



Introduction to social media in the GSS: Good practice guidance

September 2016

Version 1.0

Introduction

This document acts as an introduction to social media for the Government Statistical Service (GSS). It has three parts:

[Part 1](#) looks at the benefits of having a social media presence, using real GSS examples.

[Part 2](#) is about getting started on social media, why social media is important and different ways to progress. This includes ways to work effectively with communication colleagues.

[Part 3](#) is about maximising the impact of your social media presence.

There are 5 annexes:

- A. [The GSS website social media community group](#)
- B. [Training opportunities and points of contact](#)
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This guide is for all social media platforms, but mainly focuses on Twitter. See **Annex D** for Twitter alternatives.

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Navigation

Clicking on underlined text in the guidance takes you directly to the relevant link.

All images in this document are clickable hyperlinks.

References can be found in Annex E and are marked by numbers in boxes **[1]**

Part 1: Benefits of a social media presence

Why the Government Statistical Service should be using social media...

“We need to improve our web and social media channels dramatically”

John Pullinger, National Statistician [\[1\]](#)

“Social media is everywhere. It's becoming more and more a part of how we live our lives today and as government we can't afford to miss the opportunities it affords us”

Government Digital Service (GDS) Social Media Playbook [\[2\]](#)

Looking at the [Code of Practice](#) [\[3\]](#), social media can help us:

- “Make users aware of how they can find the information they need”
- “Engage effectively with users to promote trust and maximise public value”
- “Seek feedback from users on their experiences”
- “Consult users before making changes”



Keeping pace with others – In 2015/16, seven departments have created a statistician lead voice on social media – will your department be next?!

Part 1: Benefits of a social media presence

Real feedback from GSS statisticians already on Twitter



Department
for Culture
Media & Sport

DCMS Insight ✓

@DCMSInsight

Official Twitter account for statistics and data science from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. All tweets written by the statistics team.

📍 London

🔗 gov.uk/government/statistics

📅 Joined June 2015

“You will **reach new people** who will likely have never seen your stats before”

“Retweets can earn us a **greater number** of impressions for our statistics and **exposes** us to a wider audience”

“Social media is a **simple** and **inexpensive** way of disseminating our statistics”

“There was positive **interest** from the **comms team**”



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Statistics

DefraStats ✓

@DefraStats

Official statistics feed for Defra, the UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs.

📍 London/York

🔗 bit.ly/DefraStats

📅 Joined January 2012

A list of key GSS social media contacts, including all departments with Twitter accounts, can be found here [\[4\]](#)

Part 1: Benefits of a social media presence

Real feedback from GSS statisticians already on Twitter

“The **expert** is the one tweeting and **replying**”

“We're **engaging** with our **users**, so more questions and replies are a good sign”

“Twitter continues to **grow** and **attract** range of **followers**”

“**Stakeholders** get the **information** that they are interested in”



NHS
England

NHS England Stats

@NHSEnglandStats

Official statistics feed for NHS England run by Analytical Services. All NHS England official statistics can be found here:

england.nhs.uk/statistics/

Joined March 2014



NISRA

@NISRA

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is the principal source of official statistics on Northern Ireland. Retweets are not endorsements.

📍 Belfast, Northern Ireland

🔗 nisra.gov.uk

📅 Joined August 2014

Part 1: Benefits of a social media presence

Extending your reach and influence

Influence: Chris Cook, BBC Newsnight policy editor engaging with GSS...



Chris Cook  @xtophercook 

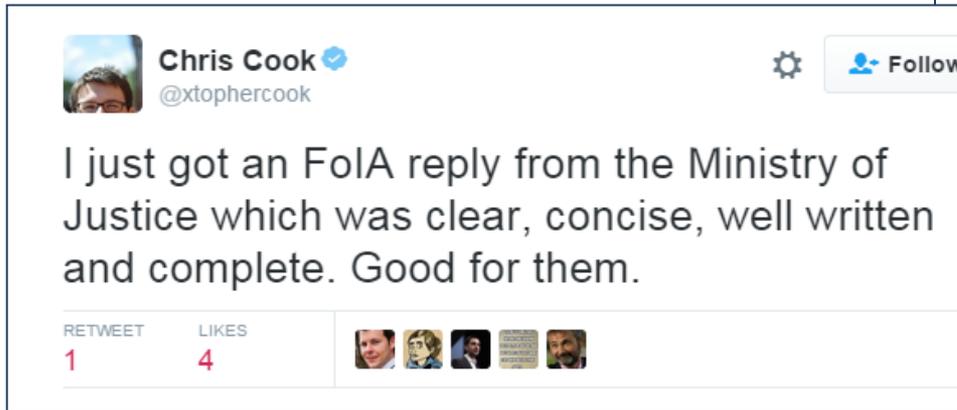
A jolly time this morning at #GSSconf - always happy to help officials get better at helping me!

