

Digital communications guidelines



Government
of South Australia

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Introduction

These guidelines support South Australian Government entities using digital technology for external communications and marketing activities. They contain guiding principles for the best practice use of digital tools and information for agencies developing digital communication activities.

Digital communication channels are subject to the same governance as other communication channels, including:

- *Government of South Australia Branding Guidelines*
- *Government of South Australia Marketing Communications Guidelines*
- *Guidelines for the Premier's Communications Advisory Group Process*
- *Government of South Australia Recruitment Advertising Policy and Guidelines*
- *Government of South Australia Sponsorship Guidelines and Principles*
- *DPC Circular 23: Private Sector Endorsements on Government Public Communications*
- *DPC Circular 009: The Master Media Scheme for Government Advertising*
- *Brand South Australia Policy and Guidelines*

All documents are available on the Government Communications Advice (GCA) website.

Further information and assistance is available from:

Government Communications Advice (GCA)

Department of the Premier and Cabinet

www.govcommunications.sa.gov.au

Email: govcommunications@sa.gov.au

Phone: 8204 9184

Guiding principles

Digital communications improve the ability of Government entities to inform, engage and connect with citizens, business and stakeholders. Here are the guiding principles for digital marketing and communications by Government entities:

- Understand audience needs and design your digital communications with the end user in mind. Conduct research to develop a deep knowledge of your target audiences, particularly when developing a digital campaign in conjunction with the Master Media Agency
- Put in place a sustainable and multidisciplinary team that can develop and maintain your digital channels in real time, led by a suitably skilled and senior communications manager with decision-making responsibility
- Decide the messaging, information and data your digital communications channels will require and set up systems to ensure they remain up-to-date and relevant
- Understand intellectual property laws and privacy considerations related to the content that you are publishing
- Make sure that your websites and other publishing platforms are able to be operated by your team over a sustained period of time
- Set up systems that allow your team to produce and deploy content in an agile, timely, and consistent manner with appropriate approvals or delegations in place
- Establish performance benchmarks and regularly evaluate using analytics and metrics from your various platforms. Make sure you have the flexibility and capacity to update and improve channels if and when needed
- Develop content that is clear, intuitive and accessible to the point that users understand and can use it successfully, first time and every time
- Make sure that all digital channels are well-resourced and updated regularly. Remove channels that are underperforming or not being maintained
- Take audience feedback seriously and use it to improve the performance of your digital channels
- Make a plan to achieve integration of your digital channels with your other marketing and communications activities.

Digital by default

Digital communications form a supporting role to the development and uptake of digital services that are required under the *Digital by Default Declaration for the South Australian Government*. Consistent with this declaration, to be successful communicating digitally government entities need to:

- take citizen/customer needs into consideration
- enhance community engagement
- provide equal access to information
- be prepared to innovate
- seek to reduce costs and improve productivity
- respond to digital trends (also known as 'digital disruption').

Branding

All Government external communications materials, including digital, social media and mobile advertising, must feature strong and consistent branding of the Government of South Australia.

Where a digital communication tool does not allow the application of a logo, a suitable branding alternative should be found in consultation with the GCA.

Examples include:

- *Text messages where graphics cannot be applied* – alternative branding could include a sign-off like 'Msg GovSA'
- *Avatars and social media profiles with text and space limitations* – alternative branding may include appropriate imagery, clear identification of the account as 'official' and the inclusion of a link to your corporate website

For more information please refer to the *Government of South Australia Branding Guidelines* on the GCA website.

Approval process

Campaigns

Marketing communications activities that use digital channels (paid and unpaid) as part of an integrated approach must be approved as part of the PCAG approval process.

Owned digital or social media presence

If you want to establish a presence on digital or social media platforms for use as part of day-to-day public relations, marketing or media relations, a social media strategy will be required. Departmental approval will be required prior to implementation.

A Social Media Strategy template is available on the GCA website.

For more information regarding the PCAG approval process for communications activities or how to make a submission to the PCAG please refer to *Guidelines for the Premier's Advisory Group Process*.

Benefits of digital

Digital channels and tools offer a number of unique opportunities for public sector organisations to enhance relationships with their citizens through direct, two-way engagement. Digital channels also facilitate greater access to information and services and can help increase internal efficiency. Broadly, some of the benefits digital offers government include:

- supporting democratic processes that are participatory, where citizens are invited to actively contribute to their communities
- helping organisations harness community enthusiasm and knowledge in the development of public policy
- providing greater transparency and openness in regards to government information
- extending access beyond business hours
- creating opportunities for users to have input on the design of the services they use
- streamlining and automating processes and services

More specifically, digital channels offer a number of benefits that can be used to enhance marketing communications activities undertaken by government agencies. These include:

Reputation Management

- The flexibility to rapidly respond to issues that arise or in an emergency situation
- Tracking your competitors and the discussions surrounding them
- Proactively identifying issues that may impact your brand by monitoring community sentiment

Audience engagement and targeting

- Providing niche targeting opportunities for difficult to reach audiences
- Allowing communications to be personalised and one-on-one
- Creating opportunities to offer free content, such as games or applications, to better engage your target audiences
- Engaging communities and/or influencers to support your objectives through word-of-mouth promotion

Efficiency and effectiveness

- Allowing testing of creative and media to optimise campaigns while in market
- Providing real-time communication
- Enhanced analytics and audience insights
- Opportunities to talk directly to the community without a reliance on paid channels
- Cost efficiency in delivering messages to a targeted audience

Paid, owned and earned media

Whether you are considering online or offline marketing channels, the idea of paid, owned and earned media is a useful way to develop a more integrated approach to your communications and marketing. While this concept is particularly helpful in the digital space where brand advocacy, word-of-mouth and social sharing is the norm, it also applies to traditional communication tactics too.

Paid

Paid media includes any type of exposure on a third party's channel or platform that you pay for. Paid media can be a good way to gain immediate exposure and to drive traffic to your owned assets.

Owned

Owned media are the assets you manage including those where you self-publish content and messages. Owned media is commonly thought of as cost-effective as the tools are 'free'. However, owning media platforms requires significant investment to manage and generate ongoing content. Owned media offers the opportunity to directly engage with your audience on your own terms.

Earned

Earned media is the exposure you don't control but which you earn through the creation of relevant, engaging content distributed through owned or earned channels. Earned media results both in better reach and greater engagement and is essentially free promotion of your brand. This free promotion is usually the product of a unique brand position, relevant and targeted offer or your success in emotionally engaging with your audience.

Paid, owned and earned media work together and shouldn't be considered in isolation. When developing your digital communications strategy consider the role each type of media will play in helping you achieve your objectives, as well as how they will work to support each other.



Paid

Advertising (television, radio, print, outdoor, online), paid promotion, product placement, sponsorships



Owned

Website, social media, blog, apps, events, direct mail, print collateral



Earned

Word-of-mouth, social sharing, fan videos and reviews, editorial and media coverage

Paid digital media campaigns

A digital advertising campaign that uses paid media follows the same principles as a campaign that uses traditional advertising. Some of the unique properties of digital media versus traditional media include:

- Targeted advertising placement to reach relevant audiences including niche ones
- Easier to measure – live insights and real-time results can even allow you to refine your strategy while your campaign is running
- Greater interactivity and more opportunities to encourage engagement through a direct call to action
- Generally lower creative production costs
- Often can be delivered to market quicker

For information regarding the approval processes for communications activities or how to make a submission to PCAG or GCA please refer to *Guidelines for the Premier's Communications Advisory Group Process*.

Use of digital services and suppliers

Specialist suppliers can provide support to agencies undertaking digital and social media communications activities.

The Master Media Agency

The Master Media Agency (MMA) undertakes paid digital media strategy, planning and buying on behalf of government entities – including all media bookings for digital advertising:

- display (banners, pop-ups, tiles, social)
- classifieds (recruitment, real estate)
- embedded video or audio content
- text, pull-through or display advertising on other digital mediums (e.g. digital radio)
- search engine marketing (optional)
- ad serving (optional)
- digital campaign management (optional).

Other specialist digital suppliers

There are a range of specialist digital suppliers in the market who can provide services such as content production, creative design, project management, user experience design and testing, search engine optimisation, development and programming, ad serving and campaign management.

Planning your paid digital media campaign

Any online media campaign must be planned by the Master Media Agency. Before you brief them you should conduct a review of your owned channels and consider the following:

- **Do you have somewhere to direct people once they see your paid media?** For example, your website or social media channels. Make sure these provide a good experience and are consistent with your campaign creative.
- **Are your owned media assets easily to access on all devices?** There is no point running a campaign using mobile advertising if you're directing people to a website that is not designed to work well on tablets or mobile phones.
- **Does your creative agency or designer have experience designing for digital platforms?** Ask them for examples of other work they have done.
- **How you will measure the campaign's success?** Is your campaign about awareness and traffic or promoting a specific call to action? Different types of online advertising work better for different types of communication.
- **Are you easy to find online?** Check where you appear on search rankings now – you may be able to improve this through better content and key word application without having to invest in paid search advertising.
- **Are you making the most of the data you already have?** Website and social media analytics will provide valuable data to allow you to evaluate the success of your paid media. Make sure you have them established prior to launching your campaign and monitor them regularly during campaign delivery.

Once you have a media schedule developed by the MMA, work with your creative agency to ensure your creative strategy makes the most of the digital environment. Use real-time analytics to closely monitor your campaign and tweak where necessary.

Understanding the digital media landscape - the basics

Paid media in the digital context includes, but is not limited to;

Advertising Category	What is it?	Example
Search Engine Marketing	Advertising that seeks to 'buy' traffic through paid search listings	Google Search or AdWords
Display Advertising	Banner, tile or pop-up advertising embedded in page content	The Advertiser online banners and pop-ups, Google Display Network
Sponsored or promoted social media content	Advertising embedded in social media platforms	Facebook advertising, Twitter promoted tweets
In Game Ads	Advertising that appears within games as part of the overall design (virtual product placement)	A billboard within a sport game
Mobile and App advertising	Advertisements that appear within mobile apps usually as banners	Apple or Android in app advertising
Classifieds	Traditional classifieds replicated in an online environment	Recruitment or real estate listings

Charging models for online advertising generally fall into two categories:

- **Performance based:** includes any advertising where the charge is based on your audience taking action – includes Pay Per Click (PPC) or Cost Per Click (CPC) or Cost Per Engagement (CPE). This charging model is better for direct call to action campaigns where conversions are a key driver.
- **Volume based:** this type of online advertising is charged on the number of people the ad is served to (regardless of how many click through) and includes Cost Per Mille (CPM). This charging model is better for branding campaigns where reach and frequency is a key driver.

Owned digital channels

There are a number of owned digital channels that you can use to support your ongoing communication, marketing and media relations efforts including:

- websites
- social media channels
- blogs
- electronic direct mail
- mobile content (SMS, apps, games)

Owned digital channels can be used to support campaign activity by promoting your messages and providing a place for paid media to drive people to. If you are thinking of establishing additional owned channels (e.g. social media) it is recommended that you establish these before you go live with a specific campaign, so you have a good understanding of what is involved in managing them and mitigating risk.

Owned digital channels should be considered permanent communication infrastructure and require a long-term commitment. When assessing which channels you want to use you should consider:

- your aim and objectives
- who your target audience is, what digital channels they use and how they use them
- how you plan to use digital media to support offline communication and engagement – what role will it play?
- what you can reasonably resource – digital channels are not 'set-and-forget'
- the experience and capability within your team – are there any skills gaps?
- ongoing costs, licensing fees and support required to maintain your digital assets

Each type of digital platform is different and will require different experience and resourcing.

Websites

The South Australian Government has committed to a Common Internet Site for Government (CISfG) – www.sa.gov.au. The site has been developed to make SA Government services and information much easier for the community to access by providing a single-entry point for the community to access core government services and information.

A number of government agencies maintain their own websites outside of sa.gov.au. As a critical piece of communication and brand infrastructure, your corporate website is an important platform and should be regularly reviewed.

Websites that sit outside sa.gov.au should have prior approval and will need to comply with guidelines and policies issued by the Office for Digital Government to ensure consistency across government.

A sound website should include the following:

- **A clear governance framework:** it is recommended that your website is governed by a strategy that outlines objectives for all staff. Your website should also have a clear owner, approval workflows and support escalation point so that information is consistently presented and risks can be appropriately managed.
- **Responsive design:** government websites should be designed so that they work well on all devices including desktops, tablets and mobile phones.
- **A great user experience:** website design, information architecture and content should be produced using a customer-centric design approach that focuses on creating a great experience.
- **Good, relevant content:** A clear strategy should be in place to manage your website content to ensure it is consistent, reflects your brand, is engaging, relevant, factually correct, optimised for organic search and easily understood by visitors to your site.
- **Analytics:** make sure you are tracking how people are using your website, what they are searching for when they get there and the content they click through to. These are valuable insights that can help shape your site and ensure continuous improvement.

Accessibility

In addition to the points outlined above, all government websites should be able to be easily accessed by all members of the community. The South Australian Government, along with governments all over the world, has adopted the *Website Content Accessibility Guidelines* (WCAG) to provide guidance on best practice. Following the WCAG principles will make sure your website is accessible to people with disabilities, different literacy and education levels and from non-English speaking backgrounds. More information can be found at www.w3.org.

