

Technology and PA: Emerging Issues

SPECIAL SECTION

Online for Public Administration

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Two of the most popular internet websites today are *MySpace.com* and *YouTube.com*. The former serving as an online network of friends and the latter a growing collection of video clips where any and all can contribute. The question asked, "what do these websites mean for public administration?"

Currently, there is little of a relationship for the field of public administration or public administrators and the thousands that visit these websites daily. The popularity of these websites may eventually diminish, but their nature of services; networking and online videos, will continue to exist. Therefore, it serves public administration to consider the potential issues which will emerge from such websites.

The first website, *MySpace.com*, is not new in its nature, nor will it be the last. Thousands of online networks exist that allow for individuals, through their personalized website, are able to communicate daily about their favorite music, things to do, who their friends (online and offline) are, and many other aspects of one's life they may choose to

share. The power and potential of online networks, such as *MySpace.com* are continually being realized. Some of the positives of online networking include the generating of large number of people to come out for events, replacing the more traditional word of mouth. With a click of the mouse, a party or city meeting can be publicized and re-publicized very quickly among friends and their friends.

Yes, the party publicity and the benefits of online networking for friends is very much a reality. However, online networking for public affairs is not as prominent. Announcing a city meeting or promoting your concerns over a new policy proposal are not unrealistic, but their impact via networks such as *MySpace.com* are marginal at best. This does not mean we can not explore the possibilities of public administration going online.

Let us explore a moment the possibility of an online network where thousands of public administrators are part of a website, similar to *MySpace.com*, discussing their events, meetings and views on government. Such a website would be bidirectional in nature, unlike many public administration websites today. Assuming everyone is or will be

technology savvy, so as to create their personalized website, we then turn our attention to the opportunities.

Public administrators would be able share their latest innovations or promote their town hall meetings. "Friends" would be able to respond with questions, comments or suggestions, resulting in a network of promoting and enhancing municipal government practices and methods of overcoming problems.

The reality of such a network could be very beneficial, but its existence would encounter various challenges. Very few, if any at all, would disclose their municipal challenges and issues. The network may serve as means of highlighting best practices, but various online networks for these means already exist. In addition, the time and opportunity for online networking would only eat into the established offline networks.

This does not mean that the virtual networks of the likes of *MySpace.com* do not have a place in public administration. A possible emerging issue for online networking in government would have to be done at the municipal level. This is to suggest that the city of Anytown, USA would be part of a municipal network, possibly one with other municipalities having similar characteristics in population or demographics.

Municipalities already have their own personalized websites, the only aspect that is currently missing is a section within the municipal website highlighting "City Friends" with links to other municipal websites. Online networks and their place in public administration may not, in the foreseeable future, have a prominent role as *MySpace.com* has in citizens and their daily networks of friends.

The other emerging common place online is *YouTube.com*, a website where thousands of video clips are made available to view for free. Anyone can post their video of something captured from television or from their telephone camera or maybe something they created. The possibilities for online video clips and public administration have no real limitations. The primary questions are; what would public administrators seek to post online and who would want to view them?

The first question mirrors the possibilities of online networking, in that postings of public sector events can be used to promote discussions of public forums or family day at City Park hosted by the municipal government. Many municipal governments already post live video streams of their town hall meetings or post on their online archives past meetings for their citizens to view.

The only benefit a central website, such as *YouTube.com*, would have is freeing up web server space from the municipal government. Citizens may also choose to do quick searches of other municipal town hall meetings through one website.

There are no real limitations to what can be uploaded but the more important question is why would the centralization of public administration associated videos be a benefit or an emerging issue? It is not, unless you consider accountability of the public sector and the role of online video warehouses. Video technology is now more than ever a critical ally in public sector accountability because of websites such as *YouTube.com*, where anyone can quickly and relatively easily share a video.

Video clips today of public sector events that most individuals are interested in viewing are those involving bloopers or accidents. However, it is not a stretch to realize that video clips of quotes by the local public administrator or actions by local municipal employees can be caught via camera phone and posted online.

These videos would not include bloopers or accidents but may still be of interest to the local citizens of that particular municipality for they lend to accountability of their public administrator. Online video clips and public administration have the potential of becoming integrally connected when it comes to issue of accountability, more so than the promotion of municipal events or showing local town hall meetings online.

There are numerous websites that garner the attention of millions of citizens' everyday and they tend not to be the local government website or the video streaming of last night's municipal forum. Today they are *MySpace.com* and *YouTube.com* and although tomorrow the names of such websites may change their function will not.

Online networking and video streaming are components of today's internet that should be considered by the field of public administration. There most certainly is a role for public administration online beyond the government website. Following the trends of the internet today, we must now consider whether the future role of public administration online will be driven by a promotion of events and meetings and bidirectional networking, a collection of bloopers, videos of accountability, or all of the above.

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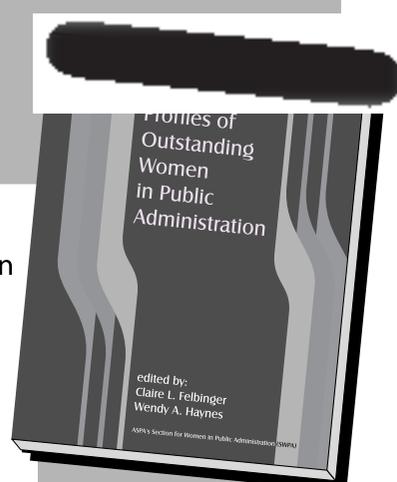
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