RETWEETS 2 LIKES 9

4:29 AM - 17 May 2017

Chris Cook  @xtophercook 

Policy Editor, @BBCNewsnight. ex-@FT. I cover what government does. I mute/block dull/cranks. Obviously, my views are mine. My PGP: <https://t.co/6BY5HhTEqH>



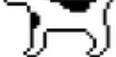
Chris Cook  @xtophercook 

I just got an FoIA reply from the Ministry of Justice which was clear, concise, well written and complete. Good for them.

RETWEET 1 LIKES 4

Reach: Excellent feedback from a new follower of BEIS Statistics...



 Steph Gray @lesteph 

Running @helpfulhq: helping people do digital for themselves. Dad, husband & former civil servant. Dogcow fan.

Followed by [Simon Bural](#) and 80 others

TWEETS 18.8K FOLLOWING 2,074 FOLLOWERS 5,015



 Steph Gray @lesteph 

This unassuming tweet shows how far Whitehall tweeting has come in the last few years, I reckon.

BEIS statistics @BEIS_stats

New article on UK Labour Disputes published by @ONS today - follow @ONSRichardClegg who has been tweeting about it today

RETWEETS 2 LIKES 4

Part 1: Benefits of a social media presence

Collaboration with main departmental account – good practice...

- **Ofsted's** statisticians work closely with their digital and communication colleagues to plan, create and schedule social media content.
- This process is managed through '[Hootsuite](#)' – where statisticians interact with the main account holders.
- Tweets go out from the main @Ofstednews account, potentially reaching 136,000 followers¹.
- This collaborative and modern approach ensures significant exposure.
- Now established, this process runs effectively with minimal resources.



- **MOD** statisticians work closely with communication colleagues to plan and schedule social media content.
- All official and National statistics are tweeted, to a large audience (154,000 followers¹).
- The hashtag [#MODstats](#) ensures users can locate statistics.
- Strengthening two way working relationships, ideas to improve / expand communications are progressing.

Part 1: Benefits of a social media presence

Learning from user feedback...

Being on social media gives your users an easy way to respond to your work. Think about the online platforms your users are comfortable and familiar with using.

You can find out when you're doing well...

Statistics Views @StatisticsViews · Apr 27
@ONS Bravo! Great look to new bulletins - clear, concise, cleaner layout, useful quote and key points still available. Well done @StatsLiz

← ↻ ❤️ 2 ⋮

 **Hetan Shah** @HetanShah Follow

Fab session now on official stats engaging w/ the wider world @julieclarebrown @puzzlesthewill @theboysmithy @GoodPracticeNW #RSS2016Conf

... and when users want change.

 **Claire Miller** @clairemilleruk · Dec 3
@StatisticsWales Did you see this: gss.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/upl... because the absenteeism figures are teeny half-hidden blank column hell

9:43 AM - 3 Dec 2014 · Details

Reply to @clairemilleruk @StatisticsWales

 **Statistics for Wales** @StatisticsWales · Dec 3
@clairemilleruk Thanks for the feedback. We've now removed the blank columns for the spreadsheet in question ow.ly/Fh5Kf

 **Colin Angus** @VictimOfMaths · Feb 2
Oh dear. @PHE_uk - @ONS use a different definition of 'alcohol-related' to you. Sort yourselves out please.

