Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices

CDC Twitter Profiles

Purpose

This document is designed to provide guidance to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) employees and contractors on the use of Twitter, the micro-blogging site in which CDC currently participates. CDC encourages the strategic use of Twitter to disseminate CDC health information and engage with individuals and partners.

Background

Twitter is a real-time information network used by millions of individuals, organizations and businesses to share information, commentary, descriptions of events, and highlight online and social media content. Launched in July 2006, Twitter enables users to send and read messages made up of 140 characters or less, called tweets. Tweets can be posted to Twitter via text message, mobile websites, audio, Twitter's website, or a variety of other mobile and web applications. Twitter has an estimated 200 million users generating more than 200 million tweets a day, and the service handles over 1.6 billion search queries per day. See Appendix A for a list of commonly used Twitter terms.

CDC has a robust and growing Twitter presence. Currently, CDC supports more than 30 Twitter profiles connecting followers with information on a range of CDC health and safety topics.

Please refer to the CDC Enterprise Social Media Policy (http://aops-mas-iis.cdc.gov/Policy/Doc/policy566.pdf) for guidance on use of social media for work-related and personal activities, and for requirements on use of social media in an official CDC spokesperson capacity.

Communications Strategy

Twitter and other social media tools are intended to be used as part of a larger, integrated health communications program or project developed under the leadership of the Associate Director of Communication Science (ADCS) in the Health Communication Science Office (HCSO) of CDC's National Centers, Institutes, and Offices (CIOs).

Clearance and Approval

1. <u>New Accounts</u>: The establishment of all new Twitter accounts must be cleared by your HCSO office. Security approval is also required from the CDC Office of the Chief Information Security Officer (OCISO) for new Twitter accounts. Please contact your CIO's Information Systems Security Officer (ISSO) for additional information on security requirements for participation in Twitter.

   The program media relations specialist and the News Media Branch in the Division of News and Electronic Media should also be made aware of the new account.

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2. <u>Messages</u>: All Twitter messaging and activities must be cleared through the clearance channels determined by your HCSO office.

   Careful consideration should be given to the nature of messages and activities. Twitter accounts, especially those associated with an expert's name, are viewed as an official voice of CDC. Tweeting standard health messages (e.g., Exercise is good for you) should go through a program's standard clearance channels. Messages that are likely to draw widespread or media attention (eg, New study shows 20% increase in disease), reflect a change in policy, recommendations or guidelines (eg, CDC expands coverage recommendation for ABC vaccine), or address a controversial topic may also need to be cleared through the program's media relations specialist and the News Media Branch in the Division of News and Electronic Media.

Consultation

The Electronic Media Branch (EMB) provides consultation on the planning and development of Twitter activities and other social media tools. Please contact socialmedia@cdc.gov for assistance. Your CIO's Social Media Council representative (information located at http://intranet.cdc.gov/cdcweb/mgmt_gov/socialmedia/index.htm) can also provide assistance.

Best Practices

Before using Twitter, programs should consider the following best practices:

1. <u>Clearly Define Your Objectives:</u> It is important to have clearly defined objectives before participating in Twitter. Do you want to highlight content, spark action, or encourage awareness of an issue? Clearly defined objectives will help you to determine if Twitter can help you in meeting your larger communication goals.

2. <u>Know Your Target Audience(s):</u> As with any communications activity, it is important to define your intended target audience(s) in order to develop and communicate messages that resonate with your audience and prompt them to take action.

3. <u>Determine Resource Needs</u>: Determine if you have the appropriate staffing resources to create content and manage a Twitter profile. It is important to designate a channel manager to serve as the point of contact for Twitter activities and ensure that content is posted on a regular basis.

4. <u>Keep Your Content Short and Simple:</u> Although the maximum character limit for a tweet is 140 characters, EMB recommends using 120 characters (including URL, punctuation and spaces) to make it easy for followers to retweet the message without having to edit it. It is appropriate to use abbreviations in a Twitter message in order to save characters. See Appendix B for tweet examples and Appendix C for a list of common Twitter abbreviations.

   To test the length of a message, go to http://nchm-dvss1.cdc.gov/count.html (link not available outside CDC network) and paste or type your message in the box provided.

