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Use social media

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# Before you begin

Use this how-to guide to best practice when you're considering setting up a new social media channel to communicate publicly (and successfully) for the Victorian Government.

The effort needed to make the most of social media is usually seriously underestimated. This guide will help you discover — one way or another — if a new social media channel is worth doing.

Note: this how-to guide is designed to help set up and use social media effectively to communicate to the Victorian public (externally). If you want guidance on using

social media for workplace communications (such as Yammer), check your intranet for your department's guidelines.

## What is social media?

Social media sites are websites which allow users to create and share content and form social networks online. Popular platforms include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn, but there are many more (listed with their best audience fit later in this guide).

## Why use social media?

Social media provides unique opportunities to engage with users and other stakeholders on a personal level. It enables departments and agencies to access a much wider audience than traditional communication methods such as print, conference, or TV.

It can be a very powerful tool to get feedback on early ideas, concepts and prototypes for digital services and can support decision making and policy development. It's also a service delivery channel to provide assistance, inform people of services available and make announcements.

# What the Victorian Government recommends

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Only create new social media channels when it's necessary and will be a productive use of time and budget.

It takes a substantial amount of time and money to create quality social media content and generate and maintain a social media following. Often, it can be more effective to use existing Victorian Government channels, as you will reach a much larger audience due to the existing following.

Check your local policies on social media. Each department or agency has its own approach to the level of engagement and preferred social media channels.

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# What standards must be met?

## Branding

Apply Brand Victoria. Refer to the How-to guide, How to apply Brand Victoria (specifically written for digital).

## Privacy

Comply with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014, and only collect information you're legally entitled to collect. You'll need to craft and publish a privacy 'collection notice' (refer to the

How-to guide, How to manage privacy or the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner).

If your digital presence collects personal information, then the physical location of the servers where it's stored must have the same level of legal protection for private data as we offer citizens in Victoria.

## Accessibility

To comply with the Australian Human Rights Commission's Disability Discrimination Act, and the WoVG standard 'Conform to Level AA of version 2.0 of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0)', your digital presence must comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2.0 (WCAG) AA standard.

If your audience is primarily people with a disability (for example, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) clients), your site must pass the test for the AAA standard. Refer to the How-to guide, How to make websites and content accessible .

## Manage public records

The Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) (under Section 12 of the Public Records Act

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1973) sets the standards for managing the public records your department or agency create. Always check with your department's or agency's records or information management specialist first for the approach to compliance.

Refer to How to manage online records for more information or the PROV website.

## Domain names

Federal and state rules apply. The Department of Premier and Cabinet reviews applications for new domain names, including domains used for social media. Refer to How to apply for and manage a domain name.

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# Getting it approved

Your Digital Management Committee (DMC) (or it might be called something else) need to approve this work. Check your Department's intranet for details.

As one example of best practice, the Department of Premier and Cabinet use this form:

**Social Media Approval Form (sample)**
DOC (129.11 KB)

as well as the social media strategy template and mandatory social media training.

### Social media strategy template
DOC (176.8 KB)

# Step 1: Understand social media activities

It's essential to understand the different ways you can use social media before you decide which channel or channels to use.

## Communication and promotion

Get your message out, send alerts, build a public narrative, set the public record. For example, Parks Victoria manages sections of important commuter bike networks for Melbournians. During works and closure periods the best way to communicate changes is to use Twitter (where cycling groups are) and tag key organisations such as the Bicycle Network who then retweet and redistribute information to their networks.

## Consultation

Get public feedback on something. For example, DPC ran a poll on what to name its consultation platform on Twitter.

## Co-development and crowdsourcing

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Develop something with, or collect information from citizens. For example, [Births Deaths and Marriages co-designed its whole organisation](#) using social media tools to help gather ideas.

## Service support

Directly support citizens online and provide customer service. For example, Business Victoria ran #chatbv for a year with small business experts so business owners could get tips and ask questions.

Setting up online communities can also be another form of service support. Business Victoria also has a [Facebook group](#) so business owners can provide advice to each other on tools to use, such as what accounting software is best.

## Research tool

Get insights and help target policy or comms work. For example, Emergency Management Victoria monitors social media during an emergency to assist people and get early warning of problems. Use an advanced tool like [Sprout](#) to schedule, publish, monitor and measure your social media traffic.

# Step 2: Choose a platform

## Do you need your own account?

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Don't fall into the trap of thinking you have to create your own social media channels to get benefit. By using existing Victorian Government channels and unique hashtag you will have a much larger audience due to the existing following.

To see what's in use today across Victorian Government, visit the vic.gov.au [social media page](). Social media accounts are a long-term investment. If you have a one-off event a new channel won't build an audience quickly enough to be useful.

## Consider your content

Social media content is generally images, videos or text. As a general guide, these content types are best supported by:

images: Instagram, Facebook, SnapChat, Pinterest, Tumblr, Reddit

video: Vimeo, YouTube, Facebook, SnapChat

text: Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Reddit

blogs: various

When you select a platform consider the kind of content you will share. For example, Instagram needs a large amount of graphic content, whereas Twitter lends itself to short

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text-based content. Consider the nature of the interaction and the expectation of users. For example, use Twitter for newsy, short messages (but may have photos), or for more discursive and discussions, use Facebook.

## Consider your business objectives while using social media

Your social media should link into your broader business objectives. Ask yourself how your social media channels will help you to achieve what you need to.

## Use your audience's preferred platform

If you're targeting retirees and use Snapchat you probably won't succeed. Your first step is to decide who you're targeting and find out what channels they use. Test your assumptions about your audience by finding out who they are and what they're saying through listening.

It's highly likely there are already Victorian Government channels targeting your audience. You should investigate using this channel as a more efficient way to get your message out or talk to the owner to get stats on what has and hasn't worked.

## Consider your budget

Unless your content is visual and interesting, no-one will read it or look at it. This means that

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to have a successful social media presence and campaign (or both) you need a budget for advertising, video and graphics. (Unless you produce them in-house.)

Managing social media also requires a big time commitment, as someone needs to take responsibility for creating content and listening to what's happening, and where necessary, responding. If you don't have enough time or budget, social media is probably not the answer.

## Step 3: Launch a new channel

### Create a social media strategy

Write a communications strategy, which includes social media. Then, write a more action-focussed social media strategy or 'playbook' which include moderation guidelines, a content plan and your legal obligations. Use the Victorian Government's official social media strategy template to guide you.

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**Social media strategy template (1).docx**
DOC (176.8 KB)

### Get involved to generate a following

The best way to generate a social media following is to like, share and have

conversations to build your profile. For basic tips on how to get started with social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter and using hashtags refer to the Emergency Management Victoria social media fact sheets.

## Use advertising to get noticed

Consider advertising to reach your target audience and let them know you exist. You'll also need to boost social posts to get visibility, particularly with campaigns. Be aware that you cannot turn comments off for ads so you will need to have a moderation plan as part of your campaign. Campaign advertising also needs approval (see approvals section.)

## Set up social media listening

Interaction the is key to social media activities. If users are communicating with you and not getting a response they will fast lose interest. You need to assign at least one individual to listen and respond to any activity on your account. Social media users expect fast responses, so you should respond on the day of the activity.

Do not set up a 'ghost' profile (a regular profile with comments shut off). They can damage the reputation of your organisation by making you seem faceless or disengaged.

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## Step 4: Create and manage content

### Have a content plan

Develop a content plan and editorial calendar which highlights key events and activities throughout the year and how your account(s) will get involved in them. For example, Victoria Police participated in Back to the Future Day. Similarly, the CFA highlighted a member's battle with depression through video to link in with R U Ok Day and Mental Health Week.

