

SEARCH  
 Communication  
 VIDEO  
 DISCUSSION  
 NETWORK  
 Friends  
 Connections  
 CHECK-IN  
 TAG  
 NEWS  
 CHAT  
 PHOTOS  
 REAL-TIME  
**SOCIAL MEDIA**  
 BLOG  
 ONLINE  
 PEOPLE  
 ENTERTAINMENT  
 MOBILE  
 SHARE  
 INSTANT  
 MESSAGE  
 FOLLOW  
 TREND  
 Community  
 LIKE  
 VIRAL  
 MEDIA  
 WORLD WIDE



Improvement and Efficiency  
West Midlands



**COMMSEPOINTO**  
creative communicators

**Best by West Midlands 2013**

A White Paper on Social Media in Local Government



## Best by West Midlands 2013

A White Paper on Social Media in Local Government

- 01 Introduction: Why a white paper...
- 02 The social media landscape
- 04 Barrier vaulting
- 07 Best practice from around the West Midlands
- 11 Evaluation and ROI
- 14 The Best by West Midlands Survey
- 16 Social media Top Tips
- 17 The IEWM New Ideas Fund



# Introduction: Why a White Paper...

**Councils across the West Midlands are increasingly using social media channels to communicate and engage with customers, citizens and communities. We believe that councils are doing some amazing things not only to improve the skills of their staff and expand their knowledge but more importantly, to enhance relationships with and among their communities.**

We believe these examples are milestones of modern communications and are at the forefront of best practice examples nationally. As public services look for greater efficiencies and to tackle ever increasing complex issues, communication specialists and front line staff are striving to find new ways of working and to use social media platforms to better connect within, across and outside of traditional public sector silos.

The survey undertaken as part of this project shows that, of the 33 councils in the West Midlands, 31 of them are using twitter and Facebook and 97.5% of respondents think that social media usage will continue to grow. For those that think social media is a fad that will 'blow over' the general message is the genie is out of the bottle and there is no going back.

Chief executives, leaders and front line staff within the region are using new media to engage with staff, residents and colleagues in ways that even 5 years ago would have seemed impossible. Lessons being learnt from experiments and new practices are that it is vital that we don't stop but build upon and expand on the good work we've done so far.

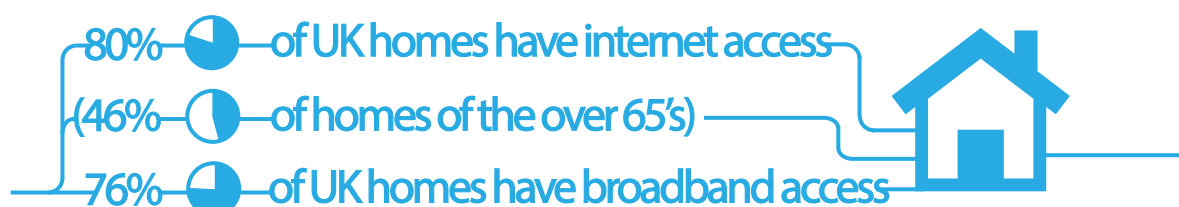
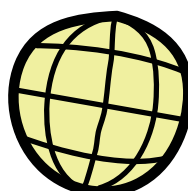
Examples like #WMGrit on Twitter, singing road technicians on You Tube and real time event coverage on Facebook are all assisting councils in telling stories about services in ways that are engaging, sometimes fun and, above all, showing the human interest that projects personality and a sense of pride about the services local government provides.

This White Paper provides a snap shot of some of the great work being done in the West Midlands and highlights the potential, as yet untapped, to use social media to transform the way that citizens see and interact with council services and officers. There is further work to be done to explore how communications can assist in tackling some of the big ticket issues like welfare reform, health integration and financial gloom but this paper is a start.

It brings to the attention of a wider audience the people who behind the scenes have been discussing and experimenting to find out the potential of using social media to build more connected communities and use technology to assist with some of the big challenges facing local government in a spirit of excitement and enthusiasm. I think we have a lot to be proud of in the West Midlands.

**Jan Britton**

Chief Executive, Sandwell Council and IEWM Board Member



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# The Social Media Landscape

## Britons spend 62 million hours a day on social media

Source: First Direct April 2013

Social media has become a huge and influential communication channel. It's vital for organisations to acknowledge this and understand what it means for their own services and customers' requirements.

Still not convinced, what with all this talk of digital divides, of disconnected communities and isn't social media all a bit niche and just for kids sat in bedrooms?

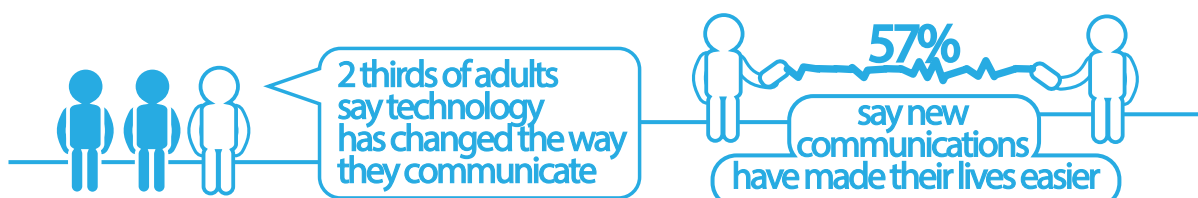
In the footer throughout the paper are some pretty compelling numbers on the digital landscape. Take a moment and see what they are telling you.



