# Using Social Media: Strategic Considerations

## Purpose

Communication via social media Web sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) is rapidly expanding in both the personal and professional realms. With careful planning, it can be a cost- and time-effective way to help promote your public report.

Stay focused on ***why*** you are using social media and have a plan for the types of information you want to share. With your strategy in hand, it’s easier to limit your time commitment while maximizing the value you can get from using social media.

## Considerations

1. **Social media is a part of mass communication: ignore it at your peril.** From afar, social media may seem like a tool for teenagers to socialize or workers to waste time. But a closer examination reveals a wide array of companies and organizations successfully incorporating social media into their marketing communication activities. For example, in a list of 2009 media trends, the World Editors Forum said it is “verging on inconceivable” that a reporter would not use Twitter. And, while the advantages of Twitter are more clear-cut, a wider range of people regularly use Facebook.
2. **There are many forms of social media.** From the popular Facebook to the leading-edge program that we haven’t heard of yet (but is destined to be the next hot item), the multitude of ways to quickly communicate using online services can be overwhelming. There are literally hundreds of social media Web sites, applications or “apps,” and tools at your disposal. The activity on social media sites can seem random and voluminous, so it’s easy to assume that it would be too time consuming to pursue. Fortunately, like most strategic activities, the best approach is to be clear about your goals and focus only on the social media tools and activities that will help you achieve them.
3. **Choose your social media activities carefully.** Think through your communication goals and practical steps using social media to help you reach them. For example, assuming that one of your goals is to increase awareness and use of your public report, it is likely that one of your key audiences is consumers. Where do they go for information? The answer likely includes newspapers (print or online) and Facebook (the most popular social media Web site). If this is the case, consider starting by using Twitter to connect with reporters (see item #1 above for rationale) and Facebook to connect with local consumers.
4. **Start slowly with social media.** If this arena is new to you, pick one of the popular social media sites and use it yourself for awhile to learn how it works in an informal, less public way. You’ll learn that the process is pretty straightforward and you control how much time you spend on it. You will also learn that it’s different from “old school” media relations or communications in which the corporate or organizational voice was acceptable. Today, such formality is often viewed as “spin.” Get ready to use a more conversational style when posting information or comments using social media.

When you are ready to have your Collaborative or public report represented on social media, consider these steps:

* **Make sure that you (or your report) is easy to find.** What is your report called? Does your communication activity focus more on promoting that name or your Collaborative? Which is more important for people to know about? This may seem like a side issue, but in the world of social media people need to be able to easily find and connect with you by typing in a name or related keywords. If you decide to use Twitter to communicate with reporters and other opinion leaders, for example, will your Twitter account be named after your Collaborative, your public report, or something else? The issue of naming will be important for several types of social media Web sites and tools. It will also improve consistency in your other communication activities.
* **Identify the type of content you want to share.** Consider posting progress in meeting milestones for producing your public report, announcements from your Collaborative, and local or national news articles that are related to the need for or content of your public report. There is still a great need to help people understand the gaps in quality and why public reporting is an important part of the process of quality improvement in health care. Also, social media is all about interaction, so be sure to scan what others are saying to learn the perspectives and interests of reporters and other key audiences.
* **Check in and add an update or a comment twice per day.** Post a comment on a topic of interest (see previous bullet). Remember to add your comments to others’ posts to encourage discussion and learning about topics relevant to your Collaborative’s public report and other efforts to improve health care quality and affordability. Being engaged means participating in the conversation, rather than just pushing out information. If people comment on what you have posted, consider the issue and comment back. Even a brief response lets them know that your Collaborative is listening and interested in what people have to say.