

Running head: FACEBOOK AND THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Facebook and the fire department: Who is using it and how?

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Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at <http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/> to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

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Abstract

The problem was that the Payson Fire Department (PFD) did not have the ability to quickly disseminate current and accurate information over the Internet to the public. This resulted in many lost opportunities to inform and educate the public on fire department activities, emergency responses, and major disasters.

The purpose of this research was to see if and how other fire departments used online social media then use that information to help improve the way the Payson Fire Department used information technology to better inform and educate citizens.

Descriptive research was used to answer questions on how the Town of Payson currently managed the use of online social media, and if and how other American fire departments managed online social media networking.

Research was conducted by an interview of the Town of Payson information technology director and a nationwide survey of 216 American fire departments.

The results of this research were a clear understanding of how the Town of Payson and the Payson Fire Department managed online social media and a better understanding of if and how fire departments around the nation used online social media.

Recommendations were made for the Payson Fire Department to educate its employees on the risks and potential consequences of posting work-related material on social media websites, to develop policies addressing the use of social media in the workplace and to commit the necessary human and financial resources to manage public education and information in the online social media environment.

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Facebook and the Payson Fire Department

Introduction

The problem was that the Payson Fire Department (PFD) did not have the ability to quickly disseminate current and accurate information over the Internet to the public. This resulted in many lost opportunities to inform and educate the public on fire department activities, emergency responses, and major disasters.

The purpose of this research was to identify and recommend ways the Payson Fire Department could use to better inform and educate citizens using online social media as a public information and education tool.

Descriptive research methodology was used for this project. Data was collected using an interview of Town of Payson Information Technology (IT) staff and a nationwide survey of American fire departments. This research answered the following questions:

- (1) How does the Town of Payson Fire Department currently the use of online social media?
- (2) Do other American fire departments use online social media tools such Facebook to further their mission(s)?
- (3) How do other American fire departments use social media?

Background and Significance

The Town of Payson covers 12,612 acres located in northern Gila County at an elevation of 4,982 feet. Payson sits at the base of the Mogollon Rim. The Mogollon Rim stands at an elevation of 7000 feet north of Payson and is a 200-mile long escarpment in the largest Ponderosa Pine forest in the world. The Town is geographically located at longitude 111.32 degrees west and latitude 34.23 degrees north, and is 93 miles northeast of Phoenix and 183 miles north of Tucson (Town of Payson, 2006).

The Payson Fire Department (PFD) provides fire, technical rescue, and EMS services to the Town of Payson with an operating budget of \$2.66 million for Fiscal Year (FY) 2009/2010. The PFD is an all-risk combination municipal fire department providing service to 19.5 square miles of incorporated land and approximately 16,000 permanent residents. The PFD also provides fire protection, technical rescue, and Emergency Medical Service (EMS) to several surrounding fire districts and approximately 42 miles of rural high-speed divided highways (Payson Fire Department, 2010).

The PFD responded to 2,432 incidents in Fiscal Year 09/10 with an in-town emergency traffic fractile response time of 5 minutes 85.09% of the time. The PFD employs 21 career uniform personnel; 9 reserve firefighters, 12 volunteer members, and 3

administrative personnel responding from two fire stations (Payson Fire Department, 2010). A third fire station is under construction and plans for staffing were still being developed at the time of this research (Aleshire, 2010).

At the time of this research, the PFD operated with 3 shifts (A, B, and C) with a total of 7 career members on duty each day. Each fire station operates a single engine company with minimum staffing of 3 personnel (company officer, fire engineer, and a minimum of 1 firefighter). Two Type 6 engines, 1 100 ft. platform ladder, 1 ambulance, 1-3100 gallon water tender, and 1 light and air utility unit are staffed on an as-needed basis with reserve and off-duty career members. A career battalion chief supervises each shift.

As of November 2010 the PFD did not have a Public Information Officer (PIO). Any media requests for information were routed directly to the fire chief who then assigned a member to address the need. The only media outlets of any practical use to the PFD to educate and inform the public were the local radio station (KMOG 1420 AM), the sole local newspaper (The Payson Roundup), and the Internet. The PFD had no personnel assigned to monitor the media for accuracy or to deliver current and accurate information to them. Delivery of the local paper had been cancelled in 2008 because of cost-containment efforts

by the Payson Fire Department (R. Connolly, Personal Communication, February 20, 2011) making it difficult for the most causal of observations for PFD members to know what was being said in the local media.

The local radio station relied on faxed Public Safety Announcements (PSA) from the PFD to provide information to the public, and the local paper was only printed twice a week (Tuesdays and Fridays) making it difficult for the PFD to disseminate timely information.

Because the PFD lacked the fiscal resources required to properly staff a third fire station (Aleshire, 2010), let alone hire either a full or part-time PIO to manage the flow of information, the Internet was assumed to be the quickest and least expensive way to deliver quick and accurate information to the public using existing resources.

The PFD's website (www.paysonfire.com) was managed by Town of Payson IT staff instead of PFD members and took several days to make a change or update. While the department website had been a practical place to post some types of information, the way it was managed made it very challenging to keep it relevant with up-to-date information. The online social media website Facebook became the focus of this research because of the vast

amounts of people who were connected using it (500 million people as of November, 2010) (Facebook, 2010).

Facebook was founded in February, 2004 as a social utility to help people communicate more "efficiently" with others. As of November 2010, it was one of the most trafficked websites in the world with over 500 million active users (defined as those who have returned to the site within the last 30 days) (Facebook, 2010).

Fundamental features to the experience on Facebook were a person's, organization's, or business's home page and profile. The home page includes "News Feed," a personalized feed of his or her "friends" updates. A "friend" is an online relationship with permissions that allow a user access to view content on another user's Facebook page. A "profile" displayed information about the individual (or organization) they have chosen to share, including interests, education and work background, and contact information. Facebook also included core applications- photos, events, videos, groups, and pages- that let people connect and share information. People could also communicate with one another through chat, personal messages, and status updates (Facebook, 2010).

This research was related to the curriculum of the National Fire Academy's *Executive Leadership* (R125) class. Several relationships were identified:

- 1) Unit 9: Introduction to influencing. Communicating with and educating the public using social media would be a type of influencing. Online social media is just another tool a fire department can choose to employ to influence it's citizens,
- 2) Unit 10: Networking. The enabling objectives of this unit were to define networking and analyze the relationship between networking and influence. Fire department use of social media for public education and information would hope to achieve an improved and more fully developed networking and influencing ability, and
- 3) Unit 12: Influencing styles. Terminal objectives in this unit were to practice planning and conducting an influence attempt, apply influence skills, and analyze the use of influence given a case study. Fire Department use of social media is a method of influence and an opportunity to apply and analyze influence skills.

The research problem and resulting research were related to 2 of the United States Fire Administration's (USFA) strategic goals:

- 1) *Goal 1: Reduce risk at the local level through prevention and mitigation.* This research was related because social media can be a tool used to improve public education, prevention, and information flow by reaching people in a current, relevant fashion.
- 2) *Goal 3: Improve the fire and emergency services' capability for response to and recovery from all hazards.* Online social media is shown in the literature to be an effective, relevant, and efficient way to distribute information to large amounts of people in short period of time thus improving fire and emergency services; capability for response and recovery from all hazards. Improving the flow of information to and from the citizens a fire department services would improve fire and emergency services' capability for response and recovery from all hazards.
- 3) *Goal 5: Lead the Nation's fire and emergency services by establishing and sustaining the USFA as a dynamic organization.* The use of online social media by large members of the public is a relatively new phenomenon.

It is now used by over 500 million people worldwide as a communication platform (Facebook, 2010). Fire departments using social media to help achieve their mission of fire and life safety would help to establish and sustain the fire service and the USFA as dynamic organizations.

Literature Review

The Town of Payson Personnel Policy Manual was first consulted for guidance on the use of social media by employees and the organization (Town of Payson, 2009). The policy manual includes an appendix with a computer usage policy which essentially states that town computer usage by employees can and will be regulated and monitored. The usage policy also states that an employee can be disciplined or terminated for failing to abide by the policy but no specific guidance for social media use is stated. This lack of guidance and direction was the impetus for this research project.

The use of the Internet by government agencies and private sector business to deliver information to the public is not new. The Town of Payson has had a webpage since the year 2000. However, the use of online social media websites is relatively new with Facebook having been established only as recently as 2004 (Facebook, 2010).

A recently publicized agency to implement Facebook as a public communications tool is the Boston (MA) Fire Department. The Boston Fire Department recently created a Facebook page and acquired more than 10,000 "fans" (people or entities who established an online communications relationship with the fire department) in less than 6 months (McCourt, 2010). This finding indicated that fire department use of online media was useful and could reach large amounts of people in a relatively short period of time.

The private sector appears to have fully embraced social media. Most businesses looking to remain relevant in today's information-based environment have created links and pages on social media websites. Businesses from Starbucks coffee (Starbucks Coffee, 2011) to nationwide outdoor equipment retailer Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI) (Recreational Equipment Incorporated, 2011) have Facebook pages to connect with people interested in the products they sell. The business marketing firm Marketing Jive (Marketing Jive, 2007) outlined the advantages of private sector businesses using Facebook, many of which applied to the public safety arena as well. Online social media marketing is now considered a staple of private sector business reaching potential customers and it was

reasonable that fire departments could and should leverage online social media to better achieve their missions.

The influencing power of social media was again clearly demonstrated in Boston in 2010 the department began its annual campaign to remind people to change the batteries in their smoke and carbon monoxide detectors when they changed their clocks to Daylight Savings Time. The department posted a message on Facebook and Twitter (another social media website) and had more than 17,000 views. Even more, dozens of fans reposted it to their own pages, resulting in an estimated 50,000 people impacted by this one message. Boston Fire Commissioner Fraser went so far as to say "Reaching so many people in such a short time frame is something we could not have done without the creative use of this media" (McCourt, 2010).

Current literature indicates fire departments across the nation have begun to embrace social media as a useful and relevant communications and education tool. Local media in Colorado Springs (CO) reported that a recent fire in Colorado Springs was first reported on the fire department's Twitter page instead of their website or local news channel (Thaxton, 2010).

The Los Angeles City (CA) Fire Department has also embraced social media as a public education and communications tool. The fire department has distributed video on YouTube (a video

sharing media site), posts updates on Facebook, has a page on MySpace (another social networking website), uploads videos of firefighters in action to video and image hosting website Flickr, and belongs to Digg, a website for members to submit content that other members can rate in importance and comment on (Collins, 2009). All of these examples supported the idea that social media can and does serve a useful role in a modern fire department's public education and information system.

It also appears that social media is now becoming not only an outlet for emergency services to connect with their customers, but also more and more a means for the public to connect with emergency services. According to Ballam (2010), "For better or for worse, Twitter and Facebook are now considered by the public as viable means of connecting with emergency services." Almost instantly, two-way feedback between a service provider and its customers is now a reality.

Furthermore, an online survey of 1,058 respondents by the American Red Cross in August of 2010 revealed that nearly 3 out of 4 people participate in at least one online community or social network with Facebook receiving by far the most usage with 58% participation (American Red Cross, 2010).

Social networks have implications to the military as well as the civilian population. The U.S. Military has begun to

embrace the use of social media to further its mission and has many similarities to civilian emergency services. Military commanders have presented social media as a means to the end of better situational awareness of the environments they work within. Social media also helps military commanders understand potential threats and emerging trends within their areas of responsibility, and assist them providing a "better, more credible, and agile" information source within their areas of responsibilities. The military believes that social media helps them to ensure that all resources within a theatre of operation are sharing the necessary information to work towards a common goal (Mayfield, 2011).

In contrast to the Town of Payson's approach, in 2010 the U.S. military issued a policy explicitly allowing social media use by service members on official computers (Department of Defense, 2010).

While the literature clearly showed that there were certain advantages to be gained with public safety agencies using social media outlets such as Facebook, there were also potential pitfalls documented. The literature highlighted the need for pro-active and clear agency policies regarding the use of social media.

DeCrane (2010) used the city of Austin, TX as an example of the benefits of pro-active policy development concerning social media use. DeCrane made it clear that while public employees have the right to free speech and to publicly criticize your employer or boss, the employer still has the right to fire the employee for doing so.

An item of particular interest with the Austin (TX) Fire Department (AFD) appeared to be that their policy clearly stated that any information communicated via social media that's relative to the AFD is the sole property of the AFD. That would include uniforms, patches, logos, equipment, etc. This raises other questions on copyrights, patents, and licensing that warrant further research (DeCrane, 2010).