"We released our video, "At Work in Highways", starring our Highways Manager, Jon Fraser, clad in his tuxedo and singing his own pothole-centric version of Frank Sinatra's My Way."

"The video didn't take long to make either, and from our perspective in the comms team, the time spent making it was time very well spent. It has raised morale for staff across the council, not just in the Highways team, which is increasingly hard in the current climate."

YouTube: Highways video by Sophie O'Neill, Worcestershire County Council



### Social media in numbers...

The number of users of social media in the UK have reached such significant levels that their inclusion in organisational communications activities have become essential.

New platforms are emerging all of the time and some of them, like Pinterest and Instagram, are growing rapidly. The user numbers for the most popular platforms looks like this:

Facebook	30million UK users
Twitter	10million UK users
LinkedIn	6million UK users
Flickr	6billion images (218,000 of them for the West Midlands)

Facebook accounts within 10 miles of the main council building  
(source: Facebook, May 2013.)

Birmingham	690,500
Bromsgrove	16,240
Cannock Chase	29,720
Coventry	171,560
Dudley	38,520
East Staffordshire	18,880
Herefordshire	49,880
Lichfield	20,860
Malvern	9,500

Newcastle-under-Lyme	15,700
North Warwickshire	15,700
Nuneaton & Bedworth	40,520
Redditch	39,000
Rugby	41,380
Sandwell	7,220
Solihull	38,080
South Staffordshire	1,060
Staffordshire	44,820
Shropshire	53,820
Stafford	44,820
Staffordshire Moorlands	9,100
Stoke-on-Trent	130,620
Stratford-upon-Avon	17,880
Tamworth	42,060
Telford	69,020
Walsall	71,860
Warwickshire	19,760
Wolverhampton	145,720
Worcester	80,280
Worcestershire	80,280
Wychavon	3,600
Wyre Forest	27,100

### Hyperlocal websites

Hyperlocal websites are becoming increasingly important local communications channels for news and content. The West Midlands leads in the development of these sites, which are often promoted and reached via social media.

Hyperlocal\* sites within administrative geographical boundary (Source: Openlylocal.com May 2013)

\*Nesta defines a hyperlocal site as: "Online news or content pertaining to a town, village, single postcode or other small geographically defined area."

Birmingham	37	Malvern	1	South Staffordshire	0	Telford	3
Bromsgrove	0	Newcastle-under-Lyme	0	Staffordshire	23	Walsall	3
Cannock Chase	2	North Warwickshire	2	Shropshire	4	Warwickshire	1
Coventry	0	Nuneaton & Bedworth	0	Stafford	5	Wolverhampton	1
Dudley	1	Redditch	0	Staffordshire Moorlands	1	Worcester	0
East Staffordshire	2	Rugby	1	Stoke-on-Trent	8	Worcestershire	2
Herefordshire	1	Sandwell	3	Stratford-upon-Avon	1	Wychavon	0
Lichfield	2	Solihull	3	Tamworth	2	Wyre Forest	1





# Barrier Vaulting

So, you can see the figures stack up and you can see why you would want to use social media in your part of local government.

You can see the benefit but how do you win the argument to use it in your corner of the world?

The best way to get round an obstacle is to understand why people would be saying "No."

When you think of those reasons you can think of counter arguments.

A Harvard academic once said that if you think education is expensive you should try ignorance. He's right. The internet is an agent of radical change and revolution. It is powerful because it simply skirts round the old ways of doing things and leaves them obsolete and exposed. However with local government, like much of the public sector, in a state of change the time has never been more right to change the way we look at things.

It can be frustrating to someone who wants to plough ahead and start using digital channels. Dave Briggs, who has done great things to pioneer social media in local government has spoken of the balance between the ethos of 'JFDI vs Being Boring.' JFDI stands for the idea of 'Just Flipping Do It.' Pick up a smartphone. Join Twitter. Start engaging. It's easier to seek forgiveness rather than seek permission. The 'Being Boring' approach is to win permission, get the strategy and then start. There are merits in both but it's a lot harder to be JFDI in 2013. More people know the social web is there.

In 2008, when social media was starting to take hold in local government the arguments had to be won by convincing the chief executive that an organisation should use it.

There are hundreds of skills needed to deliver local government effectively. It needs hundreds of different types of people. Some will be fine using the telephone. Some will need to stand up in front of people and talk to them. That's fine. Using social media effectively is another set of skills that are needed within a digital by default workforce.

You need to allow staff to demonstrate that they will use it responsibly. ACPO social media lead Gordon Scobbie, who left West Midlands Police to join Tayside Police as Assistant Chief Constable, says: **"I trust my officers with a baton. Why wouldn't I trust them with a Twitter account?"**

In 2013, the argument over whether we should use it is over. The argument over how we should use it is and will be on-going.

We'll talk a little about how to barrier vault in three ways in local government. Firstly, to convince the senior officers. Secondly, to convince whoever looks after it that you should be using it. Thirdly, some tips for senior officers to go back to their organisation and encourage them to get with the plan.

Sometimes we can be a bit hard on managers. They're under fire from all sides when all they want to do is a good job. So, let's cut them some slack. Let's put ourselves in their shoes and think of why they would say no to social media. Once we do that we can start to understand what the obstacles really are so we can navigate round them.

## 'Because it's just kids in bedrooms...'

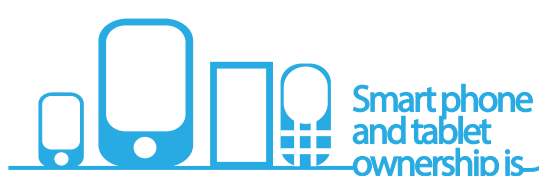
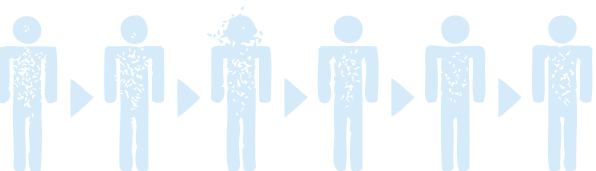
A couple of years ago this was true. But in the UK in 2013 with more than 30 million Facebook accounts that just doesn't wash anymore. Take a look at the chapter on mapping the landscape to construct an argument that fits for you.

## 'Because the popular platforms will change...'

They're right. Once Friends Reunited was an internet monster. Shortly after its launch in 2000 it drew 15 million users in the UK. Today it has lost its way. One day, Facebook will go the same way. But to understand the changing nature of the social web you have to be part of it.

## 'Because we don't have enough time in the day...'

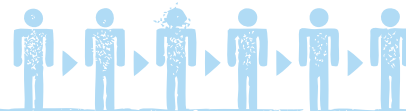
True, there's plenty of challenges to time but the same was true when e-mail was introduced and the telephone. We can spend a couple of hours a day unthinkingly on e-mail but a lot of it may be ineffective. However, experience shows that you can build a useful interactive social media channel in 10 to 15 minutes a day. Why spend twice that time sending an e-mail to five people who you will only end up telephoning anyway is my question?



higher in  
the UK

than anywhere  
else in Europe





### 'Because people will just mess about...'

One of the reasons we have managers is, let's be honest, to make sure the job gets done and people don't mess about. If people stare out of the window and don't do their job the answer is that it's a management issue. But the use of social media on work time isn't 'messing about'. The answer is not to stick brown paper over all the windows in the building. Local government needs to reach a place where using Facebook to talk to 2,000 people is as important - or heck, let's be bold - more important than turning up at a community centre to talk to 20.

### 'Because I don't like it...'

Not everyone will love using the social web but not everyone likes using the telephone, email or reading the local paper. If there is an audience of people we should be talking to them where they feel most comfortable.

### 'Because people may say something bad to us...'

Here's something for you to wake up to. They already are. On the bus. In the pub. At the breakfast table and at the water cooler. Social media is a conversation and those conversations are taking place anyway. By using social media we can see what people are talking about, what is really bothering them. Birmingham blogger Michael Grimes who works for the Citizenship Foundation produced a flow chart of engagement which is a handy resource for people using social media for an organisation.

### 'Because someone may screw-up...'

People are human. There's no stopping that. People mess up with the telephone, in face-to-face conversations and by email. It's because they are human. All we can do is train and put in some safety nets. That's the same with social media too. Some basic points in a strategy can work wonders.

### 'Because we don't have the technology...'

It's a barrier but the price of technology is falling. A 64kb computer put a man on the moon. A smartphone typically has 20MB and is available for around £20 a month making it an affordable piece of equipment.

**"I recently posted a video onto our Facebook site Wolverhampton Today which became our most popular ever post by far – both in terms of how many people viewed it and the level of engagement with it."**

**"The clip showed the steps outside St Peter's Church in the city centre after."**

**Facebook: how a cloudburst took Facebook by storm by Tim Clark, Wolverhampton Council**

### 'Because it's hard to evaluate...'

It's true. How do you work out the value of social media? But when you start to think of it as a two-way communications channel it starts to make sense. You wouldn't monitor the effectiveness of a telephone but you can start to measure engagement and also what people do as a result of your digital campaign.

### 'Because the comms team looks after that, don't they...?'

As social media becomes more commonplace a team in an organisation tends to take responsibility. Often this is the comms team. If they are bright they'll have a way where people on the frontline can use it for their organisation.

The organisation needs to grasp what social media does. It needs to have someone whose job it is to encourage, informally monitor and allow social media accounts to build and thrive within set out parameters. They need to be receptive to frontline staff accessing. So, how do you win them over?

### 'I'm really sensible. Honest...'

Demonstrate that you can already be trusted with a telephone, an email address and that you have regular contact with the public. This could be over a period of time.

### 'My manager thinks I'm sensible too...'

Not only do you think you are sensible but your manager does too. That's an extra layer of reassurance.



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# Barrier Vaulting CONTINUED

### 'I can set out what I'll use it for...'

You can show the sorts of things that you will be talking about and you can demonstrate that you are prepared to spend a little time every day in updating and responding.

### 'I'll still be doing the traditional comms...'

You can show that you'll still be plugging into the comms team for the traditional coverage and that you will call for help if things go a bit awry. The art of leadership, Tony Blair once said, is saying 'no' not saying 'yes.'

As the compelling weight of evidence for using social media rolls forward it's not just the geeks in the organisation that can see the reasons for using it. It can go right up the organisation. So, how do those at the very top encourage it's use?

Happily, there is a weight of evidence through case studies, examples, strategies and ideas that can now be accessed.

### 'Have a simple social media policy...'

It's no use having a 400-page document that sits on the shelf and defuses innovation. Have something that is simple and easy to understand. Walsall Council has a five point list of golden rules that encourages innovation.

