OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

The Postal Service's Use of Social Media

Management Advisory

August 1, 2013

Report Number MS-MA-13-003

OFFICE OF
**INSPECTOR
GENERAL**
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

HIGHLIGHTS

August 1, 2013

The Postal Service's Use of Social Media

Report Number MS-MA-13-003

BACKGROUND:

Social media is an online communications tool that integrates technology, social interaction, and content creation. It is an increasingly popular business tool for communicating information to diverse stakeholders and a vehicle for receiving and addressing customer suggestions and complaints. Through social media sites (blogs, forums, podcasts, wikis, and videos) organizations can create, organize, edit, comment, combine, and share content.

The U.S. Postal Service's social media presence includes 18 social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The Postal Service uses these platforms to enhance communication and customer service. For example, it provides forums to solicit customer feedback and announce the issuance of new stamps.

Our objective was to evaluate the Postal Service's social media use and identify opportunities to improve this critical communication tool.

WHAT THE OIG FOUND:

Opportunities exist for the Postal Service to enhance its use of social media. Specifically, the Postal Service could enhance customer engagement via blogs or additional social media sites to better communicate with, and obtain input from, specific stakeholder groups. The Postal Service would also benefit from having subject matter experts assist in responding to stakeholder comments.

The Postal Service could enhance the functionality of its social media sites by more effectively linking sites for easier navigation and cross-referencing to maximize their visibility to stakeholders. Finally, the Postal Service could identify systemic issues through stakeholder concerns and further improve customer service by summarizing and analyzing customer comments and complaints posted via all of its social media sites.

WHAT THE OIG RECOMMENDED:

We recommended the Postal Service enhance customer engagement via specific blogs or additional social media sites. We also recommended that subject matter experts contribute and respond to postings related to their areas of expertise and that the Postal Service link its social media sites for easier navigation and cross-referencing to maximize their visibility to stakeholders. Finally, we recommended that the Postal Service share analytical reports and data with other social media dedicated groups and evaluate how social media can be used effectively within a comprehensive customer care program.
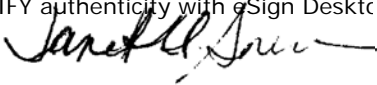
Link to review the entire report

August 1, 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR: JUDY DE TOROK
ACTING VICE PRESIDENT, CORPORATE
COMMUNICATIONS

MAURA ROBINSON
VICE PRESIDENT, CONSUMER AND
INDUSTRY AFFAIRS

E-Signed by Janet Sorensen
VERIFY authenticity with eSign Desktop

for
FROM: Darrell E. Benjamin, Jr.
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Revenue and Performance

SUBJECT: Management Advisory – The Postal Service's Use of Social
Media (Report Number MS-MA-13-003)

This report presents the results of our review of The Postal Service's Use of Social
Media (Project Number 13RG007MS000).

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any
questions or need additional information, please contact Janet Sorensen, director, Sales
and Marketing, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Nagisa M. Manabe
Jeffrey C. Williamson
Susan McGowan
Toni DeLancey
Corporate Audit and Response Management

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Introduction

This report presents the results of our review of the U.S. Postal Service's use of social media (Project Number 13RG007MS000). Our objective was to evaluate the Postal Service's social media use and identify opportunities to improve this critical communication tool. This self-initiated review addresses strategic risk. See Appendix A for additional information about this review.

Social media is an online communication tool that integrates technology, social interaction, and content creation. Through social media, organizations can create, organize, edit, comment, combine, and share content. Some forms of social media include blogs, forums, podcasts, wikis, and videos. The forms of social media continue to expand as new technology emerges.

The use of social media (such as Internet forums, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and so forth) is an increasingly popular means of communicating information to employees and members of the public and to receive and address customer feedback. The Postal Service responds to a variety of stakeholder groups, including the public, mailers, employees, the media, Congress, and the Postal Regulatory Commission.

The Postal Service began using social media in 2009 and today has 18 social media websites, including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The Postal Service uses these platforms to enhance communication, provide a forum to customers to solicit feedback, and provide a human resources portal for college students and prospective employees. The social media sites are primarily managed by Corporate Communications, Human Resources, and Stamps Services.

In 2012, Corporate Communications was tasked with coordinating the various social media efforts used to disseminate information and receive feedback from stakeholders. Corporate Communications has increased its efforts to administer this increasingly important customer service vehicle. For example, it has developed written guidelines, increased support staff working on social media, and begun to coordinate social media content with other Postal Service groups.

