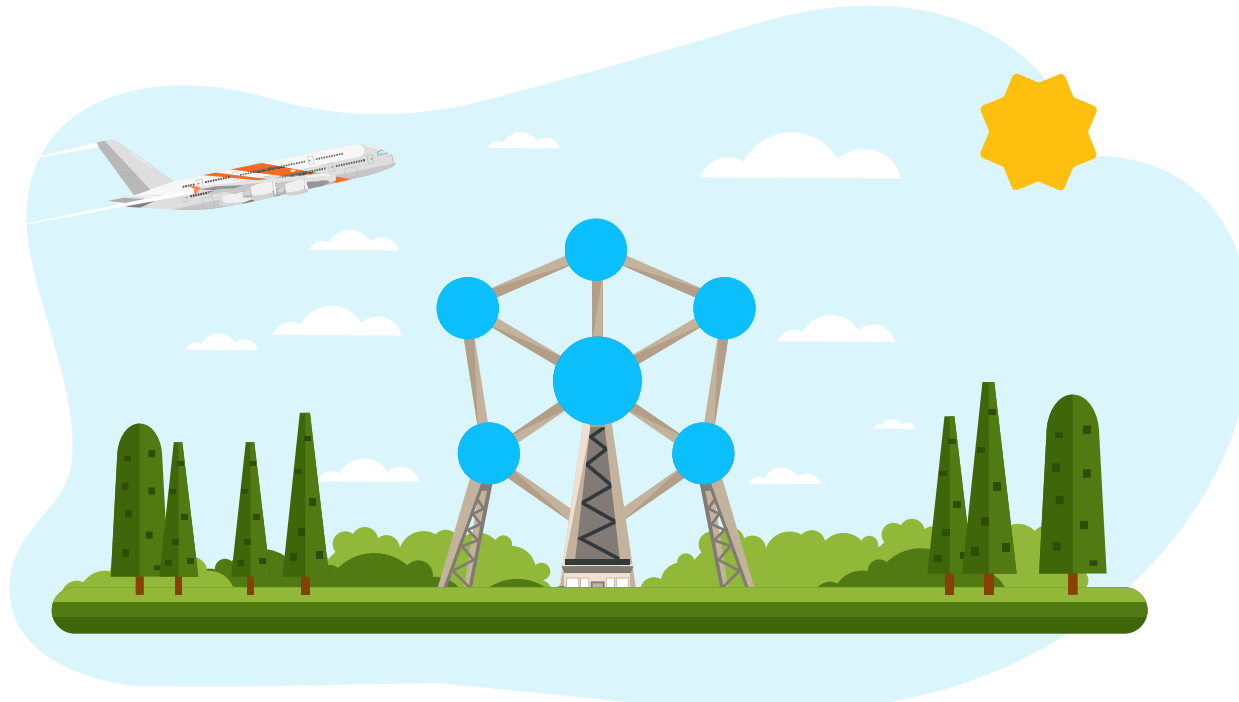




Example 2: Promoting Programs and Sharing Their Successes

A city-funded initiative in Florida works to improve the well-being of the city's most disadvantaged children. The city runs a Facebook page to publicize and promote programs supported by the initiative. Using this page, they can promote related events, advertise free resources, and share success stories with the community. For instance, the organization often shares posts from a non-profit group that teaches students business skills and entrepreneurship.

When the city shares stories of the organization's events and sales, they do more than raise awareness. Showing residents how tax dollars make a positive impact helps the city to build trust with their community. They can also further the success of the programs they've invested in by promoting them online.



Example 3: **Share Can't-Miss Attractions**

A community in Illinois is known for its larger-than-life tourist attractions. People come from all over the country to experience the community's unique offerings. The community showcases its impressive landmarks on social media. The content aims to share what makes the town unique to attract visitors and support local businesses.

Advertising your locality's best features through photos can help increase tourism from people far away and closer to home. Sometimes even your residents don't know how beautiful local parks and buildings are until you show them.



Example 4: Photograph Unique Local Events

Photographs are essential for events as well as landmarks. While most communicators know to announce events with dates and times, a picture is significantly more impactful. Help your community members see what an event is like and picture themselves enjoying the fun. If your event goes on for more than a day, take pictures on the first day and share them. If your event is annual, post pictures from last year's festivities. One city's transit authority knows that promoting local events with photos on social media is an impactful way to increase interest and boost attendance. Every year for 30 years, the transit authority

has run its Holiday Train and Bus. The six-car Holiday Train and Bus are staffed by Santa's Elves and decked out for the holiday season with lights and decorations. Most importantly, Santa is onboard, ready to give gifts to the city's youngest commuters. The agency publishes the schedule online, but the essential part of its event promotion is all the photos it shares on social media. The festive colored lights and happy kids make for the best advertising.





Part IV:

Social Media Archiving Compliance

In addition to improving reach and engagement, local government public information officers must also be aware of the legal requirements surrounding social media archiving. Public officials must maintain accurate and complete records of all communications related to government business, including social media posts.

Social media posts can be considered public records subject to open records laws. It is critical for public information officers to be aware of these requirements and to take steps to ensure that their social media content is appropriately archived and retained.



Why Archive Social Media Posts?

First and foremost, archiving social media content ensures compliance with open records laws. Public officials can demonstrate transparency and accountability in government operations by retaining social media posts. Archiving social media content also helps to preserve a historical record of government activities. Social media posts can provide valuable insight into the decision-making process and government officials' priorities over time. Public officials can also ensure that future generations can access this information by retaining these records.

Finally, archiving social media content can help to protect against legal liability. Social media posts can be used as evidence in legal proceedings. Public officials can demonstrate that they have fulfilled their legal obligations and taken appropriate steps to maintain accurate and complete records by retaining these records.





