

## Policing and Social Media

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**Organisation:** The Reykjavík metropolitan police (RMP)

**Country:** Iceland

**Level of government:** Central government

**Sector:** Public order and safety

**Type:** Communication, Digital

**Launched in:** 2010

**Link to the innovation's website**

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# Description

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This innovation increases the safety and feeling of safety of the population who the Reykjavík metropolitan police (RMP) serves. One of the tools used is social media in policing; using social media to establish a connection between the public and the police to create a dialogue. This enables the police to create a medium where direct communication with the public is possible, especially with regard to the dissemination of information and public engagement.

In December 2010 RMP created its Facebook site and subsequently the RMP's Twitter site. These two sites were run for a few months by the police chief and one employee. Subsequently moderators were added, giving more employees a chance to respond and maintain the site. In 2012 a full time employee was designated to the project since the sites then had over 20 000 subscribers.

After that, several more social media sites have been opened and social media has been embedded in ever growing numbers of policing tasks.

Whenever a matter comes in through social media that cannot be answered straight away, it is analysed and sent to the appropriate department, local police station or any other means that the RMP has available.

See: facebook, twitter, instagram, flickr and youtube

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## Why the innovation was developed

When the RMP was founded in January 2007, one of its main objectives was to "enhance the security and feeling of security amongst those who dwell, work or stay in the metropolitan area." Ten focus points were specifically defined to guide the RMP towards this objective, including increased visibility of the police, pro-active policing in conjunction with stakeholders and increased dissemination of information. At the same time, much had happened regarding the use of social media. Iceland has one of the highest internet penetrations; e. g. close to 98% of the population has access to internet. A large part of the population in Iceland was using Facebook and/or Twitter and it was therefore decided within the RMP to use social media to increase the visibility of the police force, increase security, the perception of safety and thereby the overall well-being of the community. The near bankruptcy of the country in 2008, followed by large cutbacks in funding to the police, also played a huge role in the decision to develop the innovation. With fewer police officers on the street, the problem was not just how to keep up with crime itself but also how to maintain the feeling of safety among citizens.

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## Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve user satisfaction, Increase citizen engagement

- Improve access to the police, creating a gateway for people to send in questions, tips etc.
  - More responsive policing due to the bi-directional character of social media.
  - Improve visibility of the police force in an efficient way.
  - Improve the image of the police in the public's view as the positive encounters with the police will be more visible and more frequent.
  - Establish a connection where the police is not only contacted when a person itself has a problem, but also in cases where a person has information that it thinks the police might need or want.
  - Improve participation/consultation of citizens, for instance, on where they think traffic speed should be enforced and then doing exactly that.
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## Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, General population, Government staff

The population that the Reykjavík metropolitan police serves, in total is 201 000 people (total population of metropolitan area, 1 January 2013).

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## Existing similar practices

### Police social media strategy

In other countries' public administrations

Greater Manchester police and Northern Ireland police service.

Many police forces across the world have developed means of communicating with people through social media, but not to the extent used in Iceland. Many police forces in the United Kingdom use social media, both Twitter and Facebook and were using social media in 2010 when the RMP's project started.

The RMP has been at the forefront – reaching a very large audience with regard to the population it serves.

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# Results

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## Efficiency

The project offers a good opportunity to improve service with little or no cost added, thereby being a very cost effective way of increasing the effects of visible policing, added citizen engagement and a means of communication between the public and the police.

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## Effectiveness

During a snow storm in March 2013, one of the news items posted on the RMP's Facebook wall was read by 19 000 readers in 19 minutes. This means that almost 10% of the area's population read this message from the police within a very short time span.

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## Service quality

### Accessibility:

- It became easier for the public to contact the police and also to transmit information to and from the police.
- Currently the RMP's Facebook site has 42 500 subscribers, the Twitter site has 3 843 subscribers and the Instagram site has 5 221 subscribers (27/08/2013).
- By looking at the numbers of subscribers and personal messages being sent to the police using these new channels, it is apparent that the public is comfortable using them to contact the police, which can then transfer the dialogue into a more conventional channel, such as individuals coming to a police station, etc.

### Responsiveness:

The innovation has led to certain queries regarding police conduct, whereas many misunderstandings of police tactics have been cleared up and explained. This has also generated more trust towards the police since the public now has a channel in which it can relay information regarding incidents where the police did not operate appropriately and thereby giving them a chance to relay back that they were not satisfied with the service. Hearing these remarks makes for a stronger police in the long run.

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## User satisfaction

Communication is extremely important for the police and the citizens it serves. Social media has opened a portal in which these dialogues can take place. This gives the public an opportunity to speak to and hear from its police force, which makes a stronger relationship. What has been extremely powerful are the large amounts of compliments towards the police and individual police officers, which shows police officers and other members of the public, how strong the relationship really is.

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## Evaluation

Evaluation is on-going and continuous since the project is a pilot-project. On-going evaluation is partly done by monitoring the efficiency of posts that are sent out, viewer numbers and public reaction to what is posted.

A private administrator group was created on Facebook where the administrators can speak among themselves, discussing areas such as how to tackle various problems that come up. This is extremely important seeing that the speed of communication does not allow for a long response time and waiting for face time with the admin group would take far too long. The group was also equipped with tablets with a wireless broadband connection so that they could easily maintain the sites both in the field but also from wherever they were situated, the tablets being easy to use and also an incentive for employees who were adding on to their workload.

# Development

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## Design

The idea was brought up on a meeting between the police chief and a detective, both sharing an idea of using social media for policing. As a result the RMP's police chief decided to start watching what other police forces were doing and consequently set up the first facebook account, which started the project.

Design time: 3 months

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## Testing

An incremental approach was used by taking small steps, but always ready to take a few steps back if needed.

The first step towards the innovation was to establish the RMP's facebook site, which was done in December 2010 and subsequently the RMP's Twitter site. These two sites were run for a few months by the police chief and one employee, setting the voice to be used in future relationships and establishing a model in which future members of the social media group could refer. Subsequently, moderators were added, giving more employees a chance to respond and maintain the site. The administrator group was expanded to 12 people with different roles (post on topics related to their daily work, moderate discussions, post press releases etc.).

Testing time: 3 months

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## Implementation

### Tools used:

Approaches:

- Social media approach in three phases. First, the start-up where the project was laid out, the tone was set and a basic guideline was made. The second part was establishing a team that would be drawn from multiple departments, each person adding this task to their normal workload. The third part was the hiring of a full time employee (June 2012) who further developed the social media approach.
- Volunteers take part in the project and thereby get the opportunity to speak on behalf of the organisation.
- Project management style: allowed the project to be run as a staff unit, a unit that serves other departments without having direct supervision over them.

Tools:

- Open social media profiles on twitter, facebook, instagram etc.
- Go into more time consuming projects within the social media approach (such as managing Flickr, YouTube, Instagram, streaming of content and other long term social media sites that would need maintenance) since a new full time employee joined the project in June 2012.
- Personal tablet/ i-pads (with high speed internet connection through a mobile GSM card) were purchased to make it possible for the group to maintain an internet/social media connection.

### Resources used:

- At the beginning, two persons managed the social media accounts. This was done alongside other tasks. When more people were asked to take part, ten additional people were added to the administrator group, who also did the job alongside other tasks. This makes it very hard to evaluate how much time actually went into it.
- After a 6 month trial 12 tablets were purchased, all having a wireless internet connection.
- In June 2012 a full time employee was transferred to run and oversee all aspects of the social media project, which was planned as a trial period lasting until December 2013.

Implementation time: Ongoing since march 2011

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## Challenges and solutions

Since the project was run across the regular hierarchy, with officers whose ranks range from constable to police commissioner, each person's superiors were informed that they were taking part in a project under the direct supervision of the police commissioner. This gave them the freedom to speak and reply in accordance with the philosophy of the project, importantly without having to go through the regular chain of command. In many ways this has been critical in the project's success since police usually have very strict guidelines as to whom, why and when police will speak publicly and to the media. All members were told that they had the fullest trust of the police commissioner to use their best judgment in replying on behalf of the institution. In practice, this has proven to be elemental in maintaining a short response time and answers that are in essence free of traditionally bureaucratic responses.

# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

In hindsight, one of the interesting sides of the project and probably one that has made it successful is that social media was used to enhance other aspects of policing; to improve service and to enhance the public's perception of visible policing. It was not put in place to act as a substitute or by replacing other types of services but rather to give them more tools to do their job in a more efficient way.

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## Conditions for success

A crucial factor was the fact that the head of the RMP, the police chief, was a turning force behind the project and so deeply embedded from the get-go. This installed an atmosphere amongst the group that they were trusted to respond, thereby shortening response times and installing a sense of a personal atmosphere since the responses sent were less formal in their nature.

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## Other information

It's not enough trying out innovative ideas, they must be put in a particular structure that gives them a chance to provide a steady service but also be flexible so that latest developments in social media are taken into account. Even though facebook is currently the biggest medium in the social media project, it will probably not be around forever. Exactly for that reason, a full time position was started to run the social media outfit, both to manage it from day to day but not least to keep an eye open for other possibilities that might be out there.

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