Conclusion

Opportunities exist for the Postal Service to enhance its use of social media. Specifically, the Postal Service could enhance customer engagement via specific blogs or additional social media sites to better communicate with, and obtain input from, various stakeholder groups. The Postal Service could also benefit from having subject matter experts assist in responding to stakeholder comments. In addition, the Postal Service could enhance the functionality of its social media sites by more effectively linking various sites for easier navigation and cross-referencing to maximize its visibility to stakeholders. Finally, the Postal Service could share analytical reports and data with

other social media dedicated groups and evaluate how social media can be used effectively within a comprehensive customer care program.

Stakeholder Communication

The Postal Service could better use social media to communicate with, and obtain input from, various stakeholder groups. Stakeholders we spoke with from the mailing industry expressed an interest in an enhanced Postal Service social media presence, which would serve as a forum to generate innovative ideas and new business opportunities and improve the Postal Service's engagement with customers. Stakeholders suggested the Postal Service create blogs or additional social media sites tailored to specific industry groups, such as those in the mailing industry.

The Postal Service should consider additional opportunities to enhance its outreach and communication with stakeholders, including:

- Increased operational visibility by hosting periodic blogs/forums on Postal Service and industry-specific topics developed by internal experts (such as plant operations, delivery, and parcel handling).

- Unique and secure social media sites for specific stakeholder groups, including employees and mailers, which would allow dialog to be generated and feedback considered.

- Evaluate the benefits of creating secure crowdsourcing[1] events that would encourage stakeholder problem-solving and innovation on specific topics, such as following up on issues raised at quarterly meetings with mailers.[2]

The Postal Service could better engage its stakeholder community by tailoring social media tools to meet specific customers' needs. Further, these efforts could enhance relationships with customers by providing dynamic tools to allow customers to generate innovative ideas and new business opportunities.

Customer Feedback and Comments

The Postal Service currently does not summarize and capture customer comments in a centralized data system. Customer comments received through social media should be summarized and analyzed as part of the Postal Service's customer service strategy. Sharing this information among the Postal Service program groups could help identify systemic issues through stakeholder concerns and further improve customer service.

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[1] The practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people, especially the online community. For example, Challenge.gov is an online challenge platform administered by the U.S. General Services Administration in partnership with ChallengePost that empowers the U.S. government and the public to bring the best ideas and top talent to bear on our nation's most pressing challenges.
[2] The Mailers Technical Advisory Committee meets quarterly with postal officials, in part to provide advice and feedback on postal innovations, such as the Intelligent Mail barcode.

Table 1 summarizes how the Postal Service currently addresses stakeholders' social media comments.

Table 1. The Postal Service's Use of Social Media Comments

Task	Corporate Communications	Consumer and Industry Affairs (CIA)
Searches social media sites using specialized software		X
Manually reviews social media sites	X	
Analyzes comments	X	X
Shares information with executives	X	X
Responds to comments	X	

Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) analysis.

Response to Customer Comments

Currently, Corporate Communications responds to comments made on the corporate sites[3] using standardized language. For example, if a customer posts a comment regarding a missing package, Corporate Communications may respond by saying:

> We apologize that you have not received your package. Please contact our track and confirm customer service department at 1-800-222-1811 for further assistance and information. Thank you.

It may be beneficial to designate a social media liaison in each of the various product and service groups who could contribute, and help Corporate Communications respond to postings related to its functional area of expertise. While Corporate Communications has, in the past, contacted other internal groups/functional areas to gather information necessary to respond to a comment related to that group's product or service, it required them to locate someone in a group for assistance. Designated liaisons could provide more dynamic responses and may be better equipped to respond to comments and identify trends among posts related to their group.

Analysis of Customer Comments

The Postal Service uses social media comments it receives to gauge the perceptions and sentiment of the public towards the Postal Service. Social media comments are analyzed by both Corporate Communications and CIA. Corporate Communications has recently begun to conduct weekly and monthly analysis of comments on its social media pages to understand the sentiment of Postal Service followers. CIA does not provide social media analysis on a routine basis to the stakeholders. However, during scheduled quarterly Customer Experience briefings, specific topics driven by the

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[3] Corporate web pages refer to pages administered by Corporate Communications, rather than Stamps Services or Human Resources.

analysis of social media have been discussed with organizational stakeholders. In addition, ad hoc social media reports have been provided to Postal Service officials or program managers when requested. Corporate Communications and CIA currently do not share their analyses with each other.

