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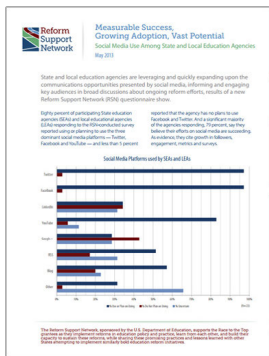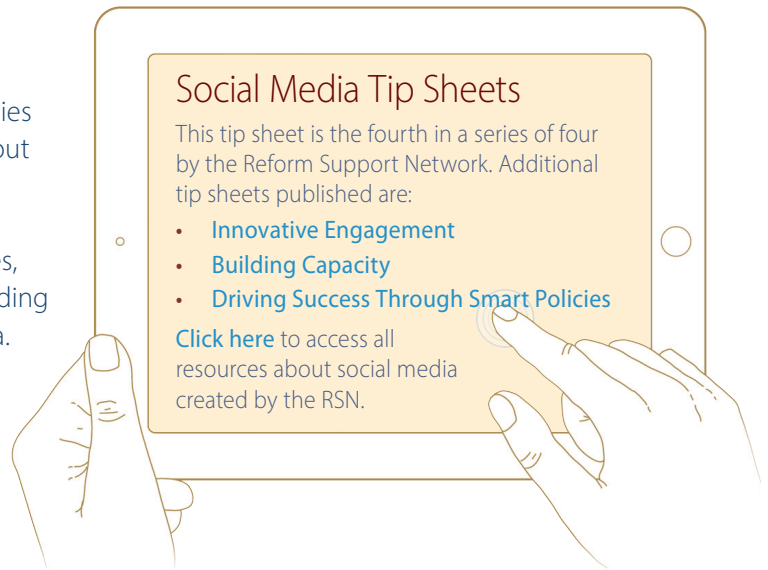# Social Media Tip Sheet #4
Measuring Success

June 2014

Communicators create clear engagement strategies and compelling messages, relentlessly reaching out using the latest tools, tactics and techniques. But many communicators aren't sure whether those efforts are penetrating or engaging key audiences, particularly with the fire hose of information flooding through emails and mainstream and social media. Government entities have limited capacity to measure the success of social media efforts, particularly those without the resources to create or pay for tools that measure engagement, sentiment and impact.

State and local agencies participating in the Reform Support Network's (RSN) **survey of State education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs)** about the use of social media said that measuring success is often the most challenging aspect of communications work.[1] As a result, many agencies simply are not measuring success at all or as well as they would like. Sixty-four percent of the agencies responding to the RSN questionnaire said that they do not create measurement or metrics reports, which makes it harder to determine which agency messages are penetrating or are the most compelling to key audiences, and where stakeholder sentiment on particular issues lies.

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[1] The Reform Support Network (RSN) conducted research to develop the series of social media tip sheets. First, the RSN conducted a social media questionnaire in January and February 2013, completed by 23 SEAs and 11 LEAs. The RSN then conducted follow-up interviews in September and October 2013 with representatives from eight SEAs and two LEAs.

Social Media Tip Sheets

This tip sheet is the fourth in a series of four by the Reform Support Network. Additional tip sheets published are:

- Innovative Engagement
- Building Capacity
- Driving Success Through Smart Policies

Click here to access all resources about social media created by the RSN.

Many States do, however, measure audience reach on social media, level of engagement and mentions by other users. Overall, half of the agencies responding to the questionnaire said that they use an equal mix of qualitative and quantitative measures with regard to success on social media. Among those measuring the success of their efforts, nearly one-quarter reported using mostly qualitative measures such as the adoption of key messages or sentiment. Those same agencies noted that they also include analytics collected from various social media sites, gauge the quality of interactions, stakeholder feedback, surveys and the growth of followers.

This tip sheet will focus on the different ways that SEAs and LEAs can measure the impact of social media activities and methods that agencies could use to emulate/adapt these tactics.

Tip One: The Basics: Tracking Followers, Fans and Figures

The first and easiest measurement tool is tracking those who engage with the agency on social media. While there are many distracting bells and whistles in social and digital media, it is important not to ignore the basics of data tracking. A simple Web plug-in, such as one provided by Google Analytics and other platforms, allows agencies to track page visits, page views, bounce rates, average time on pages and average visit duration, among other helpful metrics.

An agency can use analytical services to compare the success of specific pages, ultimately using the information to drive strategy and improve engagement. With data, agencies can determine the effectiveness of tactics such as visuals, lists, surveys, slide shows, videos and other online efforts.

Similarly, each of the primary social media platforms offers a pre-set tracking system of followers and fans. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest all have ready-made counters to determine whether people like, follow, subscribe or pin to what you are doing.