The City of Houston, TX was highlighted in local media regarding government use of social networking. In one instance, a fire department officer was contacted by a citizen on Facebook for help with traffic citations she received while going to a firefighter funeral. The firefighter then contacted the law enforcement officer who issued the citation and got the violations to disappear. This was then picked up on in the local media resulting in significant damage to the reputations not only to the people involved but to those of the organizations as well. Another instance reported was the Houston mayor's office

posting on social media websites details of "joyrides" taken in Houston police department helicopters. This again resulted in negative publicity (Dean, 2010).

In an instance reported by Thompson (2010), a South Carolina fire department recently terminated a firefighter for a controversial video concerning work-related matters that that he posted on his Facebook page while off-duty. The idea of firefighters being terminated for off-duty behavior that is embarrassing to their agency is not new, but being terminated for using social media off-duty is a relatively new take on that issue.

These examples in current literature showed that clear policies are necessary to protect both the employee and employer from the potential negative consequences of poor decision making on behalf of the employee. While this research did examine both aspects of employer and employee use of social media, it was also a limitation of this research. The use of social media by employees of fire departments warrant further research as it became too broad a subject for this research to fully cover in the time period allotted.

There was guidance helpful to the public employee and employer in dealing with the implications of social media in a connected world. Although many published recommendations were

considered by the author to be "common sense," recommendations published by attorneys (Wirth & Wolfberg, 2010) such as "don't post inappropriate pictures or images," and "respect copyright and fair use laws" appear were valuable to the public employee looking to maintain gainful employment while using social networking.

Procedures

Research for this project started in September 2010 at the Learning Resource Center located at the National Fire Academy which is home to the nation's largest collection of fire service literature. This researcher searched the card catalog with a "subject terms" search using the keywords "social media" and "Facebook."

Several online searches were then conducted using the Internet search engine Google. This researcher conducted the first Google search on October 12, 2010 using "Facebook fire department" as the key words. A second search using "social media fire department" was also done that same day which yielded a combined 19,310,000 possible results. A third Google search on November 1, 2010 again using the key words "social media fire department" was completed to verify some of the sources found in the first searches.

Question 1 was answered by conducting a recorded in-person interview with Town of Payson IT Director Steve DeHaan (Appendix A). At the time of the interview, Dehaan had been the IT Director for the Town of Payson for 8 years. He had 11 years in the IT field and possessed 11 different certifications from Microsoft and Cisco including being a certified systems engineer and database manager. His credentials allowed this researcher to consider Dehaan a subject matter expert.

A list of 8 questions were compiled by this researcher and supplied to DeHaan before the interview. The interview lasted approximately 10 minutes and served to give a reasonably complete description as to how the Town of Payson and the Town of Payson Fire Department managed the use of social media. The interview was recorded in digital Windows Media Player audio format and a written transcript of the interview was made from the audio recording (Appendix A).

The answers to questions 2 and 3 were answered with original data through a 12-question web-based survey instrument sent to 216 fire agencies around the United States. The agencies were randomly selected. Factors such as department size, budget, or call volume were not considered when determining the survey sample. The size of the agencies surveyed varied from populations served from under 10,000 people to Federal agencies

such as the United States Forest Service which directly and indirectly provides wildland fire protection for millions of Americans.

The 12-question survey was e-mailed to the 216 agencies using this researcher's internal Town of Payson e-mail account with a written request and a link to the Internet survey site www.surveymonkey.com. The Survey Monkey system was used by this researcher because of the ease of use, low cost, and the ability to save electronic files of the results. The e-mail request was sent out on November 9, 2010. The survey instrument was available for respondents to complete for 3 weeks until the closure date of November 30, 2010 at 0600 hrs. Analysis of the data collected began November 30, 2010 and continued throughout the rest of the project.

Several limitations of this research were identified:

- 1) The e-mail addresses to which the e-mail containing the survey link that was sent to the fire departments in the survey sample were obtained from e-mail lists of fire departments that had sent members to the National Fire Academy. This researcher assumed that departments with members attending the National Fire Academy would be the most familiar with current trends and the most likely to possess useful information on fire department use of social media. This resulted in a

relatively small sample size and possible limited the reliability of the data generated as there were many fire departments not surveyed who may have had valuable information to report,

2) The survey questions primarily focused on Facebook and did not specifically address some of the other tools such as Twitter, Nixle, and YouTube. Some of the agencies who responded that they did not use Facebook may very well be using some other social media means to communicate with and educate the public, and

3) Data was collected on the use of social media and Facebook by both employers and the employees resulting in very wide array of data. The survey questions should have been specifically targeted to either social media use by the employee or the employer but not both to get more specific data.