↩ In reply to Colin Angus

 **Jamie Jenkins** @statsjamie · Feb 2
@VictimOfMaths Discussions are underway to look at the definitions. We will engage with each country on this

↩ 1 ↻ ❤️ ⋮

↩ In reply to Colin Angus

 **Jamie Jenkins** @statsjamie · 23 Sep 2015
@VictimOfMaths Be good to have a chat about the detail. If you DM your email address we can set something up

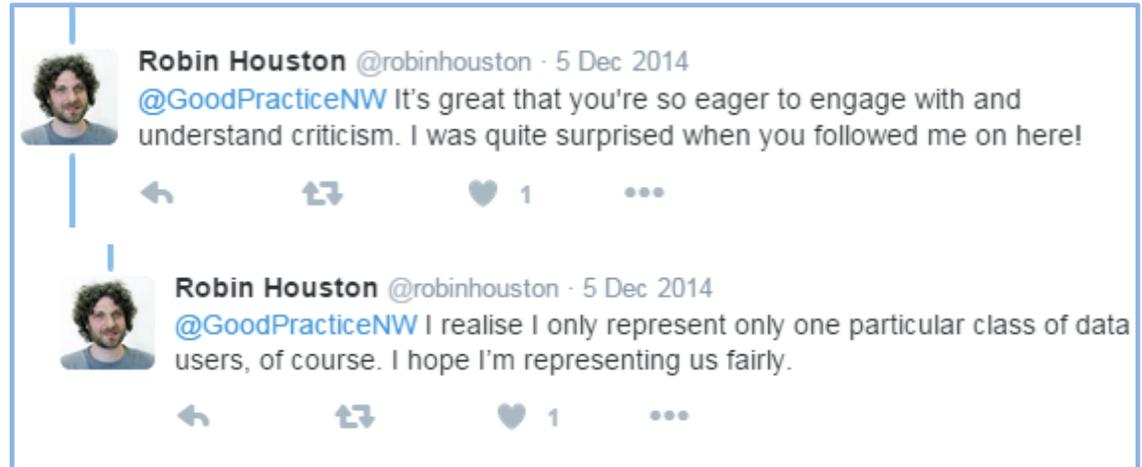
Don't just post and run... stick around to see what response your communications get!

Part 1: Benefits of a social media presence

Learning from user feedback...and gaining respect by responding...

In Dec 2014 new GSS guidance on [Releasing Statistics in Spreadsheets](#) received harsh criticism from one user on Twitter and his follow up blog...

The Good Practice Team considered the points raised and responded - resulting in some valuable feedback and a very positive reaction from the user...



Think carefully about the best way to respond to feedback. Remember that people react well to being engaged with and knowing that their feedback is valued.

Part 2: Getting started on social media

The documents below should be your social media starting points...

Social Media Playbook

Sets out the Government Digital Service's approach to social media.

Guidance

Social media guidance for civil servants: October 2014

Updated 20 October 2014

Contents

Foreword by The Rt Hon Francis Maude MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office

1. Introduction
2. The case for social media
3. Proper use of social media
4. Engaging with the public
5. Open working and service delivery
6. Further advice and guidance

Sets out to use social media appropriately to enhance your work

Your Departmental Guidance

What does your internal guidance say?
Have you looked at this recently?



The screenshot shows the Government Statistical Service (GSS) website. The header includes the GSS logo and navigation links: Home, About, National Statistician, Producing Statistics, Learning and Development, Careers, and Community. Below the header, there is a search bar and a main content area. The main content area features a group titled 'Using Social Media' with a profile picture and a 'Leave Group' button. To the right of the group, there is a 'Group Admins' section listing 'Nick Woodhill' and a 'QUICK LINKS' section with links to 'A-Z of Policies and Guidance' and 'Code of Practice'. A large text overlay on the screenshot reads: 'Join this group and contribute to the GSS's social media community'. At the bottom of the screenshot, there is a small text block: 'This group is facilitated by the National Statistician's Good Practice Team. If you have any [https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/nickwoodhill/profile/gss?team@statistics.gsi.gov.uk]

Click on each imagine for a direct link (except 'your departmental guidance')

Part 2: Getting started on social media

Your departments communications team will be an essential partner on your social media journey. You'll need to build effective relationships from the outset.

Approach your communications team early on with ideas. Get their buy-in whilst you develop your plans.

Remember your colleagues in comms are experts at communication – aim to make good use of their knowledge & advice.

Think about your plans from a comms perspective. What issues may there be and how can you mitigate these? Be open to compromise.

Ways of working for communications teams will vary – find the best approach for your department

Look at ways to build trust with your communications team. Develop your relationships over time.

Consider how your new / expanding use of social media fits in to the wider communications strategies for your team and your department.

