



Social Media Content as Government Records

How do we define social media?

Social media is generally recognised as apps and websites that enable users to create, share and comment on content quickly and in real time. The best-known examples in Australia are perhaps Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. It can also include apps with a similar function that you might use in the workplace, such as Microsoft Teams, Yammer and Slack.

Social media can make mass-communication fast and efficient; and allows government organisations to engage with their stakeholders and can give useful insights on public sentiment to help inform government decisions and public policy.

Can social media content be a government record?

Yes. The *State Records Act 2000* defines a record as 'information however recorded', therefore any business-related content created by a government organisation using social media is subject to the same recordkeeping requirements as information created by other means. Whilst some content will be ephemeral in nature, or duplicate content from elsewhere, most content will form part of the organisation's business activities and will need to be managed accordingly.

A Social Media Policy is recommended

Managing social media content can be complex. If your organisation uses social media for official communications, it should have a Social Media Policy covering how content is approved and posted to social media. Incorporating the organisation's approach to capturing and managing this content into the policy is recommended as a starting point to decide how best to manage these records.

When should social media content be captured?

When determining how content needs to be managed, consider asking yourself the following questions:

- Are you posting on behalf of the organisation?
- Does the post generate a lot of interest from the public and media?
- Does the post communicate decisions and/or commit the organisation to an action?
- Does the post seek feedback regarding organisational issues on governance, policies and procedures?
- Does the post share information that addresses issues of safety, security, etc.?
- Does the post relate to sensitive or contentious activities?
- Does the post trigger an internal process (request for information, a threat or complaint)?



If the answer is likely to be “Yes” to any of the above questions, the organisation’s social media and other information management policies should address strategies for ensuring that social media content will be captured as a government record and retained accordingly.

Capturing social media content and its context

The question of what content should be captured for social media posts to be full and accurate records, is a risk management decision. Government organisations should determine if the social media post alone is an accurate record, or if the post together with other users’ exchanges forms the most accurate record.

Content posted in response from people (and machines) outside your organisation needs to be considered. Unfortunately, this may include inappropriate, offensive or threatening content. While this type of content may be captured for evidentiary purposes, records and ICT staff should work together to ensure these records are appropriately managed.

Methods of capturing social media content as a record may vary according to the applications being used. Capturing may be as simple as saving a screenshot along with relevant details or using an automated application or external service provider to capture posts. Some social media sites allow for the download of posts that can then be captured into a records management system. Where particularly sensitive records are involved, such as inappropriate or offensive images, you may decide not to capture certain content as part of the record. In such cases the record should be accompanied by a note of your organisation’s decision to not capture certain parts of the content and why.

Retention of social media content

Leaving the content on an external social media site is not a sufficient records management strategy where your organisation has no long-term control over the platform. In worst case scenarios, information can be lost when changes are made by companies hosting social media platforms. Organisations are required to maintain social media records in a readable format and retain them for the appropriate period in accordance with their subject matter, as specified in an approved Disposal Authority.

Related advice:

Retention and Disposal of State Records - <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/retention-and-disposal-of-state-records>

For further information, contact the State Records Office via email at sro@spro.wa.gov.au .