**"At Coventry City Council we're proud of our 28,700 "likes" on Facebook - followers built up over several years of hard work, careful messaging and judicious use of social media when it really matters (which turns out to be, of course, when you think your school might be closed because it's snowing)."**

**"In an age when honest conversations about the challenges we face are more important than ever, being sensible about social media and the role it can play has to be the right way to go."**

**The benefits of open access to social media:**  
**Fran Collingham, Coventry City Council**

### 'Allow an open social media access.'

As you create good social media channels it makes no sense for those outside the firewall to be better informed than those inside. When you set-up a Twitter stream, use your intranet to allow people to be told about it. If you think staff are your advocates then plug into them. Coventry City Council never had an internal ban on social media. They have 30,000 people in a city of 316,000 liking their Facebook page.

### 'Have a digital communications manager...'

As the landscape changes and evolves people within local government will be at different stages of the learning curve. Some won't even be on it. Identify those in the organisation who have a good grasp of what social media is and allow them to share the knowledge - or share the sweets - and horizon scan.

### 'Trust and relax...'

Senior officers already trust staff to deliver hundreds of different types of service and make thousands of different decisions a day. Some will affect the lives of vulnerable people of all ages. As you can't directly micro-manage these decisions you can't directly micro-manage telephone calls, emails and social media conversations. Trust your staff to get on with the job. It's cheaper in the long run.

### 'Send a clear message yourself...'

Encourage social media by embracing it yourself. Both by using it yourself so you can understand it a little more and also see how it works. Encourage people in the organisation to use it. One way is to use a platform like Yammer, the internal communications platform that offers both a free and paid for application. At Sandwell Council, chief executive Jan Britton runs an internal blog that encourages staff to ask questions and talk to him.

### Conclusions

- It's not if we should be using but how
- We can construct an argument for a sceptical manager
- We can construct an argument for a senior officer to empower their staff
- We can construct an argument to win over gatekeepers





# Best Practice from around the West Midlands

Everywhere we look we see change. Breakneck change. From every corner of the world the old norms are not just being challenged they are being destroyed.

Local government is at the centre of some of the largest changes. But we'd be wrong to think these changes started with the global economic crisis.

These changes also started with the evolution of the internet and the growth of the social web.

Euan Semple in his seminal book 'Organisations Don't Tweet People Do' talks of how we are used to thinking in terms of big things like nation states, society and the media. We're used to those big things looking after us and protecting us but the internet breaks them apart, he says. What we find when we look closely are networks of individuals and each with their own voice.

## As Euan says:

**"If we are going to survive the changes we need to see in our institutions we need to help them find that voice."**

What that voice sounds like is vitally important as it will help local government continue to represent the views of residents and to talk to them.

Local government has always existed to serve its residents. It does that best when it is in tune with what residents are saying and has the ability to hold a conversation with it. Sometimes that's an ability to take heed on some comments. Other times it is the ability to explain and to keep people informed.

In any organisation we need to realise that there are those that will innovate and those that won't. Those that will innovate are finding ways to experiment that are defining what local government will look like.

Case studies, examples and best practice can, when handled correctly, be an inspiration. They are shafts of inspiring light from sunny upland pastures that show one way of tackling a particular problem.

But just as the English archers in the mud of the Battle of Agincourt were succeeded by better ideas and technology case studies should not be a template. In an ever changing world they should be a beacon along the path that helps shape better case studies.

In short, the success of Best by West Midlands 2013 will not be preserved in aspic of the social web but is a staging post along the way.

With case studies we aim to do two things. For leaders, we aim to give an insight into the fine work that is taking shape across the region. Much of it taking place in uncelebrated corners of local government by uncelebrated officers who are doing work often out-of-hours and almost always outside often obsolete job

descriptions. For officers, we want to inspire, cajole and show what is possible. If the case studies act as a green light for them to carry out some similar work, that's fine.

## Who are the people who have drafted the case studies?

They work in local government across the West Midlands and are a more dedicated talented bunch you won't fail to meet. They believe in what they do. They believe in local government and they know that the world has changed. They're not too busy doing something about it to miss what went before.

## David Barrie in his contribution to the Tessy Britton-edited book 'Hand Made' would call these people 'Militant optimists.'

**"They're the people who are committed to improving the world, they're prepared to organise very often and they're always keen to 'give it a go.'"**

'Militant optimists' are high on motivation, low on ready-made road maps to get them to their destination, get easily bored with playing strategic war-games and distrust marketing. 'Militant optimists' understand that to take a hostile region, it helps to establish a series of safe areas. 'Militant optimists' are also highly creative. They understand what fashion designer Nicolas Ghesquière of Balenciaga - a man who works the extravagant, not the austere - was getting at when he said:

**"We have idols but no models to follow. You have to define your own model."** - David Barrie, Hand Made, 2010.

Earlier generations may think of these innovators as what came to be called 'positive deviants'. They're the ones who are deviating from the norms and are finding solutions that go against the grain. They also crop up in unexpected places.



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# Best Practice CONTINUED

What is common amongst those who have contributed to the list of case studies is a willingness to share. This is the good thing about the public sector in 2013. If anyone is in this together it is people who work in local government but unlike the private sector they are happy to share their knowledge.

The role of the senior officer in local government is simply to identify and support. They need to hold the gate open and not fear innovation. The role of the militant optimist in local government is to make a difference, no matter how small. Because you believe that things can be better.

There are examples here of good work from across the sector in the West Midlands from museums to press offices to libraries to the coverage of public meetings but it's not just the easy things that have inspired best practice. Which is where the use of Twitter to communicate school closures and gritting runs at 3am have come in.

Each case study can provide an inspiration for something that you can do.