If a new statistician led account isn't viable at this stage, consider ways to maximise your current impact – [slide 8](#)

Contact the PDC for advice on working with your departmental communications team. They have ongoing programmes of work to connect statisticians with media colleagues.

Part 2: Getting started on social media

Consider each of the following when planning the type of content you want to create?

Set your objectives

Identify the role you want social media to play. Do you want to:

- Increase the reach of your statistician outputs?
- Provide a channel to communicate and engage with users?
- Use social media to increase the influence of your work?
- Provide a platform for you to look and listen...



Look and listen

Start by using social media to identify discussions already taking place. Can you identify new users of your statistics? Are users already discussing your outputs? Does social media help show you the wider content of your analysis?

The GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee (PDC)

PDC provide strategic direction on all presentation and dissemination activities in the GSS, including social media. Talking to your department's PDC rep [6] should be on your radar!

Which platform / channels is best?

Think carefully about which channel is best for the content you wish to share. Ideally this should be guided by user research. Read about the ONS's social media user research here [7].

Taking your first steps - GPT's Gareth Pryce [8] & ONS's Joanna Goodwin [9] can help.

Part 2: Getting started on social media

There are different ways to progress. These will depend on your users and goals.

There is no 'right' way to progress - you should be guided by your objectives, your department's social media strategy and discussions with your communications team. Current GSS approaches:

Collaboration with main departmental account

Tweets go out under main departmental account.

Pros: Larger, ready-made audience. Instant credibility.

Factors to consider: Potential lack of control. Tweets may be 'buried' by other departmental posts.

[@Ofstednews](#)

[@DefenceHQ](#)

Statistician run department account

Department's own account controlled by statisticians

Pros: Control over content and full ownership. Users can engage directly with statisticians.

Factors to consider: May require buy-in at senior levels and needs close working with comms teams.

[@ONS](#)

[@DefraStats](#)

Statistician 'personal' account

Representing statistics in a department or a particular statistical subject matter

Pros: Some users like a more personal approach. May be easier to set up?

Factors to consider: Same as statistician run account. And, may require careful liaison with comms teams.

[@SeeStats](#)

[@StatsKate](#)

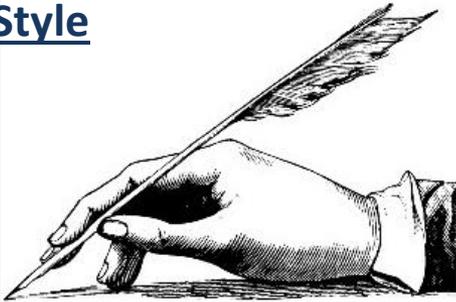
Some GSS members also tweet about statistics from their personal social media accounts – contact the Good Practice Team to find out more about this approach...

Part 3: Maximising impact

This section looks at how to maximise the impact of your social media presence

Are you covering the basics of good content?

Style



Style.ONS

[“Style.ONS” \[10\]](#) is a website intended for all members of the GSS and provides good practice guidance for writing about statistics in all forms. The section on writing for social media covers:

- ✓ Search engine optimisation
- ✓ Metadata
- ✓ Accessibility
- ✓ Interactive content
- ✓ Writing style
- ✓ Reading age

Accessibility

Good writing is accessible writing. Social media must be compatible with assistive technologies. Use colour appropriately, avoid acronyms and use animations sparingly.

One user’s view of GSS posts [11]:

"It takes me some time to get through a social media post with lots of links or hashtags- less is more!"

- Rebecca Morgan



Assume a reading age of 9 years old for all social media. Here’s [why](#) [12].

Part 3: Maximising impact

How to make time to stay active on social media



Go mobile. Download the app and check it when you're away from your desk or waiting for a meeting, the printing... the kettle.

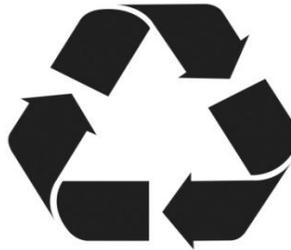


Schedule posts. Media management platforms like HootSuite [13],

Tweetdeck and SproutSocial [14] allow you to schedule posts ahead of time. And, they can be very useful when working together in a team - spread the workload of monitoring tweets, have different lists, assigning content etc.



Use lists. Organise your followers and focus on one group at a time.



Replay the hits. Repost old tweets, especially the popular ones.