A summary of key things to consider for accessibility includes:

- Providing text alternatives for non-text content (e.g. transcripts for videos, meaningful captions and metadata for images) to ensure that assisted readers can find the same meaning in content.
- Reducing reliance of downloadable documents (e.g. PDFs) to increase discoverability and improve access.
- Providing access to translated materials where requested and the ability to zoom (magnify) text.
- Taking care to make content readable – keep sentence structures simple, avoid long words and remove clutter. You can test your readability score at www.read-able.com - you should aim for a reading level of 6 – 9 depending on your audience.
- Making sure all functionality can be controlled from a keyboard for users who cannot use a mouse.
- Helping users navigate the site - make the architecture logical and based on user needs.

If you are designing a new site you should be aiming for WCAG compliance to level AA. You can also perform a WCAG audit on an existing site to determine areas for attention.

For more information please contact the Office for Digital Government.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

SEO, also referred to as 'Natural' or 'Organic Search', is the process of making sure your website contains is structured so that it is easily read and catalogued by search engines. This is usually a technical solution paid for from your website development budget however it can also be achieved through good content development and management.

General guidelines to ensure your new, or existing site, performs well in search:

- Ensure content is written using the same words and language that your target audience would put into a search engine – check analytics regularly
- Use key words within your page titles; don't use jargon or abbreviations
- Make sure headings and content are text, rather than image files, so they can be easily read by search engines
- Put your most important information and keywords up front. Repeat key words where you can and where they add value to your content
- Prioritise web page (HTML) content over downloadable documents (e.g. PDF).
- Use good quality, relevant links and ensure they work; build linking relationships with other relevant sites to drive traffic back to yours
- Review and repeat the above steps at least every six months.

Social media

Many government agencies are already using social media for internal and external communications strategies. It provides a range of opportunities to connect directly with customers and communities through two-way conversations. When managed well, social media can:

- improve reputation through increased transparency and better service delivery
- create opportunities for active and positive engagement with the community
- deliver timely and relevant information that can be shared
- listen to what people are saying about your organisation and ask for feedback
- supplement existing and future communications activities
- be a flexible and low-cost communications platform.

Key social media platforms

The list of social media channels continues to grow. Common social media platforms include:

Facebook www.facebook.com

A social networking service often used by brands to facilitate conversations, share content and news and respond to customer feedback.

Twitter www.twitter.com

A micro-blog site used by individuals, brands and the media to share content and updates in 140 characters or less.

YouTube www.youtube.com

A video sharing platform where users and brands can post original content.

Instagram www.instagram.com

A network based around photo and video sharing which has popularised the application of filters to photography.

Flickr www.flickr.com

Another photo sharing application that provides the opportunity for government agencies to create, manage and share images within a photo library or gallery.

Pinterest www.pinterest.com

A 'pin board' photo sharing application that allows users to manage and share theme based collections.

LinkedIn www.linkedin.com

A business orientated social networking site that allows users to discover professional connections, recommend job candidates, and find industry experts.

The use of any social media tools should be integrated with broader communications strategies and objectives. Simply selecting a tool because it is popular can be counter-productive, if it does not support your objectives. Before you pick one it's always a good idea to familiarise yourself with the technology. Use it, play with it and have a look at who else is using it well.

When to use social media

The decision to set up a social media channel should not be considered lightly. While the platforms themselves may be 'free', managing social media channels can be resource intensive. Key things to consider before you set up your channels include:

- **The expertise and capability within your team**
To use channels effectively and to mitigate risk your staff should be competent using the platforms you choose. They should understand the language, tone and conventions associated with each platform and have a good grasp of how to interact. This often means they need to regularly use the tools themselves.
- **Your content strategy and budget**
Social media engagement is built around relevant content. This content should support overarching brand and communication strategy. Video and photo content, where you engage a supplier, can be costly to produce. Text content can require a large amount of research, great writing and regular posting to keep your audience engaged.

You need a clear content strategy and ongoing resources to produce high quality, engaging content. If you don't have a plan for developing content, if you have limited resources or you think you may run out of content don't establish the social media channel.