The Postal Service is in the process of insourcing its customer care centers that handle complaints, suggestions, and inquiries–in three locations.[4] Once the postal care centers are established, the Postal Service plans to evaluate how these care centers can address complaints made through social media. The Postal Service has surveyed software that could be used to track and analyze social media comments and complaints. Prior to implementing a social media program responding to customer concerns, the Postal Service needs to undertake extensive evaluation of how social media can be used effectively within a comprehensive customer care program. This evaluation should include an assessment of how results of social media comments could be tracked, analyzed, and shared among other functional areas in the Postal Service.

Enhanced Functionality

The Postal Service should link its various social media sites for easier navigation and cross-referencing to maximize its visibility to stakeholders. We reviewed each Postal Service social media web page and found that most of them do not reference or link to other Postal Service social media sites.[5] Further, stakeholders conveyed they were unfamiliar with the social media outlets the Postal Service administers. Adding links to the social media sites would more easily identify other Postal Service social media web pages for followers. For example, the Stamp Services' Facebook page has icons embedded that allow a follower to directly link to other Stamp Services-administered social media sites. However, the Corporate Communications' Facebook page does not offer a similar feature. Having icons or links embedded on pages would direct customers to these additional Postal Service pages for more information and easier navigation. As the Postal Service moves forward with its social media use, we believe opportunities exist to enhance its social media presence and functionality.

Recommendations

We recommend the acting vice president, Corporate Communications, coordinate Postal Service efforts to:

1. Enhance customer engagement via specific blogs or additional social media sites to better communicate with, and obtain input from, various stakeholder groups.

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[4] The centers' locations are Edison, NJ; Los Angeles, CA; and Troy, MI; and are scheduled to be fully operational in early 2014.
[5] A website is a collection of linked documents and content associated with a single group. For example, Facebook is a website. A web page is a single page of content on a website. For example, USPS Stamps Facebook page is a web page.

2. Identify subject matter experts to contribute and assist Corporate Communications in responding to postings related to their areas of expertise.

3. Link its various social media sites for easier navigation and cross-referencing to maximize their visibility to stakeholders.

We recommend the acting vice president, Corporate Communications, in coordination with the vice president, Consumer and Industry Affairs to:

4. Share analytical reports and data with other social media dedicated groups.

5. Undertake evaluation of how social media can be used effectively within a comprehensive customer care program.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with our findings and recommendations. Regarding recommendation 1, management agreed that blogs were an important part of their social media strategy and efforts to encourage input and engagement from customers should be improved by July 31, 2014.

Regarding recommendation 2, management stated subject matter experts and liaisons have been identified and by August 2013 additional opportunities will continue to be explored as the Postal Service strengthens its social media presence.

Regarding recommendation 3, management agreed with the importance of linking and cross-referencing Postal Service social media channels and cited examples of how the Postal Service was doing so. Management plan to continue and increase these efforts by August 31, 2014.

Regarding recommendation 4, management described the extent to which the Postal Service shares its analyses among internal social media groups, liaisons, and experts and cited plans to share analyses and insight with additional social media groups by August 31, 2013.

Regarding recommendation 5, management agreed to fully evaluate the cost-effective use of social media in a customer care program by September 30, 2014. This includes which tools are available, how they can be integrated into the technology platform, and which business rules might apply when addressing and resolving comments made via social media channels. See Appendix B for management's comments, in their entirety.

Evaluation of Management's Comments

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to the recommendations and corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report.

Appendix A: Additional Information

Background

The Postal Service first entered the social media scene through a Postal Service Stamps Facebook page in 2009 and, subsequently, created Business and Human Resources recruitment pages on Facebook. The Postal Service ventured into Twitter, YouTube, and smaller social media sites by 2011 and currently has a web presence on 18 social media web pages (see Table 2).

Table 2. The Postal Service's Social Media Web Pages[6]

Corporate Communications	Stamps Services	Human Resources
Postal Service Corporate Facebook	Postal Service Stamps Facebook	Postal Service Careers Facebook
Postal Service Corporate Twitter	Stamps Educational Facebook	Postal Service Careers Twitter
LinkedIn[7]	Postal Service Stamps Twitter	Postal Service on Campus Twitter
YouTube	Stamps Educational Twitter	
Postal Service Blog	Stamp of Approval Blog	
	Pinterest	
	Instagram	
	Tumblr	
	Google+[8]	
	Beyond the Perf blog	

Source: OIG analysis.

