

## Student Update



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**Organisation:** Australian Government Department of Human Services

**Country:** Australia

**Level of government:** Central government

**Sector:** Education

**Type:** Communication, Digital, Public Service

**Launched in:** 2011

**Overall development time:**

9 months

**Link to the innovation's website**

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# Description

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The Australian Government Department of Human Services uses the Student Update Facebook and Twitter accounts to help young people understand what government payments and services are available to them. Young people use social media to ask questions and find information. The Australian Government Department of Human Services wants to ensure we're out there answering questions, correcting misinformation and interacting with young people in the environment they are comfortable in. This improves our reputation and improves young people's experience of dealing with government.

see: Student Update facebook and @StudentUpdateAU

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## Why the innovation was developed

The department's Media Section began monitoring social media mentions of the department several years ago, in the same way it monitors mentions in traditional media. This monitoring led to the recognition that the interactive nature of social media provided the opportunity for the department to join in conversations – providing requested information and correcting misinformation. The department began participating in conversations on social media where we observed that we could add value. The launch of the Student Update Facebook and Twitter accounts allowed the department to take that one step further, by posting proactive messages about changes to payments and services, and other topics relevant to our audience.

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## Objectives

Improve access, Improve service quality, Improve user satisfaction, Increase citizen engagement

- Provide better understandable information especially for younger people and enable them to claim the benefits they are entitled to.
  - Provide another channel for young people to ask questions and provide feedback.
  - Provide a way for the department to form relationships with organisations such as universities, which recognise the value of our posts and share them with their students.
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## Main beneficiaries

Academia, Families, Government bodies, Government staff, Students, Young people

The main beneficiaries of the innovation are Australians who want information about the support available to help them study. This includes both current and prospective students.

Secondary beneficiaries include parents, teachers and educational institution staff. For example, we often respond to questions from parents who want to know what support is available for their children.

It's not possible to estimate the number of beneficiaries as our Facebook and Twitter posts are frequently shared by other organisations and individuals, and we can't tell how many people see our posts in forums.

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## Existing similar practices

### The Australian Government Facebook Account 'The Line'

In my own organisation

The Australian Government

The Australian Government Facebook Account 'The Line' is another Facebook account that has launched and is aimed at youth and students. This account is a place to discuss respectful relationships. The nature of The Line Facebook is very different to the nature of Student Update Facebook in that it aims to generate conversation and behavioural change in youth. Student Update Facebook is a channel that shares information about services and payments that students may be entitled to and is still unique in its approach to encouraging and responding to citizen questions about social services.

Other examples of similar practices within the Australian government are: Family Update Facebook and Twitter, Hank Jongen Facebook and Twitter, Department of Human Services Graduate Program Facebook, Department of Human Services Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus and Centrelink Twitter.

<https://www.facebook.com/theline>

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# Results

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## Service quality

### Accessibility:

- People who have questions about their entitlements can now obtain information through social media, which is the preferred option for many.
- The Student Update Facebook and Twitter accounts now have a following of over 7 000.
- Content is also shared in video format – there is a captioned students playlist available on YouTube.
- Department information shared on social media is also readily available to students on the department's accessible and mobile-friendly website.

### Responsiveness:

Social Media provides opportunities to deliver timely information to customers regarding their entitlements, emergencies as well as providing reminders about maintaining their entitlements.

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## User satisfaction

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## Other improvements

It is likely that many people have viewed the Q&A exchanges, so the interactions are providing value to more people than just the original poster.

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## Evaluation

The accounts were evaluated at the 3, 6 and 12 month stages. These evaluations were based primarily on the very good insights offered by Facebook. The results showed we were effectively reaching our target demographic of young people aged 18-24. The results also revealed which content was most popular and how people were finding out about our page. The vast majority of people following our Facebook page had found out about it via the Centrelink website. This indicated that people who were searching for information about Centrelink online were interested in using Facebook to keep up to date about our payments and services.

There have been about 150 questions posted on the Student Update Facebook page in its first 16 months. This does not include the questions that were posted in response to posts by the department on the Student Update Facebook page. There were over 150 responses to questions about payments and services for youth and students posted on forums such as Whirlpool and Yahoo Answers between January-July 2012.

Many people have viewed these Q&A exchanges, so the interactions are providing value to more people than just the original poster.

# Development

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## Design

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter were identified as an opportunity for communicating with students and young people. In addition, online forums for families and parents were identified as a channel where people share information and experiences about raising and supporting their children. It was observed that developing a presence on these sites would allow the department to place important information in forums that have already captured the attention of our target market. It was observed that by not effectively communicating with our audience, there was a high risk of misinformation being spread throughout the community.

Design time: 3 months

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## Testing

- Obtained legal advice regarding accepting social media sites' terms of use, and legal advice on the risks associated with using social media sites.
- Drafted a risk assessment and risk mitigation strategies, a communications plan to promote the channels and a budget.
- Worked with multiple teams from across the department to establish processes for developing posts and processes for responding to customer queries/comments.
- Produced a schedule of content for posts.
- Worked with the Brand Team to develop the necessary images/logos.
- Developed a webpage on our department's website explaining our use of social media.

Testing time: 3 months

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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- Launched the social media accounts.
- Implemented the schedule of posts, which ensured regular activity on the new accounts.
- Proactively engaged with accounts belonging to organisations such as universities, to help attract attention to our accounts.
- Streamlined the processes for responding to posts.
- Implemented the communications plan.

### Resources used:

#### Direct cost:

- At the time of implementation (April 2011): 50% of one staff member's time (approx AUD 40 000 p/a).

#### Indirect costs:

- The time taken by senior level staff to oversee the project.
- the time taken by the legal department to provide advice.
- Time taken by other teams to provide advice and content.

Implementation time: 3 months

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## Diffusion

The department has since implemented other Facebook and Twitter accounts to support and inform citizens, based on the learnings and experience from Student Update.

Diffusion time: on-going

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## Challenges and solutions

Barriers included getting legal advice and approval to launch the accounts – because this was a new way for the department to engage with citizens there weren't many existing processes or precedents to draw upon.

# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- Ensure you follow all the rights processes, such as consulting with your legal department. This might mean the project takes longer to get up and running, but it's important that you are aware of all the risks, and cover yourself in the case of any mishaps.
  - Be aware that successful social media engagement does not happen overnight and takes ongoing commitment.
  - Appropriately resource the work to ensure you can be as responsive to questions from the public as you say you're going to be.
  - Clearly document your clearance processes for social media responses and have them endorsed by the Executive, then educate staff about appropriate clearance timeframes. This means you'll get a response cleared quickly when an issue occurs.
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## Conditions for success

The development and implementation of social media accounts requires support from directors and executive.

Ongoing human and financial resources are required to implement, maintain and further develop social media accounts.

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