Here we present it as a list of tweet-like descriptions.



Great post on [#localgov](#) co-operation on the [#wmgrit](#) gritting initiative by [@colebagski](#) <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> [#bestbywm](#) [#transport](#)

34s

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How a [#localgov](#) [#comms](#) team do [#socialmedia](#) by [@jking650](#) of [@ShropCouncil](#) <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> [#bestbywm](#) [#pr](#) [#digital](#)

32s

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Great post on building an effective [#Facebook](#) page in the [#uksnow](#) by [@Claire\\_Bustin](#) [@sandwellcouncil](#) <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> [#bestbywm](#)

30s

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Brilliant use of a blog by [@ShropCouncil](#)'s [@shropfamilyinfo](#) by [@katebentham](#) <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> [#bestbywm](#) [#families](#) [#parents](#) [#support](#)

28s

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How [#socialmedia](#) can work in [#socialcare](#) by Stuart Lackenby of [@dudleymbc](#) <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> [#localgov](#) [#bestbywm](#) [#blog](#) [#twitter](#)

26s

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Having a [#socialmedia](#) plan with partners and [#localgov](#) for emergency planning by [@fraser9529wmp](#) [@WMPolice](#) <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> [#bestbywm](#)

24s

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Why [#hyperlocal](#) blogs are important for [#localgov](#) by [@jvictor7](#) <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> [#bestbywm](#) [#comms](#) [#communities](#) [#neighbourhoods](#)

22s

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e-books let parents access info through their devices by @katebentham of @shropfamilyinfo  
@shropcouncil <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm

20s

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Live streaming public meetings = promote local agendas by @colebagski of  
@BhamCityCouncil <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm

18s

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Social networking. How a #countryside officer uses #digital to connect by @walsallwildlife  
@WalsallCouncil <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm

16s

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How residents' pics help @dudleymbc build civic pride by Jason Whyley: <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #flickr  
#bestbywm #communities #localgov

14s

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Moving #digital #comms from broadcast to social by @likeaword of @HfdsCouncil by @likeaword  
<http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm #localgov #pr

12s

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Excellent. How an open #socmed approach can deliver results by @frannycoll @coventrycc  
<http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm #localgov #social

10s

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How @BhamCityCouncil do #socialmedia by @aguyinbrum <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm #localgov  
#pr #comms

33s

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Great stuff. How video and #youtube can be used to deliver news by @jacklinstead of @wcc\_news  
<http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm #pr

27s

Expand Reply Retweet Favourite More



Using #socialmedia to launch a report by Mat Danks @GBSLEP <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm  
#regeneration #localgov

42s

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How #customerservices can benefit from social by @EmmaRodgers of @StaffordshireCC  
<http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm

14s

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# Best Practice CONTINUED



Using #LinkedIn to connect to businesses for #regeneration consultation by @dancarins of @WalsallCouncil <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm

17s

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#AugmentedReality and #localgov by @mike\_rawlins <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm #ar #leisure #digital

28s

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Using #WordPress to communicate weather disruption by @hkburrows @WalsallCouncil <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm #transport #schools

33s

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What is an #unconference? by @Sasha\_Taylor on @CityCampCov <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm #innovation #localgov

15s

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How Bingo cards, bloggers and the web have helped residents see what happens at @TelfordWrekin meetings <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm

22s

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A wikipediaian in residence by Helen Johnson @StaffordshireCC <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm #museum #heritage #communities

21s

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How @Shropfamilyinfo of @shropcouncil launched on #Googleplus by @katebentham <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm #families

18s

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How a live streaming pilot helped @wcc\_news Community Forum by @jacklinstead, <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm

12s

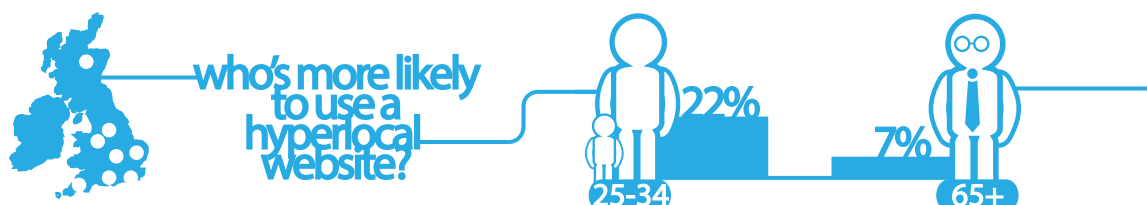
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Excellent case study by @aguyinbrum on how @BhamCityCouncil created a Google+ page with 24,000 likes <http://wp.me/P3vJ1V-h> #bestbywm

18s

Expand Reply Retweet Favourite More



## Evaluation and ROI

Okay, so you get it. You see the need for social media to be an important part of the media landscape and that it's not going away but how do you evaluate it all? In fact, should we?

There's been a debate about this for some time and often the scrutiny is far closer on digital communications than on the traditional ways as people need convincing. That's fine because there are things you can do.

The returns for social media depend entirely on why you set up the channel in the first place or ran that campaign. By winding back to that point you can start to work out if it is working.

### Return on investment? Or return on influence?

Return on investment is often the way people have gone about looking at how to see what they are doing is successful. That's working out the amount of time and resources spent compared to what they've got back but that's a lot harder in local government than the public sector. We don't, after all, sell widgets so we can't always measure sales.

Local government social media manager Helen Reynolds argues that what we should be looking at is not return on investment but actually a return on influence.