- **Your internal processes and approvals**
Social media often requires a rapid response. Complicated approval processes may undermine your ability to provide a high quality service and increase risks. You'll need processes in place that support the delivery of information quickly and effectively. If your approval process is lengthy and likely to cause significant delays avoid using social media.
- **Your capacity to respond to issues, especially outside business hours**
While you can specify hours of operation in any social media profile, community expectation is often that these platforms are operated beyond normal working hours particularly when issues arise. Make sure you have the processes and people in place to respond in a flexible way to unexpected events. If your resourcing is limited and you know you won't always be able to respond when issues arise, avoid social media until these issues are addressed.

Social media best practice

Social media is built on the idea of being part of a community and contributing to a conversation. Best practice social media is:

- **Responsive and helpful** – reply quickly to questions or feedback and help solve problems
- **Polite and respectful** – respect different views and don't post inflammatory or sensitive content, take personal conversations offline or into a private space
- **Meaningful and relevant** – provide the right message at the right time, tailor content to the audience you have, don't spam or only 'push' information out
- **Consistent with the brand it represents** – your content should be supportive of, and integrated with, your other communication strategies
- **Honest and accountable** – always acknowledge who you represent and who you speak for. Check what you post, own up to mistakes quickly and correct them, always apologise when things go wrong
- **Conversational and friendly** – use a tone and language that is familiar to your audience. Give your voice, and your brand, a personality
- **Engaging and interactive** – don't be afraid to use humour, be interesting and make sure the conversation is two-way. Acknowledge those who follow you by following them back
- **Regular** – plan to post often and at regular intervals.

Poor social media management includes:

- not responding to interactions or taking a long time to do it
- only broadcasting or pushing information out
- repeating content too often or spamming people
- not adapting your tone of voice to suit your audience and the platform you are using
- defensiveness, commenting on sensitive issues or inflaming your audience.

Before you set up your social media channels consider how a best practice approach might apply to the channels you propose to use. You can also use these to assess the platforms that will best support your objectives.

Developing social media strategy and policy

Before you develop your social media strategy or policy it is a good idea to review your current position. This includes:

- Reviewing your existing owned digital assets including how they are managed, how they support your communication goals and what existing content you have that can be used to support your social media strategy.
- Conducting a listening exercise - this includes monitoring social media to understand what conversations are already happening about your organisation and expectations of social media community members.
- Looking at how other similar organisations are using social media.
- Confirming the resources and experience within your team – if staff are unfamiliar with the platform take time to use and understand the tools first.

A sound social media strategy will provide a clear framework for use of social media by your agency. Development of your social media strategy should include a risk assessment, gap analysis and development of performance indicators.

Workflows will assist you to manage your social media channels effectively should be part of your strategy and policy development. An example of a social media response flow chart can be found on page 19 of these guidelines.

A social media strategy template can be found on the GCA website.

Other owned digital media

Email Marketing

Often referred to as 'Electronic Direct Mail' or 'Permission Marketing', Email Marketing provides an opportunity to communicate one-on-one with your target audiences online. Because privacy laws cover email addresses you should seek advice regarding the distribution lists you propose to use and 'opt in/ out' requirements.

Effective email marketing should:

- Be simple and uncluttered to allow your audience to quickly find key information
- Include an option to 'unsubscribe'
- Include a clear call-to-action and evaluation strategy to measure responses
- Carefully consider the timing of email distribution
- Ensure sizes and types of any files distributed over email will not disrupt service to recipients
- Ensure compliance with legislation (e.g. Privacy Act)

Blogs

Blogs can provide great content for social media as well as engagement opportunities on your website. They are a good way of promoting thought leadership and staff expertise on topics relevant to your audience. Good blog posts are human and conversational in their tone. They encourage interaction and know their audiences well which ensures they provide relevant and interesting content.

Mobile and tablet content

As a completely portable media device, mobile can deliver direct messages to people at any time, wherever they may be. Mobile content is now as diverse as anything you can get on your desktop device including:

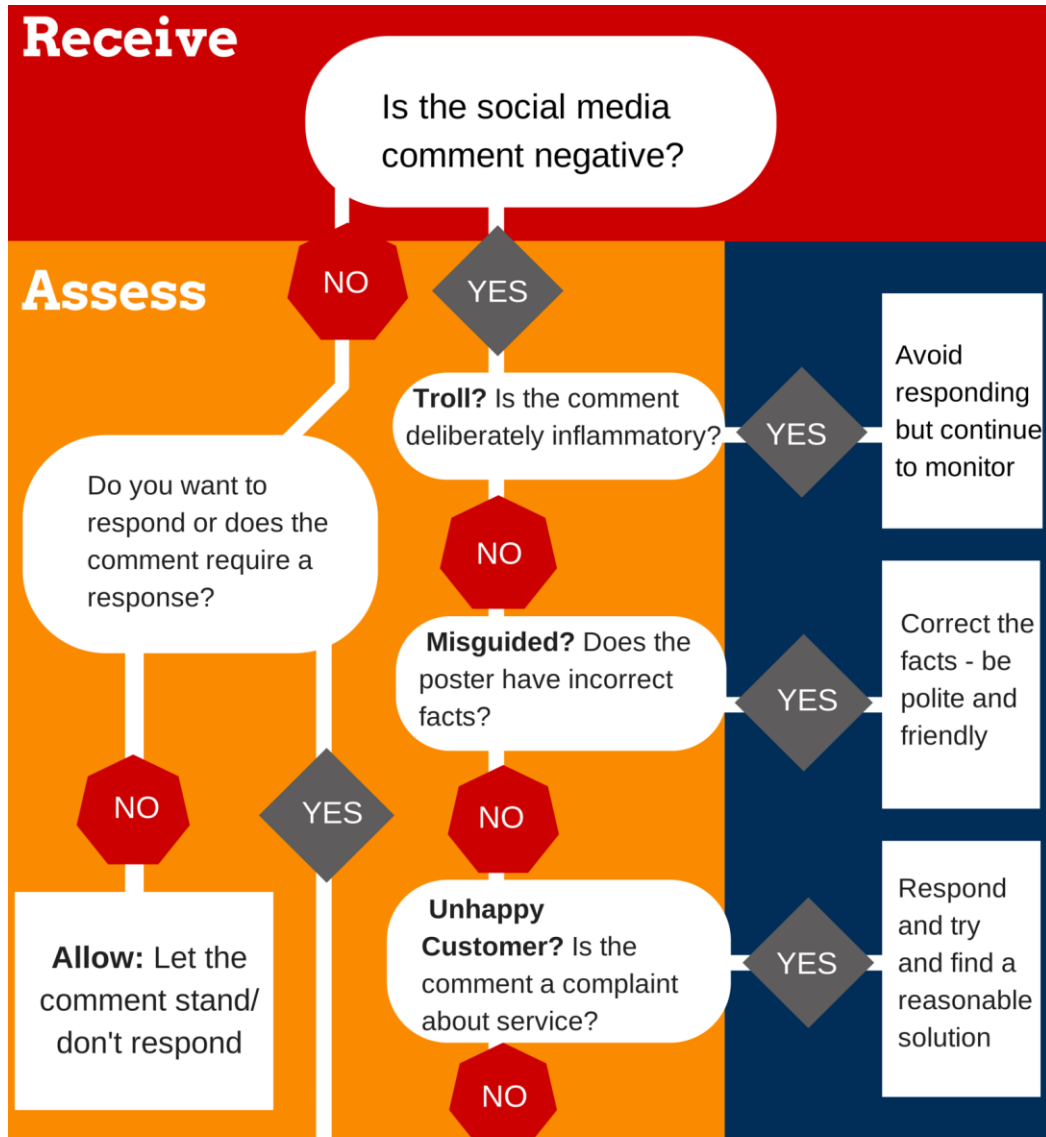
- Direct messaging
- Television and video
- Games
- Apps

Each type of media has different requirements. Some of the things to consider include:

- Compliance with legislation – As mobile phone numbers and email addresses are covered by privacy laws you should seek legal advice to ensure you comply with this and other legislation (e.g. Do Not Call Register, competition requirements).
- Timing of any push notifications - Message delivery causes an alert sound so you should ensure messages are not delivered late at night or early in the morning.
- Understand the resources required - Direct response campaigns often require significant back-end support (e.g. IT infrastructure, fulfilment, database cleansing).

Social media response flow chart

This is designed to be a guide only – use as a starting point to develop one that works for your organisation.



Response options

Acknowledge:
Like, star or favourite the post or comment

Reply: respond directly or share the interaction with your community

Industry associations and links

Industry Associations

Further information, case studies and resources can be sourced through the following industry associations.

Mobile Marketing Association (MMA)

www.mmaglobal.com

Australian Web Industry Association and Index

www.webindustry.asn.au

The Communications Council (Formerly Advertising Federation of Australia (AFA))

www.communicationscouncil.org.au

Media Federation of Australia (MFA)

www.mediafederation.org.au

Australian Direct Mail Association (ADMA)

www.adma.com.au

International Social Media Association (ISMA)

www.i-socialmarketing.org