Results

Research question #1 was answered by a recorded interview between this researcher and the Town of Payson Information Technology Director Steve DeHaan on October 26, 2010. This interview allowed this researcher to develop a clearer understanding of how the Town of Payson managed the use of social media and gave insight into the thought processes of

those in the town who make decisions regarding information technology.

The interview with DeHaan resulted in 7 key points and answered question #1:

- (1) The Town of Payson currently blocks access to social media websites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to all employees on all town computers unless pre-approved through the TOP IT Director Steve Dehaan,
- (2) The Town of Payson has allowed an parks and recreation department employee in the past to use Facebook to advertise an event but has not taken any further steps to integrate Facebook into the Town's information distribution network,
- (3) The stated reason(s) for the Town of Payson not allowing or utilizing social media use were fears of potential security breaches and having to deal with spyware, malware, and viruses that could be present on social media websites,
- (4) Dehaan did not see any advantages to using social media such as Facebook as a public information and communications tool,

- (5) Dehaan has discussed the possibility of using social media for official purposes with "a few department heads" in the past, but informal discussion is as far as it has been taken,
- (6) Town of Payson use of social media as a public education and communications tool would take additional fiscal and human resources in the IT department which do not currently exist. If Facebook or some other social media resource was deemed to have value, the town has no fiscal or human resources to allow it to develop social media as a resource.
- (7) Town of Payson IT Director Steve DeHaan was willing to explore the use of social media for official purposes provided there are mechanisms in place to help maintain security and resources to manage social media resources effectively.

Research questions 2 and 3 were answered by a nationwide survey of fire response agencies. The survey was sent via e-mail to 216 agencies across the United States. 158 responses were originally recorded for an initial completion rate of 73.1%. Data analysis of the agencies who responded revealed that twenty of the 158 respondents were from the same IP address at the

Salina (KS) Fire Department. This researcher was unable to determine if the same respondent completed the survey twenty times or if twenty different people at the Salina Fire Department completed the survey. Regardless, only one response per agency was needed. This limitation was mitigated by counting only the first response from the Salina Fire Department and did not tabulate the nineteen others resulting in a total of 139 validated responses and a corrected response rate of 64.4% (Appendix C).

100% of the 139 respondents indicated they were from United States fire response organizations. The states the agencies were in and names of the agencies the respondents worked for were collected. Forty-six of fifty states (92%) were represented in the results ranging from Hawaii to Rhode Island (Appendix C).

Ninety-nine (71.2%) of respondents were from municipal fire departments, thirty-seven (26.6%) were fire districts, two (1.4%) were private employers, and 1 (0.8%) represented a tribal fire department (Appendix C).

Populations served by the agencies who responded ranged from 0-10,000 (10.1%) to 500,000 or more (12.2%). Thirty-seven respondents indicated populations of 10,001-50,000 (26.6%), Forty-six departments indicated populations served of 50,001-

150,000 (33.1%), and twenty-five respondents (18%) indicated populations served of 150,001-500,000 (Appendix C).

Of the 139 agencies who responded to this survey, 3 agencies (2.1%) reported annual operating budgets of \$150,000 or less, 9 agencies (6.5%) reported \$150,000-\$1,000,000, 31 agencies (22.3) reported \$1,000,000-\$5,000,000, 25 agencies (18%) reported \$5,000,000 to \$10,000,000, 35 agencies (25.2%) reported annual operating budgets of \$10,000,000 to \$30,000,000, and 36 agencies (25.9%) surveyed reported annual operating budgets of \$30,000,000 or more (Appendix C).

Of the same 139 agencies who responded, 56 (40.3%) reported annual public education and/or information budgets of 0-\$5,000, 33 agencies (23.7%) reported budgets of \$5,001-\$15,000, 17 agencies (12.2%) reported budgets of \$15,001-\$30,000, 25 agencies (18%) reported budgets of \$30,001-\$100,000, and 8 agencies (5.8%) reported public education and/or information budgets of \$100,001 and above (Appendix C).

Of the agencies that responded, 114 (82%) indicated that their agency did not currently use Facebook in an official capacity to achieve its mission. 25 agencies (18%) indicated that their agency used Facebook in an official capacity to achieve its mission (Appendix C).

Twenty-six agencies surveyed (18.7%) indicated that their agency used Facebook as a public information and/or communication tool. 107 agencies (77%) responded that their agency did not currently use Facebook as a public information and/or communications tool. 6 agencies (4.3%) skipped this question (Appendix C). This data answered research question #2. According to the data collected in the survey, it appeared that less than $\frac{1}{4}$ (18.7%) of American fire departments were using Facebook as a public information and/or communications tool.

Respondents were asked to explain if their agency used Facebook for some other purpose other than public education and/or information. This was an optional question and only 14 respondents (10%) answered this question. Responses ranged from "no" to uses such as recruitment and communication with the public, to one department that had each fire station with its own Facebook page and related links in conjunction with individual engine companies who used Facebook and "other media" to communicate with their local neighborhoods. One respondent noted that his agency used Facebook to provide information to the public on events and incidents along with information on special meetings and safety messages (Appendix C).

When asked if their agency had a policy in place addressing the use of social media, 114 respondents (82%) responded "no,"

while 16 respondents (11.5%) answered "yes." Nine respondents (6.5%) skipped this question (Appendix C).

When asked if their agency allowed employees to access and use social media while on duty with agency equipment, there appeared to be a 50/50 split in responses. 58 respondents (41.7%) answered "yes," 60 respondents (43.2%) answered "no," and 16 respondents (11.5%) answered "sometimes" and listed open-ended responses ranging from "yes, if their duties are complete," to "not on department computers but using wireless Internet access on personal computers is allowed outside the business hours of 0800-1700." 1 respondent indicated that use of social media networking sites by employees were allowed if "it is somehow work related." 5 respondents (3.6%) left this question unanswered (Appendix C).

The last question of the survey asked for copies of existing social media use policies. 2 respondents (1.4%) responded with one stating that they had no policy at that time. The other stated that their use was restricted by Information Technology (IT) staff and that they had no written policy. No written policy examples were obtained as a result of this survey; the only policy examples discovered during this research were published in current literature.

Discussion

This researcher first determined how the Payson Fire Department used online social media tools such as Facebook by searching current Town of Payson policies as contained in the Town of Payson Personnel Manual. The Town of Payson Personnel Manual had a computer usage policy addendum which all employees were required to have signed which essentially stated that employees were allowed to use Town computers for limited personal use but all activity was monitored by the town IT staff. It also stated that violating this policy was grounds for discipline or termination. This policy did not specifically address if or how the TOP or its departments would or could use online social media to achieve their missions (Town Of Payson, 2009).

It was because of the lack of formal written policy specifically addressing social media that this researcher interviewed Town of Payson IT Director Steve DeHaan to determine what the official stance of the town was. This interview made it clear that despite a lack of written policy, the current practice of the town was to block any and all websites that IT Director Steve DeHaan felt were potentially damaging to the Town of Payson. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and all other social media sites were blocked because of the potential for abuse and

the potential danger of unwanted computer viruses spyware that were perceived to have been prevalent on social media sites (Appendix A).

This research appeared to highlight possible time lag between when best practices of using new technology are identified and when agencies actually implement them into operations. The literature review made it clear that social media websites are becoming and perhaps have already become a vital and important link for communication and information flow between governmental agencies and the people which they serve (McCourt, 2010), (Thaxton, 2010), and (Collins, 2009).

This research gathered data from 139 fire departments around the United States who responded to a 13-question survey sent via an e-mail link to 216 different fire departments (Appendix B). The data gathered in the survey appeared to indicate that the majority of American fire Departments (82% of respondents) have not embraced Facebook in an official capacity to achieve the missions of their agencies (Appendix C) This could be because social media is still a fairly recent communications medium, or it could mean that American fire departments simply don't have the resources to dedicate to competently manage social media.

Town of Payson IT Director Steve DeHaan did express interest in the policies and practices of other agencies that already had them in place. The IT department of the Town of Payson has only the director and 1 other employee (Appendix A). The only other IT department employee besides DeHaan was responsible for managing the TOP's website mobile data network shared between TOP police and fire emergency response vehicles. It may be that lack of resources was one of the contributing factors that so many agencies either did not use social media to achieve their missions, or did not have social media use addressed in policy. Further research is required.