### She writes on her blog:

**"Those people who insist on measuring ROI for council social media just don't get social media. So they mistrust it and they mistrust their staff. We should be past the stage of justifying its use by now."**

**My guess is that CEOs and management who use social media well don't ask staff to prove what the benefits are. And, back to the point about phones and meetings, they don't ask for ROI reports on things they do use well like email or speech."**

That's a fair point. There are lots of things all organisations do which are vital but don't have a monetary value. What's the cash return of consulting on a road scheme, for example? Probably nothing that can be put into the bank vaults right away. But maybe it all contributes towards making that £5 million road scheme as effective as possible.

### The chasing followers myth

You can count followers and you can count likes. But really as you can buy YouTube hits and Twitter followers by the thousand these days that's all a bit nebulous. Sure, it's great to have a Facebook

page with 1,000 likes and a Google Plus account with 2,000 adding it to their circles but really and truly that's not going to change the course of local government.

What's really mission critical is what those people do once you have their attention that really counts. What's also important is not to have lots of followers but you should have the right followers. If a park friends group has a Facebook page with 200 people liking it and 170 of them are regular users that's fine. Don't chase the numbers for numbers sake.

### The Barcelona Principles are your friend

There's a great set of principles that cut to the chase of social media measurement that have been produced by the Chartered Institute for Public Relations. In 2010 they met up with their US counterparts in the Spanish city of Barcelona. They talked through the challenges that PR faced by social media and a whole range of other things.

One of the conclusions they reached was that it's not by measuring audience that you can measure social media. It's what they do. That's a beautiful conclusion to embrace and share. So in other words, the result is not that the 200 people in the Friends of the Park Facebook group were sent a message. It's that 30 of them came along to the litter picking day and barbeque to make their green space a better place to visit.

Of course, once you think about it it's a bit obvious that's what you should be measuring. It's gloriously straight forward.

However this won't give you an across the board scoring matrix that can fit everything. The 30 who came to the litter picking day is a result just as much as the 100 who fitted smoke detectors as a result of a campaign but get over yourself. That's what local government has been doing for more than 100 years.

### Evaluating channel shift

There is nothing quite so compelling as demonstrating a real financial return on what you are doing and there's a place for that in social media too.

The Society for Information Technology Managers - SOCITM - did some research that looks at the cost of a resident getting something done by telephoning, calling in at a public-facing information centre and by using the web. It's useful research. We can use those figures in evaluating social media use. If





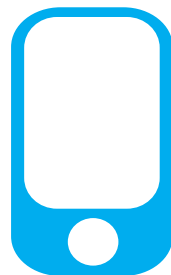
## Evaluation and ROI CONTINUED

The costs were as follows:

**Council  
one-stop-shop  
information  
centre**



**over the phone**



**via the web**



someone asks a question about gritting on a social media channel during a snow flurry we could say that this has stopped them calling the council to ask their question. It's especially valuable to do this when the snow is falling and engineers are putting all their time and effort into co-ordinating gritting the roads and keeping traffic flowing as best as possible.

We can count the one message to us asking the question. What we can't count is what hasn't happened. In other words, if we tweet a reply to one person it also goes to our 500 followers and we can never know if someone hasn't called in as a direct result.

### Evaluating a financial return

It's also possible to engage people on social media with the aim of saving money if that's what the project you are working on dictates.

Let's use the example of smoke detectors. A drive to get people to get smoke detectors has two aims in mind. It's to save lives, firstly. It's also got the aim of getting fewer avoidable call-outs. When each one costs around £400 that's something measurable.

So, if we can get 1,000 people signed-up with smoke detectors using data we can work out how many fewer call-outs we can predict further down the line.

### Evaluating engagement

One of the great things about social media is that it can plug you into what people are thinking. You can also do that in real time. If you are doing something truly right or truly wrong you can listen to what people are saying.

This is where social media stops being a broadcast comms channel and starts being customer services and a consultation channel but it's important to remember that we are all customer services and we are all consultation. We always have been. But in social media we need to fulfil these roles more publicly.

A spike of tweets or comments about a particularly troublesome set of roadworks in the town centre should be plugged into the existing networks a council has and reported back to the area that needs to know. By doing so we can build up intelligence and if we need to do more comms and put up more signs explaining what we are doing then let's do it. If it means we should be working at weekends more to avoid rush-hour tailbacks then let's do it.

If we need to have feedback on a proposal or an idea then it needs to be plugged into the consultation process. But be warned. Social media doesn't stop when the six week window we allow people to have their say comes to an end.

### Evaluating fun viral content

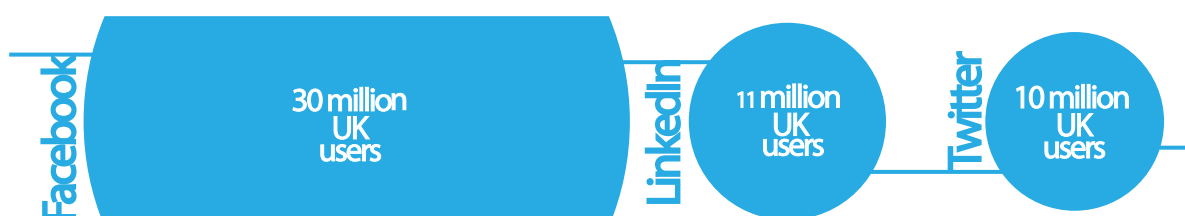
With all the emphasis on financial return, channel shift and influence it's also important not to forget that social media is meant to be social. Chase hard figures and returns solely and you'll come unstuck.