Have a look at the DELWP content plan for the period they were recruiting Project Firefighters to get an idea of what's involved.

### Capitalise on trending topics

Even the most serious of topics can get cut-through by capitalising on trending topics. For example, the most popular tweet in a campaign to encourage people to support local businesses on Grand Final Friday used a photo from another Twitter user of the Railway Hotel being painted and this caption:

'Vic #smallbiz is getting behind the #AFLGF & @westernbulldog Don't forget to support them too on Friday #GFHoliday.'

### Schedule content

Choose a scheduling platform to help you publish content consistently. Scheduling

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platforms also assist with monitoring and measurement. Departmental communications teams can provide advice on which platform will work best for your needs.

## Time your posts

Establish what times and days your audience are checking their accounts and post content at these times.

## Monitor your posts

Tailor your content over time by monitoring your posts to see what has and hasn't worked. Build on the successes and don't repeat the mistakes.

## Stay current

Social media isn't static; it evolves. The annual Sensis Social Media Report is a good way to keep up with the trends on how Australians use social media. You can also join the WoVG Digital Group on Yammer (VPS access only) to find out what works and the latest tools.

## Other content considerations

Make sure its accessible, for example, videos will need transcripts and subtitles (Refer to the How-to guide, How to make websites and content accessible.)

Copyright, for example can you safely reproduce a meme? Do you have permission

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to reproduce a person's image? Have they limited their permission to use their image in a specific context?

## Step 5: Run a campaign

Download the Victorian Government's social media campaign template.

📄 **Social Media Campaign Request Brief.docx**
DOC (451.6 KB

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## Create an engagement strategy

Each time you want to achieve a new objective or promote a new campaign you should have an engagement strategy. Your engagement strategy should identify:

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what you're trying to achieve and what success looks like

who your audience is, where they are, how to reach them, and what they can (broadly) contribute

the most appropriate one-to-many tool to get what you need from your audience

whether you have a team with the right skills and time to respond

how you'll recognise the contributions of individuals (internal and external)

how user feedback will be processed and acted upon

how you will ensure transparency so users know you're listening to them

known risks or potential opponents to your campaign and messages and how you will mitigate these risks or respond to them (have prepared responses)

## Advertising

If you have social media advertising needs then you'll have to buy advertising through the government's Master Agency Media Services contract, as a central approval process managed by the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), applies to campaign advertising.

Contact your communication or marketing team to find out if you need approval for your advertising (or you can email advertising@dpc.vic.gov.au). You won't need approval if your advertising is part of a campaign DPC has already approved, or if the advertising is for functional or recruitment purposes only.

## The importance of good records management

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The conversations you have with public and the information you publish using social media are public records and need to be collected and stored. Refer to the How-to guide: How to manage online records, for guidance. You organisation will also have its own approach for records management, so always speak to your records management staff first.

## Step 6: Close inactive social media accounts

When your account is no longer being used, close it. You should take care to download your Facebook, YouTube or Twitter Archive when you close an account using the following links:

request your Twitter archive

download your Facebook information

download your YouTube archive

Store these records in Content Manager.

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# Checklist for best practice

listen to your stakeholders, influencers and competitors

follow the Brand Victoria digital guidelines
for naming, avatars and wording

use your communications strategy to guide
you

monitor and adapt your style based on
what's working

have at least two different ads developed to
see what sort of copy and design your
audience responds to

remove ineffective ads and focus on the
most effective

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# Related How-to guides

[How to make content accessible](#)

[How to apply Branding Victoria](#)

[How to manage privacy](#)

[How to consult online](#)

[How to manage online records](#)

[How to apply for and manage a domain name](#)

# Join the conversation on digital

Get advice and share your insights about this topic with other digital practitioners on the WoVG Digital Group on Yammer (VPS access only).

Can't access Yammer? Contact us by email: contact@dpc.vic.gov.au. (We may post your comment on Yammer for general discussion. Please tell us if that's not OK.)

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