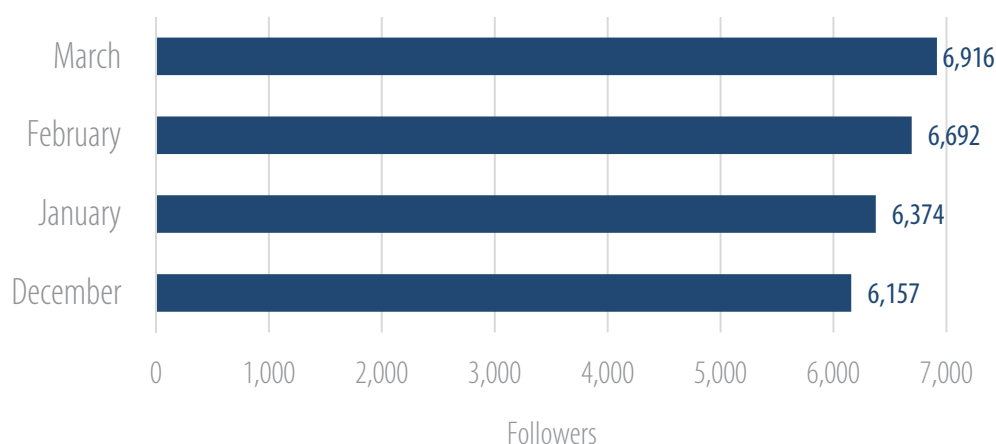Many agencies create simple measurement reports of monthly data points on increases and decreases in Web and social media account engagement. Most of the primary social media platforms have simple free reports that the user can run to identify the basic trends. The Colorado Department of Education compiles a monthly communications scorecard analyzing its communications efforts. Figure 1 displays some Twitter statistics from March 2014; the complete communications scorecard for March 2014 can be accessed at this link.

Tip Two: A Deeper Dive With Micrometrics

States and districts turn to other methods to track trends and hot topics, and to help determine which issues, messages and other content being shared on social media are falling flat.

Figure 1. Colorado Department of Education Twitter Data

Monthly Twitter followers: 3.3% increase ▲

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The departments of education in Ohio and in Montgomery County, Maryland, among other government entities, use Web analytics to determine where Web traffic is originating, particularly analyzing which links and Websites drive traffic to their content. Agencies also use Web link shortening services, which not only make Web links easier to post within character limits on platforms like Twitter, but which also give agencies originating the content the ability to track how many clicks the link received.

Among those creatively using Website link shortening services such as TinyURL.com and Bitly is the Colorado Department of Education, which sends the links to its social media ambassadors (highlighted in Social Media Tip Sheet #2) to track engagement on its key issues.

 Most State and local agencies that regularly use Twitter aggregate content with a hashtag (a simple, memorable set of letters or word after the # sign, which allows users to click and easily see others who have used it). Some of the most successful uses of hashtags by education agencies were at major education conferences. Ohio used the tag #OHEdConf around its statewide educators' conference and New York used #NTIny for its successful statewide Network Team Institute sessions. The hashtags allowed agencies to track use on Twitter on specific days, hours or even at specific sessions of those gatherings.

"We track what is shared, read and retweeted, and look at what is working," said Lisa Luten, director of marketing and communications for the Wake County Public School System in North Carolina. "You can tell through micrometrics if the messaging is off, the timing is off, the delivery is off."

Wake County performs a day-to-day analysis of its social media efforts by examining which Web pages in each blog post get the most traffic, which Facebook posts get the most shares and likes, and which tweets are retweeted (or shared) the most. If no one shares a post, they re-examine the content to analyze what could have been improved to encourage sharing.

Tip Three: Contracting With Third Parties to Build Reports

Most SEA and LEA agencies, like most government entities, cannot do what the private sector does to track social media – contract with companies or firms, or utilize costly analytical software to generate glossy reports that present measures of sentiment, audience and impact. Some agencies, however, do allocate funds from grants to pay for third-party services. Others utilize free Web-based services.

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has made use of SumAll, a free analytical tool, which Stephanie Siria, social media coordinator, said allows her to compile weekly reports of its engagement (typically this includes tracking the number of fans/followers, comments, shares and other basic engagement).

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) used grant funds to pay for **TopsyPro**. This measurement tool helped CDE monitor which topics had the most social media engagement, the specific moments social media conversations spiked about certain topics and which of CDE's partner organizations had the most success on similar social media topics.

While having access to the paid metrics for a limited time only, CDE found the data, process and reports extremely beneficial in helping to ensure that data collection and analysis are key facets of their work going forward. It prompted CDE to sharpen its own analytics reports and use the analysis to improve social media efforts, said Katie Lams, communications specialist at CDE.

Key Takeaways

Data and analytics are a vital aspect of social media and measurement is possible, even on a shoestring budget. SEAs and LEAs are carving out time and resources to ensure that their efforts on social media are having a positive impact by gauging the penetration of messages, topics and efforts.

And while some are able to pay for or secure funding for full-scale analytical services, many agencies are discovering that even their most basic measurements are having a positive impact.