That's why it's fine to keep tabs on viral content. Content that you've created without a specific goal in mind. Wolverhampton City Council did this when they posted a clip of water cascading down a set of steps after a flash storm. Almost 20,000 people viewed it and 6,000 liked or shared the content. Tim Clarke wrote about how it worked (read the full case study at [www.bestbywm.wordpress.com](http://www.bestbywm.wordpress.com)).

By creating some fun content that didn't have an overt business goal you can create the important medium of an audience. People liked the Wolverhampton page as a result of the flooding clip and stuck around for when the council had some important messages to share further down the track.

### Conclusions on ROI and Evaluation:

- Don't chase followers for the sake of it.
- Don't have big followers have the right followers.
- It's not the size of the audience. It's what they do.
- You can evaluate channel shift.
- You can evaluate financial benefits.
- You can evaluate viral content.
- You can measure engagement



# The Best by West Midlands Survey



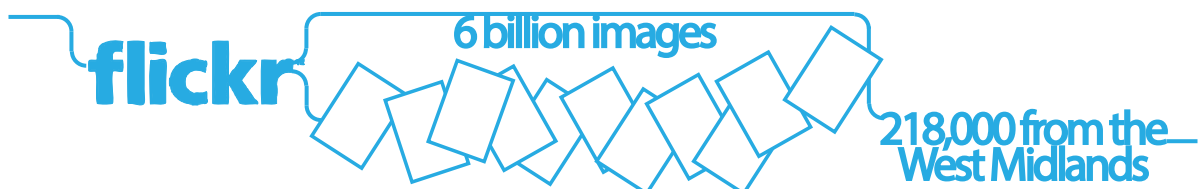
“So how does it work? The answer is simple, and it lies in one of the main advantages of working in a smaller council—the direct, undiluted contact with services. Take Baggeridge Country Park in South Staffordshire for example. They have a Facebook page—updated by the service themselves—that contains everything you want to know about the park and its services. Having a marketable product coupled with a genuine passion for the service has resulted in a successful and engaging social media presence.”

**Challenges of digital communications at a district council:**  
**Gemma Styles, South Staffordshire District Council**

We've asked councils' communications teams in the West Midlands to complete a short survey to map the social media landscape, share best practice and identify gaps we can then try and help address. We've invited all 33 West Midlands councils to complete and received 40 responses from 31 local authorities. The headline results can be found below.

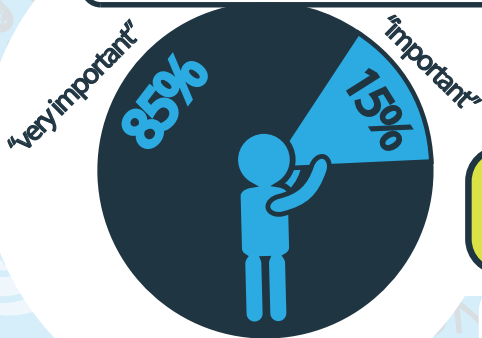
## Headline results at a glance...

- All West Midlands councils have at least one Twitter and one Facebook account
- 85% of respondents said that it is very important that their councils use social media
- And 92.5% said it is very important to use social media in their roles
- Yet only 37.5% claimed their council's usage was high
- And only 25% claimed that their council's use of social media was effective
- 47.5% of communications people said that their use was high
- Training and trust are the biggest barriers to greater use of social media today
- Only 15% of respondents said that there were no barriers
- 85% of councils have members who use social media
- The figure for senior managers who use social media is less than half this, at 32.5%
- 42.5% of councils do not have an up-to-date social media policy or guidance
- 97.5% of responding councils expect their use of social media to increase
- The most mentioned examples of good practice came from Police forces across the West Midlands, Walsall Council's use of social media, Twitter Gritter/#WMGrit and Coventry's Facebook page



# Survey Results

How important is it for councils to use social media to communicate?



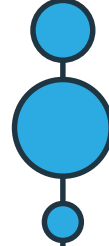
How important is it for you to use social media in your job role?



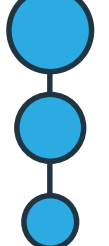
Rate your council's usage of social media



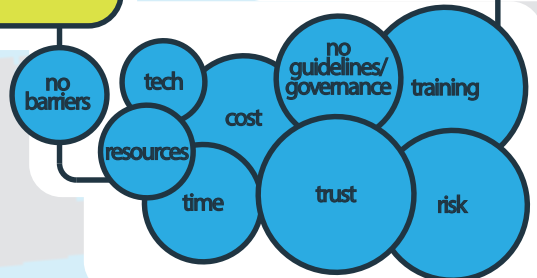
Rate your council's effectiveness of social media usage



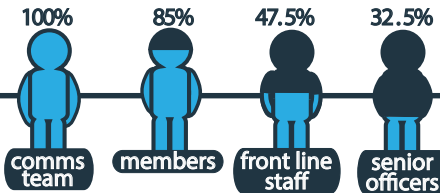
Rate your personal usage of social media



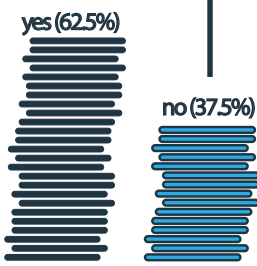
What's stopping your council from using social media more effectively?



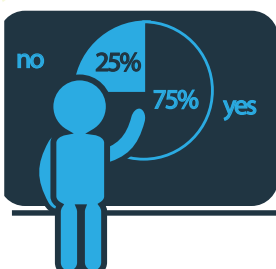
Who uses social media?



