Communicating the Value of Social Media in Emergency Management

The emergence and reliance on social media in today's society is changing the way the public safety community prepares for, responds to, manages and recovers from emergencies. Social media is a form of electronic communication through which individuals create online communities to share information, ideas and other content. Social media use and organizational adoption spans a broad spectrum across public safety organizations. As a result, there is a divide emerging in some communities between the public's expectations for engagement on social media and government capabilities and capacity. Yet a lack of readily available resources with proven guidance makes it difficult for public safety officials to communicate the benefits of a social media program.

Research suggests consistent two-way engagements before, during and after an emergency build public trust. As a result, the public is more likely to turn to public safety resources first when an incident occurs. Social media champions must clearly articulate the value proposition of social media emergency management (SMEM) operations within their organization, demonstrating the benefit to both public safety and citizens. As public safety organizations work to incorporate SMEM operations to improve situational awareness for responders and the public, the expectation and communication gap between citizens and government is likely to steadily close.
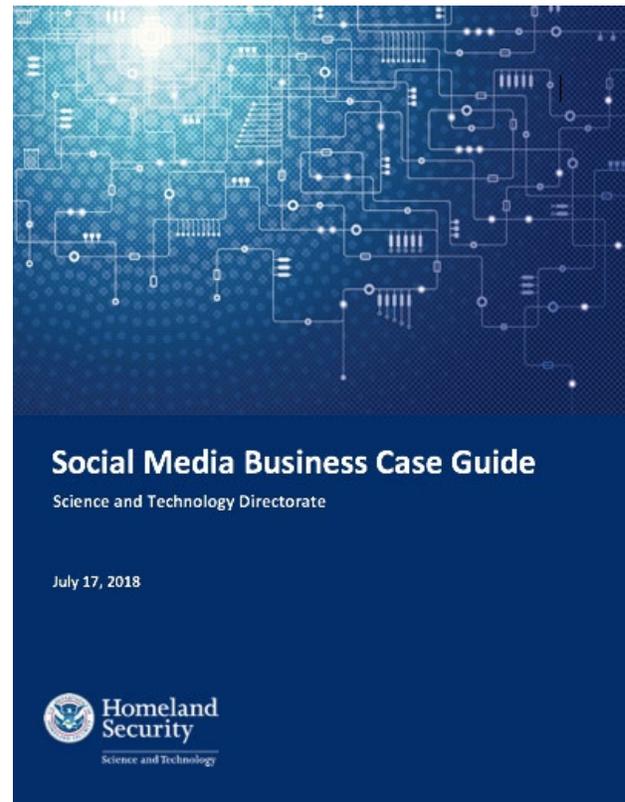
The Social Media Business Case Guide

To address stakeholder-identified barriers to incorporating social media capabilities into emergency management operations, the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) developed a Social Media Business Case Guide (Guide). The Guide provides step-by-step guidance on how to develop a business case for integrating social media into emergency management operations. More than 100 state and local government emergency managers, public information officers and SMEM experts contributed to the Guide's development. Real world best practices identified during development are included throughout the Guide.

Planning Resources

Users follow Guide prompts to: (1) think critically about SMEM strategy and policy considerations; (2) identify applicable social media risks, costs and benefits; and (3) develop a Social Media Business Case that communicates

how and why social media will benefit their organization. All of the resources and templates included in the Guide are modifiable to suit an agency's or jurisdiction's specific needs. Resources within the Guide include:

How to Prepare a Social Media Business Case: Outlines the key components an agency should consider prior to developing a business case, including laws and policies, social media content, social media platforms, budget, and contingencies.

How to Communicate the Value of Social Media: Assists users in communicating the value of SMEM to their leadership through the identification and consideration of common risks, costs and benefits.

Social Media Business Case Template Guidance: Provides instructions to help users complete the Social Media Business Case Template.

After completing the Guide, S&T hopes that agencies will have a strong business case to share with their organization's decision makers to support increased SMEM adoption.

To learn more about the Social Media Business Case Guide, contact First.Responder@hq.dhs.gov.

2018 09 14