It was interesting to note that it was almost an even 50/50 split in responses regarding agencies allowing employees to access and use social media on-duty with agency equipment. It was also interesting to see that 50% of agencies who responded allow employees to use social media on-duty with agency equipment while 82% of respondents (114 agencies) indicated that they did not currently have a policy in place outlining how your agency uses social media (Appendix C). The data collected in this research showed that fire agency employees were actively using social media while the employers were without policy to provide guidance. This could again be because social media is a

newer communications medium and policy development has to catch up.

The risks and potential consequences of employers not creating and abiding by clear social media policies could easily shorten the career of the uneducated public safety employee and tarnish the reputation of public service when unwise actions go public (Dean, 2010), and (Thompson, 2010). It is imperative that both public safety agencies and employees work together to develop sound policies and procedures to address this challenge (Wirth & Wolfberg, 2010). The potential benefits of social media in communicating with the citizens an agency serves are real, as are the risks.

The benefits appear to be:

- 1) Branding - Facebook could be a great resource for generating brand awareness for private business as well as public safety agencies. Facebook is becoming popular amongst various age demographics and can create an interception point for building relationships with citizens (Marketing Jive, 2007),
- 2) Customer engagement - Using Facebook applications can be a great way for communicating promotions, contest and events. it is another interception

point that can be leveraged to entice citizen and customer engagement with a brand, products or services (Marketing Jive, 2007),

- 3) Reputation management - Facebook could be a useful tool for seeing what users are saying about a person, business, or public safety agency. In addition, a Facebook profile can be indexed in Internet search results and can provide another favorable listing in the organic search results of the engines (Marketing Jive, 2007), and
- 4) Situational Awareness - Using Facebook and the various applications available can help a business or public safety agency to understand citizen behavior based on the sharing of content and commentary on social networking websites (Marketing Jive, 2007), (Mayfield, 2011).

The disadvantages and risks of using Facebook as a public information and communications tools appear to be consequences of improper use or attempting to use it without adequate resources committed. Disadvantages can include:

- 1) Reputation damage or destruction for agencies and employees (Thompson, 2010) and (Decrane, 2010),

- 2) Getting fired (Thompson, 2010), and
- 3) Irrelevancy if information is not kept current.

There was guidance for public employers and employees to avoid these consequences:

- 1) Respect copyright and fair use laws (Wirth & Wolfberg, 2010),
- 2) Create and abide by a social media policy (Decrane, 2010), and
- 3) Commit adequate resources to keep posted information current and relevant.

A thought for public employers and employees to consider when creating policy on the use of social media appeared to be "It doesn't make you stupid, it just makes stupidity more accessible" (Thompson, 2010).

It appeared that social media was being used for communication and public information and more people are using it every year (Facebook, 2010). Based on this research, it was the opinion of this researcher that social media is a valuable tool for public service agencies to communicate with the people they serve and that the potential benefits of using social media as a public communications and education tool outweigh the risks. A caveat to this is that agencies would need to commit enough resources (both human and fiscal) to keep posted

information current and relevant and to police the online reputation of their agency. An agency also needs to educate and train employees on the acceptable and unacceptable uses of social media on and off-duty (Wirth & Wolfberg, 2010).

In the depressed economic climate of 2011, many cities and towns have had to reduce staffing levels, layoff employees, or reduce hours worked. It was unlikely that these organizations will have the resources to develop social media as a resource. The challenge then is for fire departments to assess if they can commit the resources necessary to realize the benefits of social media. It is possible that attempting to utilize social media to connect with the citizens of a particular jurisdiction without the necessary fiscal and human resources may be worse than doing nothing at all. The use of social media by American Fire Departments does have real benefits. If adequate resources are committed, the benefits of using social media and Facebook outweigh the risks of improper use.

Recommendations

- 1) The Payson Fire Department needs to educate its employees on the potential risks and consequences of posting work-related material on social media websites,

- 2) The Payson Fire Department and public safety agencies in general need to develop and implement policies outlining acceptable and unacceptable employee use of social media sites both on and off-duty, and
- 3) Adequate resources need to be committed to manage the flow of information over the Internet to and from a public safety agency.

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