



Social media, federal policy & communications in the digital age

Don't get caught inside...



Catalytic Events

- USDA disavows gag-order emailed to scientific research unit (Reuters, January 24, 2017)
- USDA scrambles to ease concerns after researchers were ordered to stop publishing news releases (Washington Post, January 25, 2017)



What really happened?

- Internal email sent to staff at the ARS
- Called for a suspension of all “public-facing documents,” including news releases and photos...
- Email sent was almost identical to a note previously circulated 4 years earlier: what changed?
- Are LGU’s supported by the USDA subject to similar communications mandates?



Institutional social media policies

- Scanned the region
- 12/13 institutions have posted social media policies and guidelines
- Characteristics
 - How to's?
 - University branding
 - Best practices
 - Etiquette
 - Compliance (representing the University)
 - Approval
 - Violation consequences

Best of the best...

- If you wouldn't put on a flier, etch it on a brick or publish it in the Wall Street Journal, don't post it (UDC)
- Strategize, launch, engage, monitor, make time, measure success (UNH)
- Retweeting ≠ endorsement (UMD)
- Breaking news (Cornell)
 - Good (discuss with higher-ups and communications people)
 - Bad
 - Ignore
 - Press release
 - Engage deeply (be careful, social media not 1° emergency communications)
- Take the high road (PSU)

How 'bout the feds?

- USDA uses 3rd party strategies to interact with public. Forward comments to the chief privacy officer...
- Don't make negative statements, don't do it on duty, can't use title, photo or institutional affiliation (aimed at political activities)



Whether you're engaged or not, you're subject to the effects of social media...

- How do you use social media?
- Strategies to follow institutional policies?
- Does your staff understand, appreciate and follow the policies?
- What is the quality control?
- What resources do you have available for managing social media?
- Information leakage, how did/would you handle?
- How have you dealt with negative outfall?