Social Media in Transport
CIVITAS Forum 2011 – Notes by Andrew Nash (andy@andynash.com)

1. Definition:

According to WIkipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media):

> The term Social Media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue.

> Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content."[1]

> Social media are media for social interaction, as a superset beyond social communication. Enabled by ubiquitously accessible and scalable communication techniques, social media substantially change the way of communication between organizations, communities, as well as individuals.[2]

In essence, social media tools are designed to make it easy for anyone to share information with everyone else.

Examples

- Facebook
- LinkedIn (professional social networking)
- Flickr (share photos)
- Trip Advisor (travel reviews and information)
- YouTube (share videos)
- Many more ….

2. Why is social media important?

- Social media use is exploding (over 800 million Facebook users);
- Mobile devices mean people can be connected everywhere and all the time;
- Social activities ("Like" button on websites) are replacing website addresses!
- Many applications are being developed to provide information via social networks (e.g. Facebook pages) about companies, products, etc.
- Social media drives customers to your other online and real products
- More …

The future of mobility systems belongs to social networks intertwined with smart everyday objects. (Oana Mitrea, Interuniversity Research Centre for Technology, Work and Culture, Graz)

You can't be everywhere, but your customers are!

3. How is social networking being used in transport?

The rise of the "*Smart Traveller*" means your customers have constant access to real time information, internet applications, media reports, social networking sites … this substantially changes how transport systems can be operated.

Here are some ways to use social networking in transport:

- Information sharing from agencies
    - General marketing
    - Real time from agency – especially in crisis/disruptions
    - Obtain survey information from customers
    - More?
- Information sharing from customers (very broadly defined!)
    - Complaints
    - Real time from citizens – especially in crisis/disruption
    - Responses to agency surveys
    - More?
    - "Crowd Sourcing"
- Creating positive feelings and good will for agency
- Fan groups (e.g. photo sharing)
- Reporting problems   www.fixmytransport.com   www.seeclickfix.com
- Providing planning input … www.greencitystreets.com
  http://nyc.changeby.us/#start
- "Peer-to-Peer" Services: Helping operate/organize transport systems – social network to control traffic signals, buses, organize carpools?
- More?

4. Information in a Crisis/Disruption

Examples described at IIID Conference on Social Media and Transport: winter storms in Great Britain 2010, Japanese Earthquake and Oslo bombings.

Great Britain – Twitter shown as a valuable source of real time information. The national rail information system was mostly switched off and some operators encouraged travellers to Tweet about their journey status and experience. This helped information circulate - with people able (and willing) to share experiences.

Bus Operator Go Northeast linked information from Twitter to other social media and agency pages (e.g. Facebook, home page).

Oslo Bombings – Good and bad points shown. Good: some agencies used Twitter very effectively to communicate information (Oslo Airport), some processes had been set-up to automatically communicate information from one application to another (e.g. tweets show up on Facebook or travel planner application).

Bad: some agencies went dark (the person responsible for Twitter had gone home for the day, the building where the person responsible for Twitter worked was evacuated, other applications were not linked to real time information (e.g. travel planner still suggested travelling through the closed area).

Lessons for using social media in crisis or disruption:

- During a crisis, those affected by events will use social media, thus turning them into essential channels … You **CANNOT** ignore this!

- One to one communication on emergency phone numbers will break down

- Obtain official status with social networking agencies now.

- Become power users of social media: really learn how to use them and applications designed to make them effective (e.g. tools that allow you to send the same message to different social media, e.g. hootsuite).

- Integrate agency information streams / processes and don't neglect other media (e.g. home page)

- Communicate proper "tag" information so everyone can access and provide information in the right place

- Add "crisis banners" and/or direct social media feeds to other websites and applications helping direct users to appropriate social media for updates and information

- Use a team and distributed access approach to ensure that agency information is always available.

- Work together with other natural partners: police, fire, rescue, etc. to share information effectively with each other and with the public.

- Prepare plans for using social media in crisis situations.

- Continue to 'nurture' Social Media fans / followers after event.

- Be aware of the next technology consumer-product 'leap': consider how operational and information systems can relate to that

- Ensure that standard applications (e.g. public transport travel planning applications) communicate proper information in crisis (e.g. don't direct people to use stations or routes that are closed). If the application can't be changed at least be sure to place information banner with problems as specific to the particular customer request as possible.

Finally: remember user-generated information can help you operate your service effectively through the crisis!

References: Presentations made at IIID Traffic & Transport Conference 2011 by John Austin, Austin Analytics (www.analytics.co.uk); Niall Gardiner (Tactran) and Craig Nelson (Steer Davies Gleave); and Bent Flyen, (http://bent.flyen.no).

5. Crowd Sourcing Ideas, Problems

When is a complaint not a complaint? When your agency uses it to improve its products or services.

Use the process of creating applications for crowd sourcing ideas to improve your agency's existing processes for handling suggestions or complaints.

Recommendations for effectively using social media input:

- Use webforms and online survey software for structured feedback

- Don't forget to organize face to face meetings too, provide some rewards for the people who are helping you

- Provide a forum for information exchange within the community – let the crowd help identify the good ideas rather than doing it yourself

- Use multiple channels to obtain more feedback … you don't want to limit yourself to one type of users or social media application.

- Develop clear internal processes for handling feedback:
  - Categorize information
  - Evaluate information quality
  - Prioritize information: Does it need an immediate response?
  - Forward information to appropriate technical experts

- Make crowd sourcing applications easy for everyone to use!
  - Screen/ Application Design
  - Use available functions to reduce error and make process easier (e.g. GPS in smart phones)
  - Allow information at different levels of detail
  - Keep things simple and clear
  - Provide tools to help them (e.g. drafting program)

- More?

Interesting Applications

- Com-oVer – (http://www.abc-consulting.at/index.php?id=110 in German) Austrian project for crowd sourcing bike information.

- Cyclopath (www.cyclopath.org) includes an editable bicycling map where users can share notes about roads and trails, enter tags about special locations, and fix map problems.

- Next Stop Design – (http://www.nextstopdesign.com/welcome) US application for designing a better bus stop, includes educational information and tools to help users develop their ideas.

- seeclickfix (http://www.seeclickfix.com) Seeclickfix enables residents to identify "non emergency" problems (e.g. potholes) and also has administrative tools for organizations to effectively use the crowd sourced data.

- FixMyTransport (www.fixmytransport.com) crowd sourced information on public transport problems (developed by MySociety.org the same people who developed www.fixmystreet.com).
- GreenCityStreets (www.greencitystreets.com) crowd sourced information on public transport planning (rather than "just" problems) includes educational component.

References: Presentations made at IIID Traffic & Transport Conference 2011 by Michael Kieslinger, Fluidtime Data Services GmbH (www.fluidtime.com) and Andrew Nash (www.andynash.com).

6. Social Media and Marketing

Perhaps the most obvious application for social networking in transport. Some interesting examples:

- Facebook pages, e.g. pubic transport agencies: www.facebook.com/wienerlinien www.facebook.com/zuerilinie … etc. provide links to information, other applications, photo sharing, youTube …
- Homepages, e.g. Lufthansa Miles & More MemberScout provides user generated travel information about destinations, flying etc.
- Mobile applications: e.g. iDTGV … allows you to chat with other people on the same train.
- Travel Planning Applications: SNCF Petits voyages entre amis – uses social networking to help friends plan travel together.
- Agency YouTube sites, Flickr groups etc.
- More?

Social networking allows you to have more direct contact with your customers.

7. Peer-to-Peer Services

Some examples in this rapidly developing area:

- avego car pool organization
- Caltrain bicycle car organization
- More