Its most popular social media sites are Facebook pages, Twitter pages, and a YouTube dedicated channel. The content on these sites has generated 72,073 'likes' on Facebook, 9,464 followers on Twitter, and 304,979 views on YouTube, respectively, as of June 11, 2013. These social media forums are used to reach anyone with an interest or stake in Postal Service affairs (see Figures 1, 2, and 3).

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[6] The Western Area administers a blog and a podcast in addition to these sites. Corporate Communications also identified Yammer as a social media site that is restricted to employees and can be used for announcements and collaboration.

[7] Human Resources uses the corporate LinkedIn page to post position announcements but recruits via personal LinkedIn accounts.
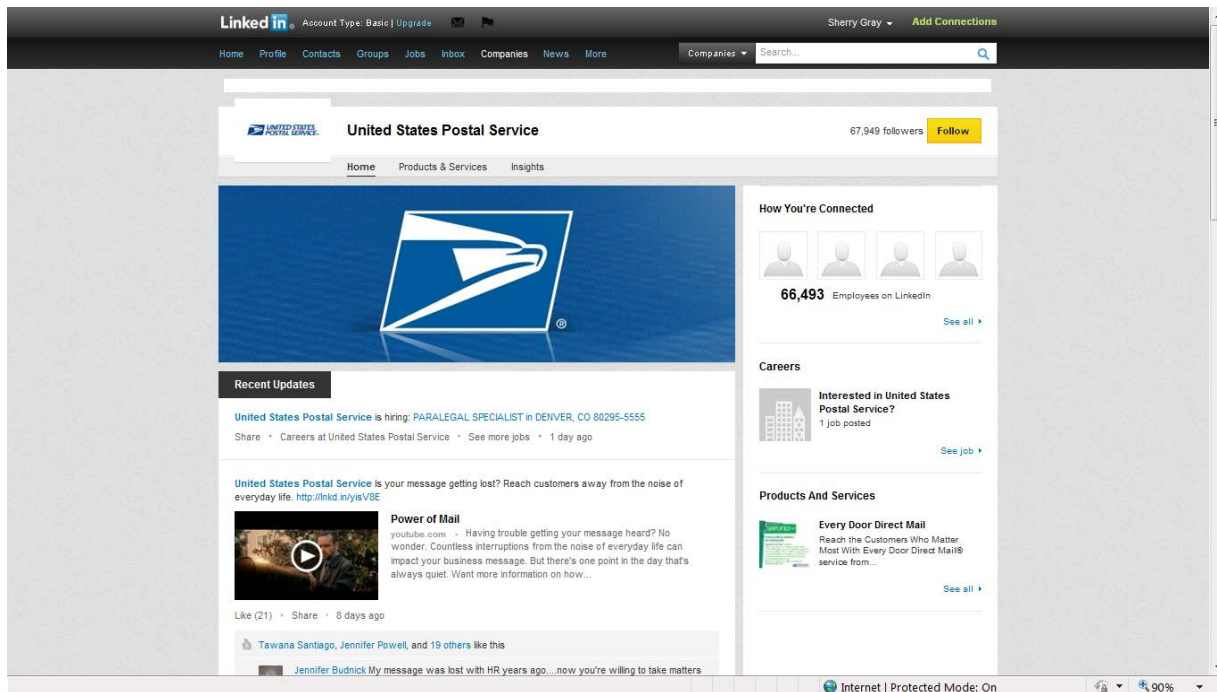
[8] Google+ is a social media site, similar to Facebook. It allows the user to create a profile web page within the Google+ site to be used to communicate and connect with others online.

Figure 1. The Postal Service's Recruiting Twitter Page

Source: Postal Service page, June 11, 2013.

Figure 2. The Postal Service's LinkedIn Page

Source: Postal Service page, June 11, 2013.

Figure 3. The Postal Service's Stamps Facebook Page

Source: Postal Service page, June 11, 2013.

Comments requiring responses are primarily posted by customers on the Facebook and Twitter sites. Corporate Communications only addresses comments made on its pages and only uses responses from preapproved organizations, customer contact centers, and comments from various Postal Service groups. Customer inquiries on the Stamps or Human Resources sites are generally redirected to a customer call center. Some sites are only used for information dissemination (one-way communication), while others are a forum to generate conversation among followers (two-way communication). Not all sites are used to receive feedback and commentary from stakeholders (see Table 3), although all have the capability to do so.

Table 3. The Postal Service's Social Media Communication Type

Social Media Site	Communication Use
Facebook*	Two-Way
Twitter*	Two-Way
YouTube	Information Dissemination
Stamp of Approval Blog	Two-Way
Pinterest	Information Dissemination
LinkedIn	Two-Way
Postal Service Blog**	Two-Way
Instagram	Information Dissemination
Tumblr	Information Dissemination
Google+	Two-Way
Beyond the Perf Blog	Information Dissemination
Your Postal Blog	Two-Way
Your Postal Podcast	Two-Way

Source: OIG prepared.
Note: *The Postal Service has multiple sites on these forums.
Note: **This site is currently awaiting development while Corporate Communications decides how the site will be used.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate the Postal Service's social media use and identify opportunities to improve this critical communication tool. To accomplish our objective, we researched and identified the Postal Service's level of social media presence and communication efforts. We interviewed Postal Services managers, employees, and interns involved with the administration of social media sites to determine how sites are monitored and managed. We identified and reviewed current policies and guidelines that pertain to Postal Service employees' use of social media and reviewed social media benchmarking reports previously conducted by Postal Service contractors. We also interviewed Postal Service mailing industry stakeholders to hear their views on the Postal Service's social media efforts.

We conducted this review from December 2012 through July 2013 in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation.* We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on July 1, 2013, and included their comments where appropriate.

Prior Audit Coverage

Report Title	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact
Meeting America's Emerging Communications Needs	RARC-WP-12-009	4/27/2012	None
Report Results: Mobile devices, in conjunction with network connectivity and social media, foster new channels of increasingly instantaneous and collaborative messaging (such as texting, tweeting, and blogging) and shift control from broadcast media to the individual recipient. The Postal Service's mission to "bind the nation together" is well suited to bridging the nation's digital and physical spheres to meet the new communications, commerce, and information management needs of Americans. The Postal Service is a permanent institution with the existing infrastructure to provide a hybrid solution with complementary digital components that offer access, convenience, and fosters economic opportunities. The OIG did not make any recommendations in this report.			
The Postal Service Role in the Digital Age Part 1: Facts and Trends	RARC-WP-11-002	2/24/2011	None
Report Results: The Postal Service has maintained its position in physical communications due to its reach and monopoly access; however, new competitors are bypassing this advantage, changing the 'postal ecosystem.' Some of the main types of service providers in the digital economy today, such as social media, look to maintain or grow their position as digital economy evolves. Social media offers brands more than just an outreach platform and social media sites are becoming increasingly popular as a marketing vehicle that allows feedback without the need for expensive focus groups or consumer polls. Companies have been shifting their marketing budgets from traditional to new media tools like corporate websites, blogs, and social media. While the return on investment has been difficult to calculate, it is clear that social media has been an effective method of boosting brand awareness. The OIG did not make any recommendations in this report.			

Appendix B: Management's Comments

UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE

July 25, 2013

TO: JUDITH LEONHARDT
               DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS

FROM: Judy de Torok
               Acting Vice President, Corporate Communications

               Maura Robinson
               Vice President, Consumer and
               Industry Affairs

SUBJECT: Draft Management Advisory – The Postal Service's Use of Social Media
               (Report Number MS-MA-13-DRAFT)

The Corporate Communications Social Media Management Group has received the Draft Management Advisory Report. Management has reviewed the Report and agrees with recommendations 1 through 5 as listed in the Report on page 5. Please note that many of these efforts were well underway prior to this audit.

Recommendation 1: Agree

Enhance customer engagement via specific blogs or additional social media sites to better communicate with, and obtain input from, various stakeholder groups.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with Recommendation 1. The Corporate Communications Social Media Group had already reached out and engaged with a broader audience by engaging our various stakeholder groups through audience-specific social channels, which include business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) segments. For example, the Postal Service provides a platform to generate innovative ideas and new business opportunities through our LinkedIn Company page as well as LinkedIn Groups. These platforms provide a unique space for stakeholder groups to provide ideas, encourage problem-solving, and send feedback as suggested on page 2 of the Report. Since LinkedIn is a professional social networking site, we are able to increase visibility of the Postal Service for our stakeholder groups, which include employees and professionals in the mailing industry. Additionally, the Corporate Communications Social Media Group is creating a B2C Twitter handle with a focus on customer service, a B2B Business Solutions Facebook page, and B2B business-specific Twitter handle. We agree that blogs are also an important part of the existing media relations strategy, but the strategy can be enhanced more specifically to encourage the blog audience to visit and engage with our existing and aforementioned social media channels.

Target Implementation Date:

July 2014: These activities can increase during the next Fiscal Year with the additional funding and staffing resources we've requested.

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WASHINGTON DC 20260-3100
www.usps.com

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Responsible Official:

Toni DeLancey, Senior Public Relations Manager

Recommendation 2: Agree

Identify subject matter experts to contribute and respond to postings related to their areas of expertise.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with Recommendation 2. The monthly social media cross-functional meetings currently held by the Corporate Communications Social Media Group serve as a platform for stakeholders and subject matter experts throughout the organization to contribute content ideas and suggestions for social media posts. Subject matter experts or department liaisons have been identified and provide content following guidelines provided by the Corporate Communications Social Media Group. Additional opportunities and communication channels will continue to be identified and opened for various subject matter experts as we continue to strengthen our social media presence.

Target Implementation Date:

August 2013

Responsible Official:

Toni DeLancey, Senior Public Relations Manager

Recommendation 3: Agree

Link its various social media sites for easier navigation and cross-referencing to maximize their visibility to stakeholders.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with Recommendation 3. Each social media site serves a specific target audience and provides content intended for that audience. For instance, we post more B2B content via our LinkedIn company page than we do through our USPS corporate Facebook page since we recognize that we have a business-specific audience on LinkedIn. Furthermore, we do provide links to our corporate social media channel links under the 'About' section on our Facebook page for easier navigation and to maximize our visibility to a broader audience, as suggested on page 4 of the Report. Generally, the content overlaps, and we take the opportunities to cross-reference any shared links through all of our channels, giving each audience segment the opportunity to engage across our channels. We also regularly share calendars and planning materials across internal functional groups to identify additional opportunities to cross-promote content that will reach a larger group of stakeholders.

Target Implementation Date:

August 2014: These activities can increase during the next Fiscal Year with the additional funding and staffing resources we've requested.

Responsible Official:

Toni DeLancey, Senior Public Relations Manager

Recommendation 4: Agree

Share analytical reports and data with other social media dedicated groups.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with Recommendation 4. The Corporate Communications Social Media Group already shares social media analytics and similar metric reports during the social media cross-functional meetings and therefore with the department liaisons and subject-matter experts. We will continue sharing analytical reports and data with all social media dedicated groups to ensure that we stay pursuant of our social media objectives.

Likewise, Consumer and Industry Affairs had previously provided Corporate Communications with access to its social media tool. Working with Corporate Communications, Consumer and Industry Affairs has identified appropriate staff and provided them access to and training to this tool. Analyses of social media engagement are provided through quarterly Customer Experience Measurement (CEM) briefings attended by both headquarters and field staff. As the Consumer and Industry Affairs group expands their analysis of social media, they will continue to provide social media insights to other social media dedicated groups.

Target Implementation Date:

August 2013

Responsible Officials:

Kevin Farmer, (A) Manager, Customer Engagement and Strategic Alignment; Toni DeLancey, Senior Public Relations Manager

Recommendation 5: Agree

Undertake evaluation of how social media can be used effectively within a comprehensive customer care program

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation. Social media can provide insights on customer issues and concerns that could be addressed through the Postal Service's customer care program. We intend to fully evaluate how social media can be incorporated into a cost-effective customer care program including assessing social media tools

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available for use within a care center environment; how these tools can be integrated within the care center technology platform; and what business rules should be developed to manage the collection of, routing of, response to and resolution of concerns identified through social media channels.

Target Implementation Date

September 2014: These activities can increase during the next Fiscal Year with the additional funding and staffing resources we've requested.

Responsible Official:

Deborah Judy, Manager, Enterprise Customer Care

This report and management's response do not contain information that may be exempt from disclosure under the FOIA.

Judy de Torok
Judy de Torok, Acting Vice President, Corporate Communications

Maura Robinson
Maura Robinson, Vice President, Consumer and Industry Affairs

cc: Nagisa M. Manabe
        Jeffrey C. Williamson
        Toni DeLancey
        Corporate Audit Response Management