How to Archive Social Media Posts

There are several methods for archiving social media posts, and public information officers should choose the plan that best meets their needs and resources. Here are a few options to consider:



Manual Archiving

A straightforward method for archiving social media content is manually saving each post as it is published. This method requires significant time and effort, but it may be appropriate for smaller entities with more hands-on workflows.

To manually archive social media posts, public officials can use the built-in tools provided by each platform to save posts as screenshots or PDFs. They can then store these records securely, such as in a shared drive or cloud-based storage service.



Automated Archiving

Automated archiving tools can help to simplify the process of retaining social media content. These tools automatically capture and store social media posts in a secure, searchable database, making it easy to retrieve records when needed.

These services typically offer a range of features, including compliance reporting, audit trails, and advanced search capabilities.



Hybrid Archiving

A hybrid approach combines manual and automated archiving methods to create a comprehensive records management system.

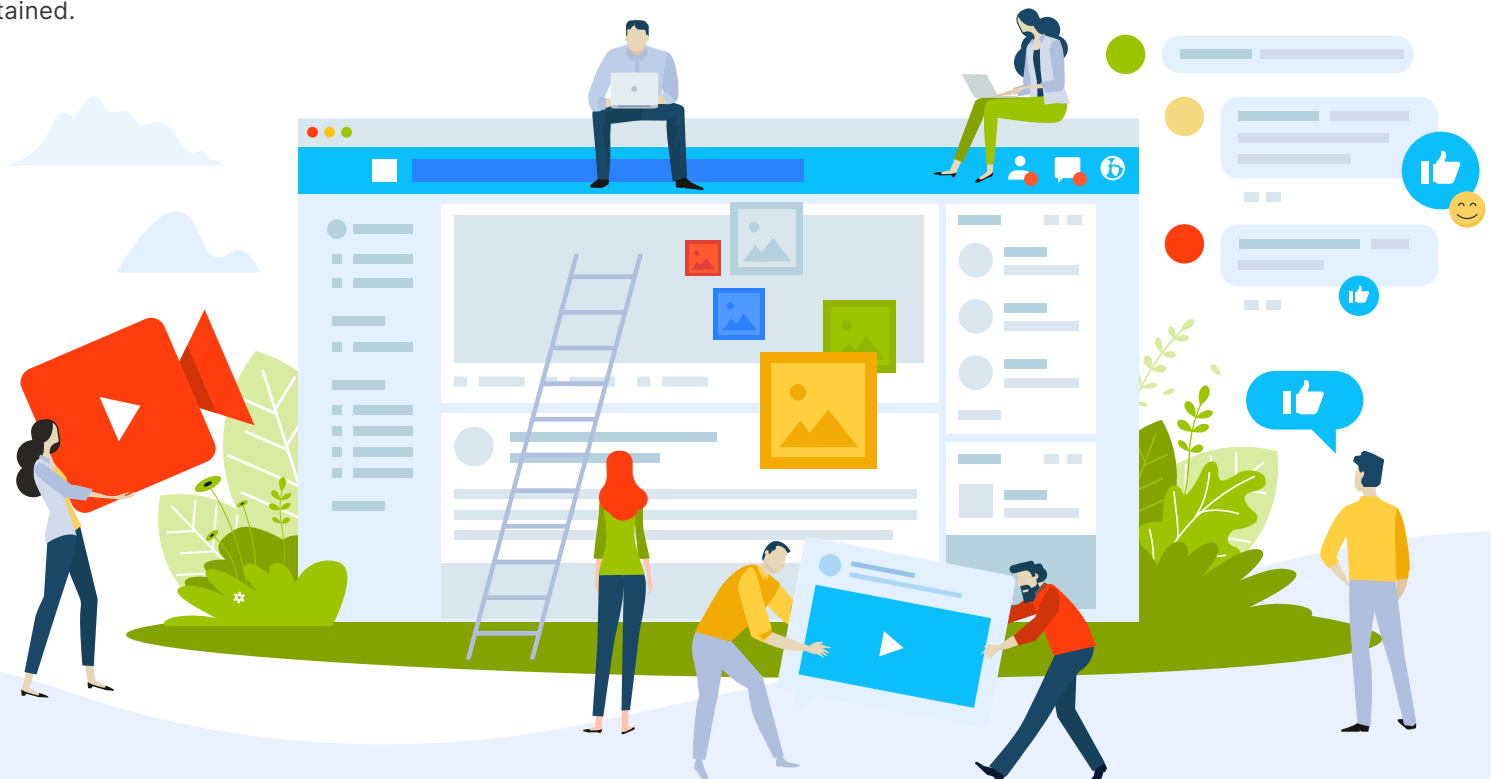
With a hybrid approach, public officials can use automated tools to capture and store social media posts and manually review and archive certain critical content.



Conclusion

In today's digital age, social media has become a foundational tool for local government public information officers to reach and engage with community members. However, public officials need to be aware of the legal requirements surrounding social media archiving and to take steps to ensure that their social media content is adequately archived and retained.

By creating a defined strategy, learning what content is most impactful to each platform, focusing on the positive, and ensuring you comply with legal regulations, you'll be well poised to start seeing a boom in social engagement. #Like.





About The Author

CivicPlus® is a technology company focused on building trust in government by fostering consistently positive digital experiences for residents and staff. With over 12,000 global customers, CivicPlus solutions are used daily by over 100,000 administrative staff members and over 340 million people in the U.S. and Canada alone. For more information, visit civicplus.com.

CivicPlus Social Media Archiving

The CivicPlus Civic Experience Platform includes a Social Media Archiving solution (formerly ArchiveSocial). It is the most reliable social media archiving solution chosen by public agencies to remain compliant with public records laws and actively manage risk online. Learn more at civicplus.com.