Style.ONS

Guest Blog – Fitting Social Media into your busy life

Published by Joanna Goodwin, 1 July 2016, 10:00

In this fast changing world, social media is becoming an increasingly important tool in disseminating all types of information and official statistics are no exception. As such, one of the Good Practice Team's objectives is to help the GSS take forward its social media presence.



In April 2016 we organised a conference call telephone meeting for people in the GSS who use social media (or would like to do so). The meeting was designed to bring together people across departments to discuss ways in which we can increase the reach and impact of official statistics on social media. As well as discussing ways to collaborate, a key challenge people at the meeting talked about was how to find the time to fit in social media. So, Joanna Goodwin (Head of ONS Social Media) has kindly provided some top tips below...

"Statisticians are busy people so can find it hard to fit social media in to their day. This short guide offers some simple tips to keep active on social media"

Go mobile!

Download the **Twitter app** to your mobile device so you can access your social media on the go. That way, when it's time to post, you don't have to go running back to your desk.

Tweet on the go

Now you are mobile, you can post, reply or browse your streams anywhere! Those few moments when you're waiting for a train, or queuing for your lunch are now golden seconds to engage with your online audience.

Scheduling

Schedule some of your posts on Monday morning, reducing the number of posts you need to remember to post later that week.

You can tweet the same thing differently – think of different formats, pull out different interesting points of a release or remind people about the important facts.

Repost

Repost the good stuff. If you got a lot of response to a particular post, consider revisiting the topic.

Share – you don't have to do it all yourself!

Post links to articles, news and posts that say what you want to say. Just be sure to add your own comments. Why does this topic matter? What about this particular article do you like?

Twitter lists

Sometimes your twitter feed can become a long list of nonsense and you can't find the right people to engage with. This is where **Twitter lists** come in! (here's the [list](#) for all GSS lead Twitter accounts)

You can organise the people you want to follow on Twitter by different topics, interests or industry. Perhaps you'd like to make a twitter list of journalists that regularly pick up your statistics so you can see what they are talking about? Or create a twitter list for people you want to engage in your statistics so you can keep tabs on them and look for opportunities to engage. This [Bufferapp blog post](#) has a list of ideas how to use Twitter lists to help you organise your contacts.

Alerts to respond to people

You can set up notifications on your mobile device to alert you if someone mentioned you or engages with your content – meaning you don't need to go into the Twitter app or website to see what people are saying about your content.

You don't have to get everything, you can chose what notifications you receive and how often.

To find out about Twitter notifications and how to set them up, visit the [Twitter support page](#).

Twitter advanced search

Sometimes you know what you're looking for on Twitter but just can't find it! You can trawl through the feeds of people you follow and still not find that one tweet with the information you're looking for.

Twitter advanced search is what you're looking for!

You need to be logged in to use [Advanced search](#) and you can search by what account sent the tweet, or who it was sent to, the date range it was sent and add keywords or links. For more information and how to use advanced search, visit the [Twitter support page](#).

GSS Social Media Community Group

Finally, don't forget to share how you get on across the GSS! The GSS website [social media community group](#) is a great place for members of the GSS to keep up to date with all things social media. This group has discussions, slides from recent GSS events and tools to help you get started. If your looking for help / ideas or what to share something that's worked for you, the group is a great place to start.

Joanna Goodwin, ONS Social Media Lead

Twitter: [@JoannaGoodwin3](#)

For more advice, see Jo Goodwin's (Head of social media at ONS) blog [here](#) [15]

Part 3: Maximising impact

How to write the 'perfect' tweet

Write for a single user persona [5]



Pick the best format:

[headline, nugget or hook](#) [17]



How many people were claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in your area in November?
bit.ly/15VKoo3

“If we don’t present and disseminate our statistics in a way which meets our users’ needs, then there is little point in producing the statistics in the first place!”

Julie Brown, Head of Profession [16]

Keep it short



Defra Stats @DefraStats · Jul 21
Out today: Poultry and poultry meat statistics, UK: June 2016
bit.ly/UKPPMJUN16

Pick the best timing... for your audience...