Shorten the URL using Web sites such as http://tinyurl.com or http://is.gd or http://tr.im. For Government URLS use http://go.usa.gov to shorten links. Visit https://go.usa.gov/ to register for an account.

5. Determine Schedule and Frequency of Twitter Posts: It is important to set a posting schedule that defines a frequency for posts per week. Setting a regular schedule helps to ensure that the account is active and encourages engaged followers. Consider posting weekly at a minimum.

6. Conduct Promotion Activities: Ongoing promotion of your Twitter profile is strongly recommended. Promotion tips include:

   - Cross-promote on other CDC social media and Web channels. For example, leverage existing CDC Twitter profiles and Facebook pages with similar audiences and/or content to promote your Twitter activities.

   - Consider Twitter advertising to increase the number of Twitter followers. It is recommended that you determine your budget, target audience, and objective before beginning a Twitter advertising initiative. Please contact socialmedia@cdc.gov for more information.

7. Determine Approach for Engaging with Twitter Followers: In addition to being a channel for health information dissemination, Twitter should also be used to engage your target audience in two-way interaction and communication. Examples of engagement activities include:

   - Develop criteria for whom to follow on Twitter. Identify relevant partners, influencers, and federal, state and local agencies that are involved in and interested in your specific health topic(s). See Appendix D for recommendations.

   - Share relevant partner and follower Twitter content on your Twitter profile. Develop a strategy for identifying and retweeting or replying to posts from partners and followers.

   - Consider holding Twitter events. Twitter events encourage followers to participate in conversations about your priority health topics. See Appendix E for examples of Twitter events.

8. Evaluation: Evaluation is an integral component of all social media activities, including Twitter. Evaluation approaches for Twitter may include reviewing metrics, identifying lessons learned, and determining whether the social media effort successfully met project goals.

   Regularly monitor your Twitter account to review the number of followers, updates, retweets and mentions in Twitter. You may also consider monitoring the increases in traffic to your website, as well as the mentions outside of Twitter on blogs, websites or articles. Examples

of Twitter metrics that can be collected are number of retweets a post receives; number of click-throughs from a Twitter post to a CDC.gov Web page; and number of @replies.

Adobe SiteCatalyst can be used to determine the number of click-throughs from a tweet to a CDC.gov website. Automated metrics reports can be established for programs. Please visit the statistics and metrics intranet site (http://intranet.cdc.gov/cdcweb/statsmetrics.htm, link not available outside CDC network) for more information.

9. <u>Establish a Records Management System:</u> Set-up a system to keep track of your Twitter posts, @replies, retweets and mentions to comply with Federal guidelines for records management and archiving.

How to Setup a CDC Twitter Profile
Please email socialmedia@cdc.gov if you require consultation, or contact your Social Media Council representative for assistance.

1. <u>Develop and Clear Twitter Concept, Plan, and Content:</u> All Twitter activities, including account set-up and content creation, must be cleared through your CIO's established communications clearance channels. Security approval is also required from the CDC Office of the Chief Information Security Officer for new and existing Twitter accounts. Please contact your CIO's Information Systems Security Officer for additional information on security requirements for participation in Twitter.

2. <u>Create the Twitter Profile:</u> Set up a Twitter account at http://twitter.com.Twitter accounts require the following information for set-up:

   - Profile name: The profile name is a unique identifier that describes the subject matter of the account, name of the organization, or contains a keyword describing the nature of the organization. Your Twitter profile should be identified as being an official CDC presence. If possible, start the name of the account with CDC (e.g. CDC_eHealth, CDCgov). The profile name should be short and concise (maximum 20 characters).

   - Website: A CDC.gov URL should be included on the profile page as the official source of information.

   - E-mail address: Identify a group or team mailbox that multiple team members can access.

   - Bio: The biography is a 160 character description of the profile.

   - Profile Image: A logo or image that represents your organization.

3. <u>Evaluate and Track Twitter Metrics:</u> Establish a plan for monitoring and evaluating your Twitter presence. If you wish to use Adobe SiteCatalyst to track click-throughs, please visit

the statistics and metrics intranet site (http://intranet.cdc.gov/cdcweb/statsmetrics.htm, link not available outside CDC network) for more information.

Appendix A: Twitter Terms

The following are common terms related to Twitter activities:

-   **Direct Message or DM**: A private Twitter message sent via Twitter between people who follow each other.

-   **Follow**: A way to subscribe to receive an individual's or an organization's Twitter updates. A user can "follow" another individual or organization by clicking the "Follow" button on the person's or organization's page.

-   **Follower**: A Twitter user who subscribes to follow another user.

-   **"#" or Hashtags**: A way to categorize tweets around a particular topic.

-   **Mentions/@ Reply**: A Twitter update that contains @username anywhere in the body of the Tweet.

-   **ReTweet or RT**: Sharing another user's tweets with followers, usually by using the phrase "RT @username" or "ReTweet @username."

-   **Tweet:** An individual Twitter post.

Appendix B: Sample Tweets

Some examples of tweets that have been created by CDC programs are included below:

-   Teen birth rates declined in 2009. Help improve the lives of young people with effective prevention. http://go.usa.gov/Z9o

-   In the next 2 hours, one pedestrian will die and 27 will be injured in a traffic crash. Walk safely! http://go.usa.gov/Za6

-   If you're prepared for a zombie apocalypse, you're ready for any emergency. Latest from @CDCgov PH Matters Blog: http://go.usa.gov/jVd

-   Parents can help prevent teen crashes. Learn more in this new CDC video. http://go.usa.gov/bmi

- Number of states reporting widespread flu activity increased to 25; regional flu activity reported by 16 states. http://go.usa.gov/YNE

- CDC recommends rapid flu treatment w/ antivirals for people at high risk of serious flu complications. http://go.usa.govYqY

Appendix C: Twitter Abbreviations

Some common abbreviations used in tweets include:

- **US**   (for United States)
- **Info**   (for Information)
- **&**   (for And)
- **Msg**   (for Message)
- **IMPT**   (for Important)
- **b/c**   (for Because)
- **w/ or w.**   (for With)
- **Pls** (for Please)
- **RT**   (for ReTweet)

Do not use the "@" symbol as an abbreviation. This is used to refer to other Twitter users by their user name. Additionally, do not use the "#" symbol, as this is used to refer to a hashtag.

Appendix D: How to Determine Who to Follow on Twitter

Programs should determine, in conjunction with their CIO's HCSO and other key stakeholders, which partners, followers, and influencers to follow and retweet. Below are recommendations for specific sectors to consider when determining who to follow:

- Federal agencies and programs
- CDC funded public health partners, such as APHA, ASTHO, and NACCHO
- State and local health departments
- Non-profit public health organizations/partners (e.g. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, American Cancer Society)
- Topic-specific public health programs and campaigns (e.g. Red Pumps Project, Red Dress Campaign)

Appendix E: Types of Twitter Events

Twitter events can be an effective way to engage with Twitter followers. Types of Twitter events include:

Live Tweeting: Live tweeting from an event, such as a CDC conference or meeting, allows followers to virtually experience the event through Twitter. Conference highlights, speaker quotes, announcements, and other key aspects of the event can be tweeted, and where available, a predefined hashtag is included at the end of each tweet to group all tweets related to the live tweeting event.

Twitter Chat: A Twitter chat is a way to have a conversation and interact with followers using tweets and a predefined hashtag. CDC Twitter chats are usually arranged in advance and scheduled for a specific time, and include a formal agenda or script to guide the discussion. CDC subject matter experts or outside partners participate in the chat, and interact with CDC Twitter followers by responding to questions and comments received during the chat. Each tweet includes the predefined hashtag to group all tweets related to the Twitter chat.

Twitterview: CDC subject matter experts and partners have participated in Twitterviews with national media outlets. Arranged in advance, a Twitterview is a type of interview in which the interviewer and interviewee conduct the conversation through tweets. Using a predefined hashtag at the end of each Twitterview tweet allows followers to track the discussion.

Twitter Town Hall: Arranged in advance, a Twitter Town Hall is a forum that allows followers to submit questions via Twitter about the topic to be discussed during a live town hall event. Questions can be submitted via Twitter in advance of or during the event. Responses are delivered through tweets during the event, and can be responded to live during the discussion. Followers can monitor the discussion if a predefined hashtag is included with each tweet.