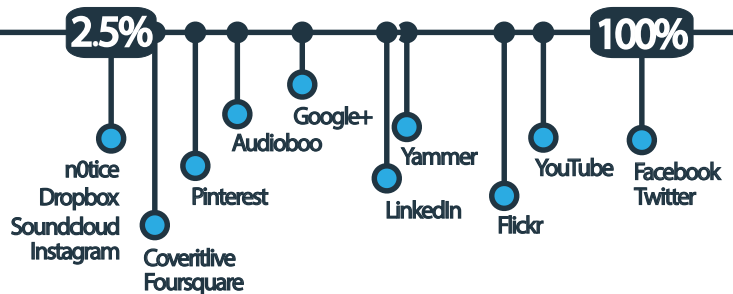
Have you got an up-to-date social media strategy/action plan?



Have staff had any training or been given any guidelines?



Which platforms are your council OK with you using?



97.5% more

2.5% don't know

Do you think you will be using social media more in the future or less?

Best Practice in the West Midlands

Best Practice in the West Midlands

## Best by West Midlands 2013

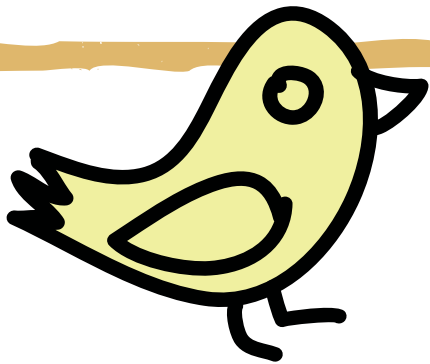
A White Paper on Social Media  
in Local Government

[www.bestbywm.wordpress.com](http://www.bestbywm.wordpress.com)

# Social Media Top Tips

As social media use becomes mainstream there is a need to support it, share best practice and horizon scan with an eye on the future. Here are 11 recommendations for local government in 2013 drawn from learning through the Best by West Midlands 2013.

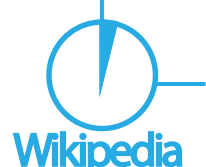
- (1) Enable staff to access social media through an open access policy.
- (2) Enable communications to take overall responsibility for social media strategy across the authority. But to enable, not control.
- (3) Enable a digital communications officer to train, support and horizon scan.
- (4) Draw-up a media landscape to map how residents are using traditional and online media.
- (5) At public meetings allow and support the public to use Twitter and other social media channels unhindered.
- (6) Enable an informal social media group to meet to help support and share innovation across the authority.
- (7) Encourage attendance at low cost events that will share learning.
- (8) Enable social media use to be devolved to the frontline.
- (9) Encourage staff to learn from mistakes and realise that mistakes will happen as they always have.
- (10) Encourage elected members to learn and adopt social media.
- (11) Update and refresh annually a social media policy and guidance.



**“The launch of Real Time Results was supported by a communications strategy that included coverage in local media, our residents’ newsletter, online and through local Community Forum meetings. The campaign centred on the fact that although the vote count and some of the announcements would take place late at night and into the early hours of the morning, people could find out what was happening at the touch of a button. The delivery of the initiative itself was incredibly simple; a communications officer was present at the vote count armed with a smartphone and would offer regular updates from the venue.”**

**Social media and elections: Dan Coates, Nuneaton & Bedworth District Council**

2 thirds of  
internet  
users are  
on Facebook  
and refer a share  
of traffic to ...





# The IEWM new ideas fund

Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands (IEWM) has a history of bringing innovation and promoting new approaches in the region.

This White Paper highlights the practical opportunities provided by social media technologies and demonstrates how the use of 'unconferences' and similar models of bringing people together in informal networks with fresh ideas is having an impact at local and regional levels.

The IEWM team have attended a number of events that have highlighted the opportunities provided by social media to support new ways of working, communicate some of the major challenges facing local government and possibly assist with the delivery of efficiencies.

Discussions with people engaged in these activities reveal that there is significant enthusiasm and appetite to make improvements and these could be introduced quite simply but empowerment to act and resources to leverage the change are not always present. Within the current economic climate authorities do not always have the ability to be able to take risks with even a small amount of resources.

The IEWM Board has set aside a budget (up to £5000 per project) which can be used for the development of ideas generated through the region's social media activities. If you have any ideas please send your proposals to [info@westmidlandsiwp.gov.uk](mailto:info@westmidlandsiwp.gov.uk) for discussion and approval by the team.

**"Twitter seemed to provide another means of developing a dialogue with existing and potential users, to function as a research tool, to learn more about local businesses in the area and to learn what is happening elsewhere that is relevant to us and to develop contacts with new people. We wanted to convey something of what Acton Scott is about to people encountering our Twitter stream, to give people a feel for the place, as well as detail on what it offers and opportunities to be involved."**

**Using Twitter for a rural farm museum: A Volunteer at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, Shropshire Council**

**"There has been an explosion of bright ideas in local government in the West Midlands. The driver of this revolution in thinking has been the unconference starting with localgovcamp in 2009."**

**"You put bright people in a room and bounce ideas and the chances are you will come up with better ideas."**

**"There is a direct link between the West Midlands' ability to stage an unconference and its position on the cutting edge of innovation of social media in local government."**

**Unconferences and how they generate innovation in the West Midlands:  
Dan Slee, Walsall Council**

—over—  —are watched on—  —every month—

