

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SMARTPHONE POLICY AUDIT: A SURVEY OF FLORIDA COUNTIES

Executive Summary

The objective of the Brechner Center's Florida Social Media and Smartphone Policy Audit was to ascertain what policies, *if any*, county governments in Florida had regarding the capture and retention of public records on social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter) and mobile devices (i.e., text messages, Blackberry PIN messages). To achieve this, an audit was conducted of the 67 counties in Florida during the summer of 2011. A public records request for each county's policies on the use, capture, and retention of public records created and/or transmitted using social media applications and mobile devices, as well as an optional questionnaire, was distributed to county administrators. Of the 67 counties contacted, 12 were completely unresponsive to the public records request or a subsequent follow-up. Sixteen counties provided relevant policies, which indicated that branding and consistency are major concerns related to social media. While public records are mentioned in most policies, they serve more as reminders of the law than sources of specific guidance for how to achieve compliance. Two counties prohibited the use of social media because of open government laws.

In looking at the usage and retention habits as reported by the counties, social media isn't widely adopted, with just a little more than half of the 53 respondents reporting county use of social media. For open government advocates, this adoption rate might mean more time to work to ensure that safeguards are in place to capture and retain records. This is especially important in light of the only 20 of 28 counties using social media reporting retention of posts, and only 10 of the 53 respondents reporting retention of text messages. Elected officials are slightly more likely than employees to use smartphones or text messaging. As these two technologies are the least likely to result in records retention, yet officials have the most decision-making power, more progress is needed to ensure these records are maintained.

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