‘Frontload’ key information



98% of children engaged with the arts in 2015/16. 96% if reading and writing are excluded
ow.ly/xwzw302szYL

Posted early morning to catch the headlines



Statistics for Wales @StatisticsWales

There were 10.28 million overnight trips to Wales in the year ending March 2016.
ow.ly/kigL301Vlca

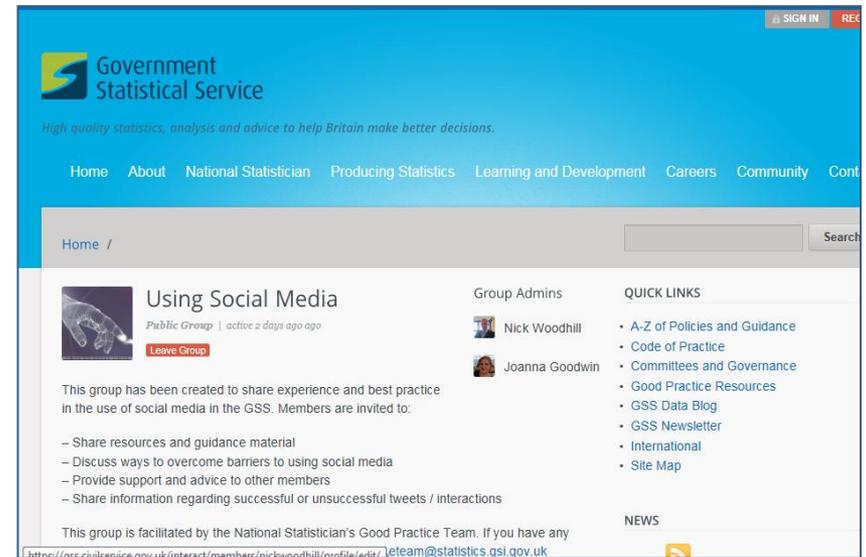
2:40 AM · 5 Jul 2016

More tips on how to maximise your impact can be found [here](#) [18].

Annex A – Website community group

a

The GSS social media community is a great place for members of the GSS to keep up to date with all things social media. This group has discussions, slides from recent GSS events and tools to help you get started. If you're looking for help and ideas or want to share something that's worked for you, the group is a great place to start.



Examples of successful business cases for dedicated departmental statistics accounts!

The community library contains:

- NHS England's twitter guidance
- BIS and NHS England business cases
- A list of tweeting statisticians
- Social media style guide
- GSS social media fact finding survey results

In 2015 the GSS Good Practice Team ran a survey of department's social media presence. Twelve departments responded. You can read the survey results [here](#) [19].

Annex B – Training

How to access training and points of contact

Contact the GSS Good Practice Team to discuss:

- ✓ Training needs for your department
- ✓ How the GSS is moving forward
- ✓ How best to engage your comms teams*
- ✓ Taking your first steps

Contact the ONS Social Media Team to discuss:

- ✓ Expert advice
- ✓ How to use different platforms
- ✓ How to set up campaigns

Modular social media training – Coming soon...

The ONS Learning Academy deliver quality and innovative training that focuses on making learning accessible (through a variety of modern and digital learning channels).

ONS are currently developing a social media training pathway, using a modular approach to bring blended learning techniques into the working environment – combining theory with the practical. This will also be available to GSS colleagues. Contact ONS's [Joanna Goodwin \[9\]](#) for more information.



* This links with cross GSS work being taken forward by the GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee.

Annex C – Wider reading

Links to documents, website and blogs for further reading



2016 guidance for government on conducting user research via social media

New guidance on FOI requests received via social media



Wide ranging blog showcasing a range of best practice and innovation from government.

Wider best practice: A host of digital marketing companies blog about new and good practice



sproutsocial



Mashable



Government Digital Service

Blog



Click on any image for a direct link

Annex D – Other social media platforms

Think carefully about which channel is best for the content you wish to share

What platforms are the right ones and how many should you manage? Below are examples of platforms you may wish to consider...



Great for transforming statistics into digestible engaging stories. Trialled [successfully by ONS](#) in summer 2016.



Used by the [GSS](#) to summarise conference proceedings. A digestible alternative to multiple PowerPoint presentations.



A professional platform with dedicated groups for discussion of [official statistics](#). A global reach.



A popular and extremely familiar channel to most people. Huge potential, but for the right content.



What will the future look like? It's hard to accurately predict what devices and social media platforms will exist in 5 or 10 years time! What is the next big thing - will it be video, voice controls or virtual reality?! Focus on understanding your users needs and providing insight. Try not to get too tied into any particular channel or type of presentation / dissemination method.

Annex E – References and resources

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