Electronic Records Management: Strategies for Managing Social Media Records Retention

Purpose: Provide guidance to state agencies and local government entities on managing social media records for the purposes of public records retention.

Because social media posts happen on third-party platforms, it can be difficult to manage these records in an accessible and authentic format. With that in mind, here are some strategies for social media records retention:

1. **Identify business uses** – Decide what business uses your agency has for social media.

2. **Create a social media policy** – Identifying the purposes for which social media will be used by the agency can help determine the appropriate retention periods.

3. **Sort social media by their retention period** – Using the records retention schedules, determine the retention for each of the business uses identified in Step 1.
   
   - There is no catch-all retention period for social media.
   - If multiple retention periods cannot be applied to the social media records, identify the longest applicable retention period and apply that period to all social media posts.

4. **Use a capture tool** – Social media records should be kept in electronic format, with all the associated formatting and metadata. Using a social media capture tool can ensure this information is kept along with the content of the record.
   
   - Once you identify a capture tool, develop policies and procedures to manage the storage and access of that social media content.
   - If a capture tool is not an option for your agency, consider manually capturing screenshots of social media posts in something like Microsoft Word. Captured screenshots don’t have the same authenticity/metadata, but they are better than doing nothing.

5. **Apply retention to captured copy** – As managing retention of social media posts on the actual social media platform may be difficult, the agency should apply retention to the **captured** copy of the social media record.

Once you know which social media posts you have and how your agency can retain them, you are ready to manage social media records!

Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from Washington State Archives:

www.sos.wa.gov/archives
recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov