



## **In Brief**

## **Use of Social Media**

Report Number A-11-01, September 28, 2011

### **Why We Did This Audit**

We conducted this audit to assess whether the Institution's plans for and current uses of social media productively and responsibly advance the Smithsonian mission to increase and diffuse knowledge, including whether the Institution provides adequate oversight and sufficient accountability.

### **What We Recommended**

To improve oversight of and accountability for the Institution's social media use, we recommended that the Smithsonian (1) develop a performance measurement system to evaluate whether the Institution as a whole has met its goal of broadening access using social media; (2) appoint a pan-Institutional Web and new media leader, as called for in the Smithsonian's Web and New Media Strategy; (3) update the Smithsonian Website and Social Network Registry with social media accounts we identified; and (4) request units to close inactive accounts we identified, in accordance with the Institution's new social media policy.

Management generally concurred with our findings and recommendations.

### **What We Found**

The Smithsonian generally used social media responsibly. The Smithsonian content in the nearly 1,600 Smithsonian Facebook and Twitter practitioner posts we reviewed advanced the Institution's mission to increase and diffuse knowledge. Smithsonian practitioners we interviewed regularly reviewed social media for inappropriate user content, but did not find many instances of such content. Likewise, we found no user content that we believed was inappropriate in our random sample of 14 Smithsonian Facebook pages.

However, contrary to best practices, 25 of the 30 Smithsonian pages we reviewed in a separate sample did not contain a comment policy.

At the conclusion of our audit work, the Smithsonian issued a social media policy. If followed as written, it will reinforce practitioners' responsible use of all social media. The policy incorporates social media best practices, setting forth expectations for how to use social media responsibly, including requiring comment policies on Smithsonian social media accounts.

The Secretary and his direct reports ("Management") have not provided adequate oversight of the Institution's efforts to broaden access using social media, limiting accountability. The Under Secretaries have not yet established a system to measure Institution-wide social media performance, even though the Smithsonian's Strategic Plan calls for Management to do so.

The Under Secretaries have not established a system to measure social media performance at all units because they believed that the Smithsonian had not identified a meaningful social media performance indicator. Recently, however, Management selected performance indicators that they plan to begin tracking at the start of FY 2012.

The Secretary has not appointed a Web and new media leader, as called for by the Institution's Web and New Media Strategy, to help oversee the Institution's plans for and strategic use of social media.

The Smithsonian did not know the full extent of its social media presence, further limiting Institutional accountability. The Smithsonian's central directory of social media accounts was missing at least 10 percent of Smithsonian-managed accounts and lacked contact information for almost 20 percent of the registered accounts.

We found that the Smithsonian could help practitioners use social media more productively by improving information-sharing across the Institution. In August 2011, the Smithsonian established an internal information-sharing hub for its social media practitioners.

**For additional information or a copy of the full report, contact the Office of the Inspector General at (202) 633-7050 or visit <http://www.si.edu/oig>.**



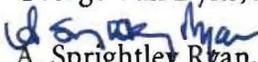
# Smithsonian Institution

Office of the Inspector General

Date September 28, 2011

To G. Wayne Clough, Secretary  
Evelyn Lieberman, Director of Communications and External Affairs  
Anne Van Camp, Director, Smithsonian Institution Archives

cc Claudine Brown, Assistant Secretary for Education and Access  
Richard Kurin, Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture  
Judith E. Leonard, General Counsel  
Albert Horvath, Under Secretary for Finance and Administration and Chief Financial Officer  
Eva J. Pell, Under Secretary for Science  
Scott Miller, Deputy Under Secretary for Collections and Interdisciplinary Support  
George Van Dyke, Acting Chief Information Officer

From  A. Sprightley Ryan, Inspector General

Subject Audit of Use of Social Media, Number A-11-01

This report presents the results of our audit of social media<sup>1</sup> use at the Smithsonian. Our objectives were to assess whether the Institution's plans for and current uses of social media productively and responsibly advance the Smithsonian mission to increase and diffuse knowledge, including whether the Institution provides adequate oversight and sufficient accountability.

We initiated this audit in November 2010 to address the risk posed by users posting inappropriate content on Smithsonian accounts. We also initiated this audit because the Smithsonian's strategic plan<sup>2</sup> emphasizes the importance of these tools in advancing the Institution's mission, and we were concerned that the Smithsonian ensure adequate oversight of and accountability for social media use.

In its Strategic Plan, the Smithsonian committed to using social media and other new media tools to broaden access to the Institution's programs and outreach – one of seven strategic priorities. The Strategic Plan's other priorities include measuring performance and enabling the mission through organizational excellence. The Strategic Plan characterizes a performance measurement system as gathering data, monitoring progress, and evaluating results, as captured in a set of performance indicators directly linked to what the Smithsonian wants to accomplish. The Strategic Plan also calls for a commitment to excellence and accountability and for the Institution to account for and control its processes, improve performance, and support ongoing learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Social media are defined as any form of online publication or presence that allows end-users to engage in multi-directional conversations in or around the content on a website. *OnlineMatters.com*. Glossary of Online Marketing Terms. (2011). Retrieved 4/25/2011 from <http://www.onlinematters.com/glossary.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Smithsonian Institution Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2010 – 2015, *Inspiring Generations Through Knowledge and Discovery*.

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To accomplish our objectives, we conducted extensive interviews of Smithsonian management and staff and surveyed the Institution's social media practitioner community. We focused our audit on third-party social media sites<sup>3</sup> because they allow anyone to create an account and post information to a global audience instantaneously. We tested the completeness of the Smithsonian's Website and Social Network Registry<sup>4</sup> by searching the Internet for Smithsonian-managed social media accounts not already listed on the registry. We identified social media best practices from external organizations and tested a sample of Smithsonian Facebook and Twitter accounts against those practices.

We include a detailed description of our scope and methodology in Appendix A.

## **RESULTS IN BRIEF**

The Smithsonian generally used social media responsibly. The Smithsonian content in the nearly 1,600 Smithsonian Facebook and Twitter practitioner posts we reviewed advanced the Institution's mission to increase and diffuse knowledge. Smithsonian practitioners we interviewed regularly reviewed social media for inappropriate user content, but did not find many instances of such content. Likewise, we found no user content that we believed was inappropriate in our random sample of 14 Smithsonian Facebook pages.

However, contrary to best practices, 25 of the 30 Smithsonian pages we reviewed in a separate sample did not contain a comment policy.

At the conclusion of our audit work, the Smithsonian issued a social media policy. If followed as written, it will reinforce practitioners' responsible use of all social media. The policy incorporates social media best practices, setting forth expectations for how to use social media responsibly, including requiring comment policies on Smithsonian social media accounts.

The Secretary and his direct reports ("Management") have not provided adequate oversight of the Institution's efforts to broaden access using social media, limiting accountability. The Under Secretaries have not yet established a system to measure Institution-wide social media performance, even though the Smithsonian's Strategic Plan calls for Management to measure performance systematically. Given the Institution's decentralized organizational structure, methodically measuring pan-Institutional performance entails having these systems established within each unit. Yet, the Under Secretaries have not yet required unit directors to establish such systems.

The Under Secretaries have not established a system to measure social media performance at all units because they believed that the Smithsonian had not identified a meaningful social media performance indicator. Recently, however, Management selected performance indicators that they plan to begin tracking at the start of FY 2012.

The Secretary has not appointed a Web and new media leader, as called for by the Institution's Web and New Media Strategy, to help oversee the Institution's plans for and strategic use of social media.

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<sup>3</sup> Third-party social media sites are sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), which are hosted outside of the Smithsonian's computer servers.

<sup>4</sup> The registry is a central directory of the Institution's websites and social media accounts. We used the Website and Social Network Registry as of February 14, 2011.

The Smithsonian did not know the full extent of its social media presence, further limiting Institutional accountability. The Smithsonian’s central directory of social media accounts was missing at least 10 percent of Smithsonian-managed accounts and lacked contact information for almost 20 percent of the registered accounts. Without a complete registry, Management could not systematically measure the performance of or otherwise ensure adequate oversight of all the Institution’s social media accounts. The Smithsonian lacked a complete registry because at the time of our testing, Management did not require social media practitioners to report new accounts, as it now does under the just-issued social media policy.

We made four recommendations to improve oversight of and accountability for the Institution’s social media use, which Management generally agreed to implement.

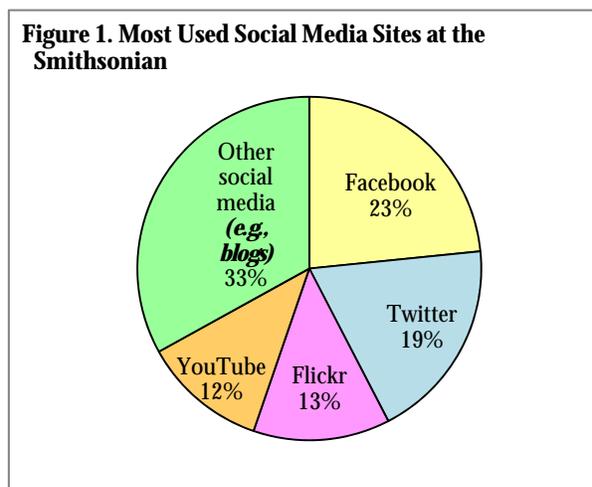
We also found that the Smithsonian could help practitioners use social media more productively by improving information-sharing across the Institution. Although Smithsonian social media practitioners we surveyed were generally satisfied with the Institution’s current methods of sharing information, at the time of our survey, 72 percent of respondents would have found an information-sharing hub dedicated to social media useful. At the conclusion of our audit work, the Smithsonian established an internal information-sharing hub for its social media practitioners. We encourage the Smithsonian to continue to help provide ways for social media practitioners to find the information they need more easily.

Because of the evolving nature of social media use at the Smithsonian, the initiation of the audit produced some uneasiness among senior managers. Though we were able to complete the audit and satisfy our objectives, we wish to emphasize that we chose the topic based upon its strategic significance to the Smithsonian and conducted our work consistent with our authority and mission under the Inspector General Act.

## BACKGROUND

### Use of Third-Party Social Media at the Smithsonian

The Institution had 342 social media accounts recorded in the Smithsonian Website and Social Network Registry.<sup>5</sup> Although the Smithsonian uses a variety of social media sites to reach its audiences, the four most commonly used ones were Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube, which represented 229 (or 67 percent) of the total accounts. See Figure 1 for a breakdown of the most used social media sites.



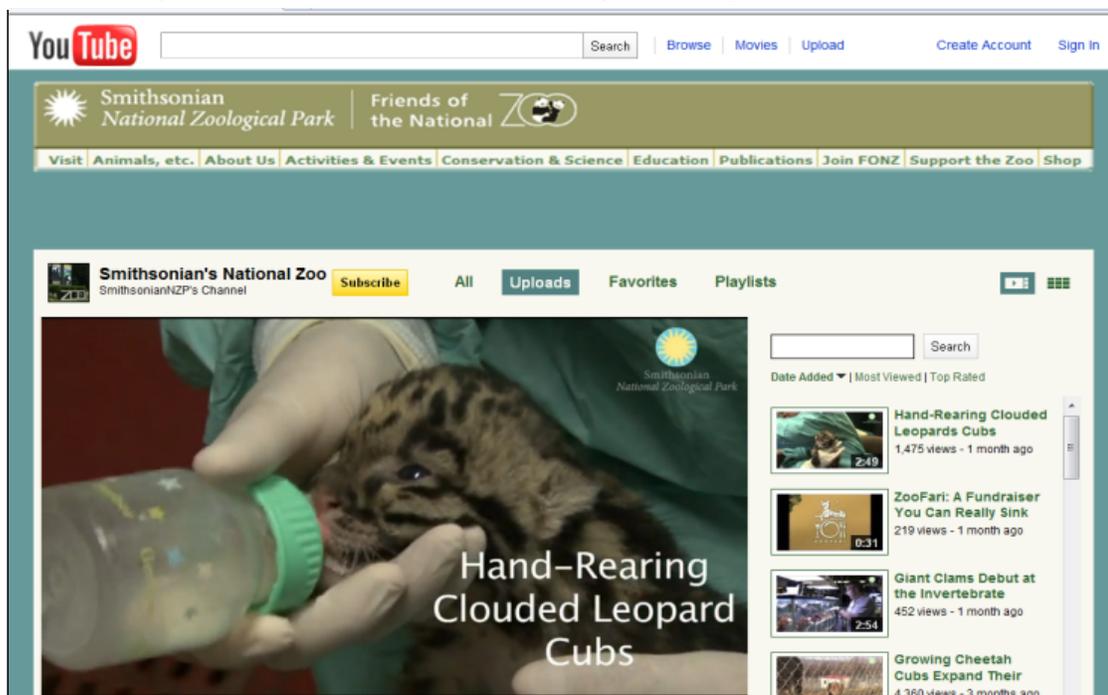
<sup>5</sup> This number is based on the registry as of February 14, 2011. However, as noted later in the report, the registry did not contain all of the Smithsonian-managed social media accounts. Furthermore, the number of registered accounts will continue to change, as units establish new accounts or close abandoned accounts.

Using these sites, the Smithsonian posts a wide range of content, such as notifications of museum events, links to videos and photos, pictures and descriptions of collection items, and facts about historically significant dates.

For example, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, and museums such as the National Museum of the American Indian, post events on their Facebook pages where users can RSVP and share the events with their Facebook friends.

In other examples, the National Zoological Park's YouTube channel posted a video of animal care staff hand-rearing clouded leopard cubs born this spring at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute. In the video, the animal care staff describe their work with the cubs and the importance of the clouded leopard breeding program. And, the National Air and Space Museum relived the Apollo 11 mission to the moon by tweeting highlights from that mission in real time on the mission's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

#### National Zoological Park's YouTube Channel video featuring clouded leopard cubs



### The Smithsonian Strategic Plan and Social Media

In addition to reaching audiences through traditional means such as exhibits, the Smithsonian's Strategic Plan calls for the Institution to use social media and other new media tools to broaden access to Smithsonian resources, one of seven strategic priorities. Third-party social media are just one aspect of social media, as social media also encompass interactive tools embedded in Smithsonian websites. Furthermore, social media are just one small part of the much larger Web and new media field, which also includes tools such as mobile technology and video games.

The Strategic Plan also communicates the Institution's aim to involve its audiences as partners in the increase and diffusion of knowledge. Specifically, the Smithsonian seeks to "use new media and social networking tools to deliver information in customized ways

and bring [its] resources to those who cannot visit in person.” This vision stems from the Institution’s Web and New Media Strategy, finalized on July 30, 2009, which sets forth the Smithsonian’s strategic Web and new media goals, as well as tactical recommendations to implement these goals.

## Importance of Social Media

Organizations can no longer view social media as discretionary. The explosive proliferation of social media across the globe means that users now demand that organizations employ social media. Social media are essential for the Institution to remain relevant, as they enable audiences around the world to receive information on the social media sites they already use and in the personalized and participatory manner they expect. People of all ages now actively use social media. In July 2011, for example, Facebook had 750 million active users. Without effectively using social media tools, organizations risk losing their audiences, who may gravitate towards organizations that do reach out and engage with them in these spaces.

As an example of the trend toward two-way dialogue, during a controversy regarding the *Hide/Seek* exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery,<sup>6</sup> audiences used Facebook to express their opinions to Smithsonian management and to debate with one another.

In another example, audiences rated and commented on their favorite singers in a national anthem singing contest on YouTube, as part of the National Museum of American History’s efforts to promote its new Star Spangled Banner exhibit.

National Museum of American History’s YouTube Channel



Social media also offer new opportunities to involve audiences in conducting the Institution’s work more efficiently. As limited resources continue to be a challenge for the Smithsonian, social media provide innovative ways to “crowdsource”<sup>7</sup> knowledge to help

<sup>6</sup> On November 30, 2010, the National Portrait Gallery removed a four-minute video that was part of its exhibit *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, in response to complaints that the video was offensive to some.

<sup>7</sup> According to Wikipedia, crowdsourcing is defined as the act of taking tasks traditionally performed by an employee or contractor, and outsourcing them to an undefined, large group of people or community (a crowd), through an "open call."

achieve mission-based projects. For example, the Smithsonian has used Flickr, a photo-sharing social media site, to solicit additional information about photos in its collection.

### Social Media Roles and Responsibilities

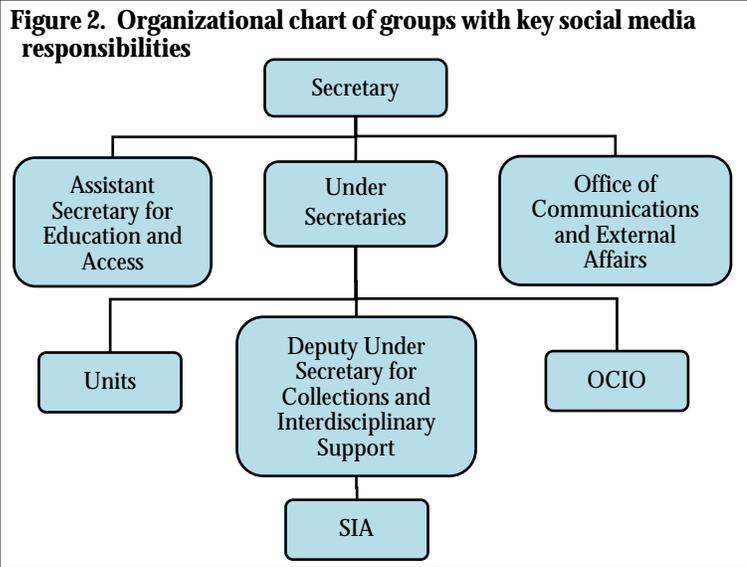
As with many of its other functions, the Institution manages its social media use in a decentralized manner. See Figure 2 for an organizational chart illustrating groups that have key social media responsibilities.

Social media practitioners throughout the Institution – who reside in various unit departments ranging from communications, to public programs, to Web and new media – operate the accounts and report to their unit directors, who in turn report to their respective Under Secretaries.

The Smithsonian does not have a single leader with Institution-wide responsibility for social media, or Web and new media as a whole. Instead, the Smithsonian divided key responsibilities for social media among central Smithsonian groups as follows:

- The Office of Communications and External Affairs (OC&EA) has operated the several main “Smithsonian”-branded social media accounts.<sup>8</sup> OC&EA is also responsible for setting pan-Institutional social media policy, and has developed the policy in coordination with staff from the Office of General Counsel, Smithsonian Institution Archives (SIA), the Office of Contracting and Personal Property Management, and the Office of Chief Information Officer (OCIO).
- SIA has been responsible for maintaining the Institution’s Website and Social Network Registry and for archiving relevant social media records.
- OCIO has been responsible for technology solutions, but those responsibilities do not extend to third-party sites, such as social media sites. OCIO has two mid-level managers who assist with coordinating pan-Institutional new media strategy.

At the time we drafted this report, Management was in the process of reassigning roles and responsibilities related to Web and new media, including social media. While OCIO and OC&EA both have played a key role in the past, the extent of their future responsibilities is under discussion. Other central units, such as SIA, will likely continue to play a role; new offices, such as that of the newly established Assistant



<sup>8</sup> Examples of main “Smithsonian”-branded social media accounts include the Smithsonian Institution Facebook page, the Smithsonian Twitter account, and the Smithsonian Videos YouTube channel. Separately, unit practitioners operate social media accounts specific to their unit activities, such as those we describe in the background section of this report.

Secretary for Education and Access, will take on a greater leadership role.

Before disbanding in February 2011, the Web and New Media Steering Committee, a pan-Institutional group of Smithsonian management and staff, began a process to redefine its role and membership. As part of this process, the committee hired an independent consultant who is helping to draft a charter for a replacement pan-Institutional Web and new media group.

### **Accountability and Performance Measurement**

According to the Strategic Plan, the Institution seeks to build a culture that emphasizes organizational accountability as part of its strategic priority of “enabling the Institution’s mission through organizational excellence.” Recognizing that performance measurement and accountability go hand-in-hand, the Smithsonian also established performance measurement as another one of its seven strategic priorities:

Performance measurement of individuals, teams, units, and activities tells us whether we are achieving our objectives, goals, and outcomes.... Performance measurement is critical to sustaining the highest standards of excellence.

The Strategic Plan also emphasizes the importance of measuring performance so that the Smithsonian can communicate the performance of the entire Institution, not just select units: the Smithsonian strives to “improve the capability of the Smithsonian to explain and market its accomplishments, relevance, and wealth of offerings to the Congress, Administration, donors, sponsors, and the public.”

## **RESULTS OF AUDIT**

### **The Smithsonian Generally Used Social Media Responsibly**

We found that the Institution’s social media practitioners responsibly managed Smithsonian and user content on the Institution’s social media accounts. The Smithsonian content we reviewed on Facebook and Twitter advanced the Institution’s mission to increase and diffuse knowledge. Practitioners we interviewed regularly reviewed their social media accounts for inappropriate user content and did not find many instances of such content. We also found no user content that we believed was inappropriate in our review of a random sample of Smithsonian Facebook pages.

Management’s just-issued social media policy, if followed as written, will reinforce the practitioners’ responsible use of all social media. The policy, which incorporates social media best practices, sets expectations for how to use social media responsibly. Before the policy came out in August 2011, practitioners may not have been aware of and may not have followed social media best practices, as demonstrated by our finding that most Smithsonian Facebook pages we reviewed in another sample did not include a comment policy – a social media best practice.

### **Smithsonian Practitioners Posted Content that Advanced the Institution’s Mission**

Smithsonian practitioners posted content that was related to the Institution’s mission, as recommended by best practices. We found that the content in our sample of 703

Facebook and 878 Twitter postings advanced the Smithsonian’s mission to increase and diffuse knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

For example, the National Museum of Natural History’s Human Origins program encouraged Twitter audiences to vote on which fossil from the museum’s exhibit to add to its online 3D collection.

**A Tweet from the National Museum of Natural History’s Human Origins Program Twitter Account**



**The National Postal Museum invited its Facebook audience to vote on a stamp for the museum’s new gallery**



Similarly, the National Postal Museum used Facebook to invite the public to vote on the stamp that would represent the United States in the museum’s new gallery.

**Smithsonian Practitioners Reviewed Social Media for Inappropriate User Content, but Did Not Set Forth Expectations for User Content**

Although practitioners we interviewed regularly reviewed their social media accounts for inappropriate user content, most Smithsonian Facebook pages we reviewed did not set forth expectations for appropriate user content by posting a comment policy; 25 (or 83 percent) of the 30 pages in our sample did not contain a comment policy.

Unit practitioners we interviewed regularly reviewed their social media accounts for inappropriate user content, and did not find many instances of such content. See Figure 3 on the following page for an example of user content. Some of the practitioners we interviewed were concerned when they established their accounts that users would post a large amount of inappropriate content; however, they rarely found such content, and when they did, they moderated the content by warning the user or deleting it. We found no user content that we believed was inappropriate in our random sample of 14 of the Smithsonian’s 80 registered Facebook pages.

<sup>9</sup> We did find one instance of a posting unrelated to the Institution’s mission, in which a practitioner promoted a new feature on a social media site that offered a chance to win a tablet computer.

**Figure 3. Example of user content (on right) in response to Smithsonian content posted by practitioners on Facebook**



Social media best practices recommend that organizations set forth expectations for appropriate user content by posting a comment policy. Best practices also recommend that after users post content, practitioners review the content and moderate it according to the posted comment policy.

Without a posted comment policy, how the Smithsonian moderates comments is not transparent, and users do not know what is expected of them. As a result, users may view the Smithsonian's moderation as unfair. For example, if the Smithsonian were to delete user content during a passionate debate without advising users ahead of time of the standards used to gauge appropriate language and content, the users could view the Smithsonian as censoring their comments.

Most Smithsonian Facebook pages did not include a comment policy because the Smithsonian did not have a policy requiring practitioners to do so. The recently issued SD 814 requires the use of a comment policy on Smithsonian social media accounts, as appropriate to the social media site.<sup>10</sup>

### **New Smithsonian Policy will Reinforce Responsible Use of Social Media**

At the time we drafted this report, after we had concluded our fieldwork, the Smithsonian was finalizing *Smithsonian Directive (SD) 814: Social Media* Policy to reinforce responsible use of social media. This directive is based on draft guidelines established in July 2009 by a small group of stakeholders who, amid the ever-growing presence of social media at the Smithsonian,<sup>11</sup> realized the need for Institution-wide guidance on how practitioners should use social media responsibly. The draft of SD 814 established guidance, such as types of acceptable practitioner and user content, as well as procedures for establishing social media accounts. The Smithsonian shared an earlier version of this guidance with the social media practitioner community.

<sup>10</sup> Posting a comment policy should be required only as appropriate to each social media site, as not all sites (e.g., Twitter) are designed to allow a user to post content on others' accounts or provide space to post a comment policy.

<sup>11</sup> Social media use at the Smithsonian began to proliferate after the *Smithsonian 2.0: A Gathering to Re-Imagine the Smithsonian in the Digital Age* conference hosted by the Secretary in January 2009.

Because Smithsonian staff were drafting the policy during our audit, we shared with them the social media best practices we identified to incorporate at their discretion. We noted that the most recent draft policy incorporated best practices previously identified by staff as well as appropriate best practices we identified. The newly issued final policy addresses relevant legal issues, such as privacy and records retention, as best practice suggests such policies include.

Social media best practices recommend that organizations have a social media policy to set expectations for how to use social media responsibly. Lacking an implemented policy, practitioners may not have been aware of and may not have followed social media best practices. For example, as we note in this report, prior to the policy's implementation and contrary to best practices, most Smithsonian pages we reviewed did not contain a comment policy, and the Smithsonian's central directory of social media accounts was missing at least 10 percent of the Institution's accounts.

The Director of Communications and External Affairs issued SD 814 as we were finalizing this report, and therefore we do not make a recommendation regarding the issuance of the policy.

### **Management Oversight of and Accountability for Social Media Limited**

Management has not exercised adequate oversight of the Institution's efforts to broaden access using social media, limiting accountability. Specifically, the Under Secretaries have not yet established a system to measure Institution-wide social media performance. The Smithsonian's incomplete listing of social media accounts further limited Institutional accountability. Finally, the Secretary has not appointed a Web and new media leader, as called for by the Institution's Web and New Media Strategy, to help oversee the Institution's plans for and strategic use of social media.

### **The Under Secretaries Have Not Systematically Measured Institution-wide Social Media Performance**

The Under Secretaries have not adequately overseen unit social media efforts by systematically measuring Smithsonian-wide progress in using social media to broaden access. The Smithsonian's Strategic Plan calls for Management to do so by selecting a performance indicator, setting a performance target, gathering data, monitoring progress, and evaluating and reporting results. See Figure 4 on the following page for elements that make up a performance measurement system.

Given the Smithsonian's decentralized organizational structure and the autonomy afforded its units, systematically measuring pan-Institutional performance entails having performance measurement systems established within each unit. Yet, the Under Secretaries have not yet required unit directors to establish adequate systems to measure their unit's social media performance, which may give unit directors the impression that having such systems is not necessary. Two unit directors we interviewed explained that they were struggling with how to measure social media performance and that they did not set targets or methodically evaluate performance.

Instead, lacking a systematic approach, both the Under Secretaries and the unit directors we interviewed relied only on examples to demonstrate that the unit had broadened access using social media. One unit director gave us an example of his museum using its social media audience to quickly translate a foreign language item from its archives.

While we acknowledge that anecdotes are helpful in illustrating how social media can broaden access, anecdotes do not provide a complete picture of unit performance. Anecdotes may only capture successful case studies, whereas systematically measuring performance would capture both successes and areas that may require additional support.

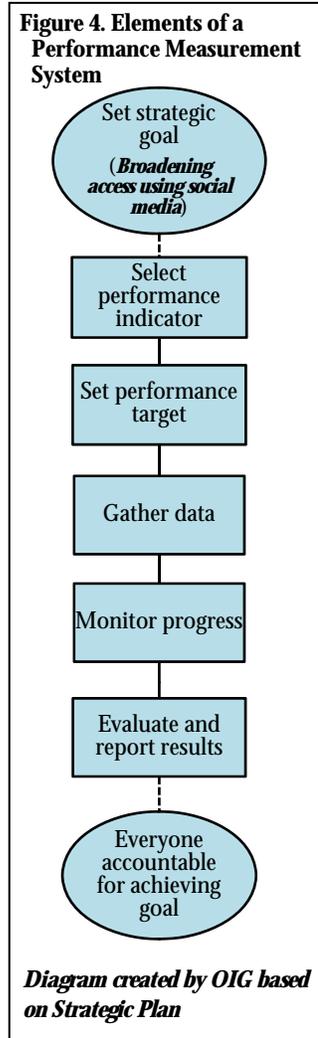
Management has recognized the need to systematically measure social media performance. As part of the Smithsonian's ongoing process to measure performance in all strategic areas across the Institution,<sup>12</sup> Management identified pan-Institutional social media performance indicators, namely the number of followers and monthly views of Smithsonian social media accounts.<sup>13</sup> Management plans to begin using these indicators by the start of FY 2012, but has not yet determined when it will establish performance targets.

We recognize that the Smithsonian is placing more emphasis on performance measurement than it has in the past. However, we note that two years after issuing the Strategic Plan, Management still does not have a systematic method of measuring social media performance Institution-wide and has not decided when it will establish performance targets.

Failing to systematically evaluate performance is also counter to the management practices described in the Smithsonian's Strategic Plan and its Web and New Media Strategy. Both documents outline the Institution's aim to measure Smithsonian performance systematically. Specifically, the Strategic Plan states:

We will engage all levels of leadership in matching outcomes, goals, objectives, and strategies to performance indicators that will specifically and annually measure progress toward our goals.

A system for measuring performance on a more detailed level includes gathering data, monitoring progress, and evaluating results, as captured in a set of



<sup>12</sup> Since January 2010, Management has been redesigning its processes, including goal setting and performance measurement, to help the Institution achieve its Strategic Plan goals.

<sup>13</sup> Management intends to track the number of social media followers by compiling the number of fans and followers from official Smithsonian Facebook and Twitter accounts, respectively. Management defined social media monthly views as the number of times YouTube visitors have viewed videos posted by Smithsonian units, combined with the total number of times Flickr visitors have viewed individual photos and photo sets posted by Smithsonian units on official Smithsonian Flickr photo-sharing sites.

performance indicators directly linked to what the Smithsonian wants to accomplish.

According to the Web and New Media Strategy, the Smithsonian seeks to “create a culture of accountability” and “require regular reports on Web and new media initiatives, including target audiences, measurable performance goals, technologies used, resources expended, and lessons learned.”

The Smithsonian has not yet established social media performance measurement systems because the Under Secretaries believed that the Smithsonian had not identified a meaningful performance indicator that could be tracked pan-Institutionally, as the field of social media measurement is still new. The Under Secretaries believed that practitioners should be allowed to experiment without being required to systematically measure their performance. We acknowledge that this field is nascent and that best practices recommend that organizations encourage their staff to experiment with social media. However, we note that leading information technology research and advisory companies<sup>14</sup> recommend against organizations experimenting with social media without measuring performance. One of these companies recommends that organizations begin measuring their social media performance by starting with simple performance indicators before moving on to complex ones, and look to leading organizations for best practices on measuring social media performance.

We are concerned that without a performance measurement system, the Smithsonian will not be accountable for reaching audiences using social media as audiences demand. No one could know whether the Smithsonian was making progress toward achieving its strategic goal of using social media to broaden access. As a result, (1) accountability for broadening access using social media was limited at all levels of the Institution, and (2) Management’s reports to the Board of Regents did not accurately reflect Institution-wide performance.

#### Inadequate Accountability

Without a system for measuring pan-Institutional social media performance, there was a dearth of accountability for broadening access using social media at all levels: the Under Secretaries, unit directors, and potentially unit practitioners. Lacking performance targets and results, the Secretary could not hold the Under Secretaries accountable for ensuring the Institution as a whole achieves its strategic goal. Likewise, the Under Secretaries could not hold unit directors accountable for systematically demonstrating how their unit used social media to broaden access. Finally, unit directors who have not established systems to measure their unit social media performance may not hold their staff accountable for their role in broadening access.

If unit directors do not hold staff accountable for achieving social media performance targets, unit directors are essentially allowing staff – rather than unit directors – to determine the priority of social media relative to their other responsibilities. On the one hand, staff could work on social media to the detriment of other responsibilities; on the other hand, staff may not devote sufficient time to social media efforts. As an example of the latter, subject matter experts, such as researchers and curators, may not collaborate with practitioners to develop social media content. Because subject matter experts may be

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<sup>14</sup> Gartner, Inc. and Forrester Research, Inc. are leading information technology research and advisory companies.

responsible for meeting performance targets specific to their area, such as completing a specified number of research publications, these staff may not be motivated to spend time collaborating outside of these areas. Likewise, practitioners often juggle many responsibilities and may not be motivated to dedicate time to social media without being held accountable for achieving a target. The Smithsonian therefore risks losing relevance with its audiences, as more people expect to be reached in an interactive manner using their preferred online tools.

### Management's Reports on Social Media did not Reflect Institution-wide Performance

Lacking a system to provide unit performance results, Management could not know and could not accurately demonstrate to the Board of Regents or other stakeholders how the Institution's overall social media efforts broadened access. This inability to demonstrate pan-Institutional social media performance was evident in Management's FY 2010 written reports to the Board of Regents.<sup>15</sup>

In the first quarter update on the Smithsonian's progress in achieving the Smithsonian-wide FY 2010 goal of broadening access using social media, Management reported on only three main Smithsonian accounts centrally operated by OC&EA,

**FY 2010 Smithsonian Goal to Broaden Access Using Social Media**

Attract new and diverse onsite and virtual visitors by ... expanding social networking activities.

**Source: Smithsonian Institution FY 2010 Annual Goals**

out of the nearly 200 other social media accounts managed by Smithsonian units at the time.<sup>16</sup> Management reported that the Facebook page, which hosted live question and answer sessions with Smithsonian experts, reached 37,000 fans; Twitter followers increased to 16,800; and the YouTube page was redesigned.

Management also did not first establish performance indicators and corresponding performance targets. For example, Management reported the following results in the first quarter of FY 2010:

***Twitter followers increased to 16,800; with 43% of our followers male and 57% female.***

Without a pre-established target, Management may report any performance as evidence of success; for example, Management could interpret adding any number of followers – from one to one million – as success. Indeed, Management has used such results as evidence that the Institution was “on track” to achieve its FY2010 goal.

Management's reports to the Board of Regents thus did not reflect Institution-wide performance. We are concerned that reporting in this manner may give the Board an incorrect impression of the Institution's overall social media use, implying that all units

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<sup>15</sup> Management periodically reports its progress towards achieving the Smithsonian strategic goals to the Board of Regents. For example, in FY 2010, Management provided two written reports to update the Board of Regents on the Smithsonian's progress toward the pan-Institutional FY 2010 goals.

<sup>16</sup> Management reported on the following accounts: 1) Facebook ([www.facebook.com/SmithsonianInstitution](http://www.facebook.com/SmithsonianInstitution)), 2) Twitter ([www.twitter.com/smithsonian](http://www.twitter.com/smithsonian)), and 3) YouTube ([www.youtube.com/SmithsonianVideos](http://www.youtube.com/SmithsonianVideos)).

are successfully using social media to broaden access when they may not be. Alternatively, the Institution may not be giving itself credit for the full range of its social media accomplishments. The reported results are not meaningful, and may even be misleading, without specified performance indicators or targets to provide context.

Management is currently reevaluating its goals as it redesigns how it will measure progress toward achieving the Strategic Plan. As part of these efforts, after the start of FY 2011 Management overhauled all of its annual goals from FY 2010, and no longer has a goal specific to social media.

Our audit only covered the social media element of the Strategic Plan. As such, we do not comment on other broader aspects of the plan. However, our work underscores the importance of overseeing the units to ensure that they have performance measurement systems in place for all key strategic areas and, further, that the Under Secretaries rely on the overall plan to prioritize their activities.

### **Recommendation**

To ensure sufficient oversight of and accountability for the Institution's overall social media use, we recommend that the Secretary:

1. Develop a performance measurement system that includes performance targets, set centrally or by the units, to evaluate whether the Institution as a whole has met its goal of broadening access using social media.

### **Web and New Media Leader Needed to Plan for and Use Social Media Strategically**

The Secretary has not appointed a Web and new media leader – as called for in the Web and New Media Strategy – with the authority and visibility to help oversee the Institution's plans for and strategic use of social media. The Director of Communications and External Affairs and the Chief Information Officer had been co-leading Web and new media at the Institution, with one responsible for new media content, the other for technology. However, a divided management approach may not be effective. The areas of content and technology overlap in much of new media, including social media, and co-leaders may have different management approaches or priorities, thus frustrating decision-making.

Both co-leaders believed that sharing leadership may not be as effective as having a single leader. Several Smithsonian unit management and staff we interviewed expressed similar views.

Additionally, the Director of Communications and External Affairs believed that the Smithsonian would benefit from having a dedicated leader deeply knowledgeable about this ever-evolving field. A leader knowledgeable about current new media practices would enable the Institution to spend and invest resources strategically in this area, and help other senior leaders understand the costs, benefits, impact, and potential of new media. Furthermore, because Web and new media affect all disciplines, a leader would help integrate long-term new media thinking into projects and activities across the Institution. A leader could also provide clear and steadfast direction at all levels of the organization, as called for in the Strategic Plan.

## Recommendation

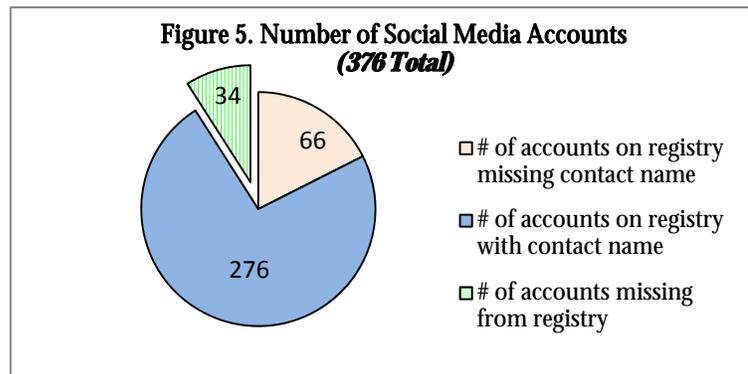
To ensure sufficient oversight and accountability for the Institution's overall social media use, we recommend that the Secretary:

2. Appoint a pan-Institutional Web and new media leader, and give that person the authority and visibility to lead change, as called for in the Smithsonian's Web and New Media Strategy.

## The Smithsonian did not know the Full Extent of its Social Media Presence, Limiting Institutional Accountability

While the Smithsonian maintained a centralized directory, or registry, of the Institution's social media accounts as recommended by best practices, no one at the Smithsonian knew the full extent of the Institution's social media presence because this directory was incomplete. The Smithsonian was aware that the registry, which included 342 social media accounts, was incomplete.

We found 34<sup>17</sup> social media accounts (or an additional 10 percent) missing from the registry. Furthermore, of the 342 accounts included on the registry, 66 (or 19 percent) did not include contact names – a key field on the registry, which aids accountability. See Figure 5 for a summary of results.



Accordingly, we cannot be sure of the full extent of the Institution's social media presence because we may not have identified all missing accounts.

As with the lack of comment policies, the Smithsonian's Website and Social Network Registry was incomplete primarily because the Institution had not yet issued or implemented SD 814, which requires social media practitioners to notify SIA of new social media accounts. Furthermore, social media practitioners may not have been aware of the registry because central Smithsonian offices did not establish a process for reporting accounts to the registry until after practitioners were actively using these tools. Finally, although SIA emails quarterly reminders to update the registry to various Smithsonian listservs,<sup>18</sup> these reminders may not reach all social media practitioners across the Institution because participation in these listservs is voluntary. This method of communication may also be ineffective because practitioners may not be inclined to follow instructions from outside of their unit.

<sup>17</sup> We identified these accounts by searching the Internet for social media accounts that appeared to be official Smithsonian accounts managed by staff and not listed on the registry. This number may not reflect the entire population of unlisted accounts, as we limited our search to accounts that contained the Smithsonian name or names of the individual museums.

<sup>18</sup> A listserv, an automatic mailing list software application, allows emails addressed to the listserv to be broadcast to everyone on the mailing list.

An incomplete registry affects the Smithsonian in three ways.

First, it limits organizational accountability for the Institution's social media efforts because no one at the Smithsonian knows the total number of social media accounts operated by Smithsonian practitioners. An incomplete registry increases the likelihood that missing accounts would not be captured in an Institution-wide performance measurement system, hampering Management's ability to determine whether the Institution as a whole broadened access using social media.

Second, accounts missing from the registry are more likely to be inactive than those included in the registry. For example, whereas only 1 of 60 accounts we reviewed from the registry was inactive, 8 (or 24 percent) of the 34 missing accounts we found were inactive.<sup>19</sup> Inactive accounts may reflect poorly on the Institution and may give the impression that the Smithsonian lacks commitment to its social media efforts and to public outreach in general. Such accounts also pose the risk that inappropriate content may not be properly moderated.

Third, the Smithsonian cannot promote social media accounts, as best practices recommend, if it does not know about them. For example, social media accounts missing from the registry would not likely be linked from the main Smithsonian website.

Furthermore, those accounts that were on the registry but lacked contact names limit communication with the units, which poses risks. First, accountability is limited without a contact who could point management to the individuals responsible for the account. Second, training and information-sharing abilities are limited. Management would not know whom to train if they decided to offer training when it implements the social media policy, and practitioners may have more difficulty identifying fellow practitioners.

## **Recommendations**

Our initial draft report included a recommendation for the Director of SIA to reach all Smithsonian social media practitioners to announce the requirement to report all Smithsonian-managed social media account information. The Director of SIA has since issued a Smithsonian-wide email to announce this requirement. Accordingly, we removed this recommendation.

We also recognize that the Director of SIA has started addressing other recommendations we made in our initial draft report. SIA began updating the registry with the missing accounts we identified; requesting units to provide complete account information, including contact names; and contacting units to close the inactive accounts we identified.

To further strengthen accountability for all of the Institution's social media efforts, we recommend that the Director of SIA finish its efforts to:

3. Update the registry with the missing accounts we identified.

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<sup>19</sup> We defined inactive accounts as accounts that did not include any practitioner updates for the past six months or longer at the time of our testing. This number does not include six additional accounts that did not have updates in the past six months at the time of testing because they either directed users to another active account or had never been used (indicating that Smithsonian units may be saving the account name).

4. Request units to close inactive accounts we identified, as necessary, following procedures set forth in SD 814.

### **The Smithsonian Should Improve Information-Sharing about Social Media**

Although social media practitioners we surveyed were generally satisfied with the Smithsonian's current methods for sharing information about social media, the practitioners believed that these methods could be improved. Seventy-two percent of those surveyed reported that they would find it useful if the Smithsonian had a hub for information sharing – both in-person and using a central repository – dedicated to social media. Social media practitioners currently share information in various ways, including through Smithsonian listservs, monthly pan-Institutional department meetings, and the Web and new media strategy SharePoint site. According to the practitioners we surveyed, however, these forums do not reach all social media practitioners and do not focus solely on social media.

Pan-Institutional department meetings that discuss social media do not reach all social media practitioners. For example, Webmasters meetings (the primary in-person forum for sharing social media information) are dedicated to Webmasters, not to social media practitioners working in the other fields such as communications, research and collections, and public programs. Likewise, staff from other fields, such as communications, may hold their own meetings that discuss social media.

Information shared on the Web and new media strategy SharePoint site, through the listserv, or discussed during the Webmasters meetings, does not focus on social media. Social media practitioners may not participate in these forums because they are overwhelmed by the amount of information related to other Web and new media topics.

We believe that improved information-sharing could enhance social media productivity by allowing practitioners to more efficiently share best practices and lessons learned. Indeed, the Smithsonian's Strategic Plan sets forth the Institution's intentions to encourage a culture that routinely identifies innovative strategies to solve problems and shares lessons learned across the Institution. Furthermore, if staff that attend the various pan-Institutional department meetings, such as for Webmasters and communications, do not coordinate their discussions, social media practitioners may duplicate each other's efforts by researching and discussing the same social media topics.

In August 2011, OC&EA established an information-sharing forum dedicated to social media on the Smithsonian's internal Web and new media strategy SharePoint site. Accordingly, we make no recommendation regarding this finding. We encourage the Smithsonian and its social media practitioners to continue to improve their methods for sharing social media information, and we will revisit this matter in a future audit.

### **MANAGEMENT RESPONSE**

In their September 22, 2011 response to our draft audit report, Management generally concurred with our audit recommendations.

Below, we summarize their comments to our recommendations and then offer our responses to their comments.

**Recommendation 1.** Concur. As part of developing performance targets, Management plans to begin tracking select social media metrics in FY 2012. Management also noted they will continue to stay informed about new tools for measuring social media amid the challenges of creating useful and accurate measurements.

**Recommendation 2.** Concur. However, Management believes that the current decentralized environment is working well, and the decision to establish a new senior position must be considered in the context of overall staffing needs and fiscal constraints.

**Recommendation 3.** Concur. SIA will update the registry with the missing accounts we identified by December 15, 2011.

**Recommendation 4.** Concur. By December 15, 2011, SIA will request that units comply with SD 814, including the requirement to close inactive accounts, as appropriate.

We include the full text of management's response in Appendix B.

## **OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL COMMENTS**

We are pleased that management generally concurs with our audit recommendations. We offer the following comments on Management's responses to Recommendations 1 and 2.

**Recommendation 1.** While we acknowledge Management's efforts to begin tracking select social media metrics and to be attentive to new ideas for measuring performance, our recommendation called for a comprehensive performance measurement system that includes setting performance targets and evaluating performance against these targets. Because the response did not provide a target date for this recommendation, we will continue to work with Management to establish a completion date for implementing actions consistent with the initial recommendation.

**Recommendation 2.** We appreciate management's view that both the emerging use of social media in a decentralized manner and the budget uncertainties facing the Smithsonian bear on the decision to appoint a Web and new media leader. Nonetheless, we wish to reaffirm our recommendation for a Web and new media leader as called for in the Web and New Media Strategy and as supported by unit management and staff. Management responded that "establishing a new senior position is a management decision that must be considered in the context of overall staffing needs and fiscal constraints." We request their decision by September 30, 2012.

Management's planned actions are responsive to Recommendations 3 and 4.

We appreciate the courtesy and cooperation of Smithsonian management and staff during the course of this audit.

## APPENDIX A. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Our objectives were to assess whether the Institution's plans for and current uses of social media productively and responsibly advance the Smithsonian mission, including whether the Institution provides sufficient oversight and adequate accountability.

To accomplish our objectives, we interviewed the Smithsonian's Under Secretaries and Assistant Secretary for Education and Access, as well as management and staff from the following central offices: Office of Communications and External Affairs, Office of the Chief Information Officer, Office of General Counsel, and Smithsonian Institution Archives. We also interviewed management leading the Institution's efforts to redesign the goal-setting and metrics processes. Because units throughout the Institution use social media, we also interviewed management and staff from five judgmentally selected Smithsonian units: Smithsonian Enterprises, National Museum of American History, National Air and Space Museum, National Postal Museum, and the Asian Pacific American Program. We also interviewed unit directors from two of these units.

We conducted a web-based survey of social media practitioners to understand how units across the Smithsonian use social media and share information about these tools. We received 47 responses to the survey. Because the Institution does not maintain a list of social media practitioners across the units, we could not determine the total number of social media practitioners Institution-wide.

We reviewed the Smithsonian's draft social media policies and guidelines, Smithsonian Board of Regents meeting minutes, annual organizational goals, and other documents about performance measurement relevant to social media. We also reviewed the Smithsonian's various strategic plans: FY 2010 – 2015 Smithsonian Strategic Plan, Web and New Media Strategy, and draft Mobile Strategy.

Because the Institution was still developing Smithsonian Directive (SD) 814, ***Social Media Use***, we identified social media best practices by searching the Internet for social media policies, guidelines, and publications from other organizations such as museums, other non-profit institutions, and the federal government. During the course of our audit, we shared these best practices with staff drafting the policy. We then reviewed the draft directive to determine whether it incorporated social media best practices, as appropriate, and whether the policy addressed relevant legal issues, such as records management and privacy requirements.

To address the risk of users posting inappropriate content on Smithsonian sites and to determine if the Smithsonian uses social media responsibly, we reviewed user and employee postings on 14 Smithsonian Facebook pages randomly selected from the 80 registered accounts. The results of our sampling could not be projected across the population so therefore we did not project our results. We did not extend our review to other social media sites because we did not find inappropriate content to be as big of a risk as we originally anticipated. We selected Facebook because it was the most commonly used social media tool at the Institution and allows two-way interaction.

To test the completeness of the Smithsonian's Website and Social Network Registry and to determine whether the Smithsonian maintains adequate accountability over social media, we searched the Internet for Smithsonian-operated social media accounts that

## **APPENDIX A. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

were not listed on the registry but appeared to be operated by Smithsonian staff and that included the Smithsonian or a museum name in the account name.

Finally, we tested a sample of Smithsonian and peer museum social media accounts based on the best practices we identified, and shared the results with social media practitioners. We used peer museums to establish social media performance benchmarks because the Smithsonian had not identified performance targets. Our sample included Facebook and Twitter accounts because these were the two most commonly used social media tools at the Institution. We tested 30 (or 38 percent) of the Smithsonian's 80 registered Facebook accounts, and 30 (or 46 percent) of the Institution's 65 registered Twitter accounts. We tested both Facebook and Twitter accounts for 15 judgmentally-selected museums representing a mixture of large, small, specialized, and local institutions. Because individual results should be understood within the broader context of unit and account purpose and goals, we provided the testing results directly to the unit social media practitioners but did not include them in this report.

We conducted this performance audit in Washington, D.C. from November 2010 through July 2011, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence we obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.



## APPENDIX B. MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE

# Smithsonian Institution

G. Wayne Clough  
Secretary

September 22, 2011

To: A. Sprightley Ryan, Inspector General

From: G. Wayne Clough, Secretary  
Evelyn Lieberman, Director of Communications and External Affairs  
Anne Van Camp, Director, Smithsonian Institution Archives

cc: Claudine Brown, Assistant Secretary for Education and Access  
Richard Kurin, Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture  
Judith E. Leonard, General Counsel  
Alison McNally, Under Secretary for Finance and Administration  
Eva J. Pell, Under Secretary for Science  
Scott Miller, Deputy Under Secretary for Collections and Interdisciplinary Support  
George Van Dyke, Acting Chief Information Officer

Subject: Response to Draft Report on the Audit of Use of Social Media, Number A-11-01

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the draft report on the audit of the Smithsonian's use of social media. The following comments address the recommendations made in the Office of Inspector General (OIG) report.

We are pleased to note that the OIG audit found several positive results:

- Social media practitioners responsibly managed the Facebook and Twitter accounts
- Facebook and Twitter content advanced the Smithsonian's mission to increase and diffuse knowledge
- Practitioners regularly reviewed their social media accounts for inappropriate user content
- A random sample of 14 Facebook pages found no inappropriate content

The OIG also acknowledges the Smithsonian recently implemented a new Social Media Policy (SD 814), which includes best practices and addresses concerns expressed in the audit, such as the need for a comment policy.

The OIG cites the importance of social media to the Smithsonian's efforts to reach new audiences in new ways and broaden access to all the Institution has to offer. We agree, and are encouraged by the ongoing efforts across the Smithsonian to use social media to connect with targeted audiences.

We are also pleased to note that three highly credible sources have cited the Smithsonian for using technology (including social media) in innovative ways to reach our audiences. The New York Times, First Lady Michelle Obama, and Mashable, a major social media blog, recently noted the Smithsonian's creativity in broadening access to Smithsonian collections, events, and expertise.

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**Recommendation 1**

*Develop a performance measurement system that includes performance targets, set centrally or by the units, to evaluate whether the Institution as a whole has met its goal of broadening access using social media.*

Response: We concur with this recommendation and note that work has begun on developing performance targets. As the OIG report notes, we will begin measuring social media in 2012 with a metric that tracks the numbers of Facebook fans and Twitter followers, and the number of views on YouTube and Flickr. While we agree that measuring success is important, we also note that the very nature of social media's multiple venues and multiple audiences, combined with the wide variety of projects and goals throughout the Smithsonian, make it challenging to create useful and accurate measurements. We will continue to stay informed about new and effective tools for measuring social media and how they can be applied productively to the Smithsonian's social media activities.

**Recommendation 2**

*Appoint a pan-Institutional Web and new media leader, and give that person the authority and visibility to lead change, as called for in the Smithsonian's Web and New Media Strategy.*

Response: We concur with the idea behind the recommendation, although it is clear that Web and new media initiatives have flourished in a decentralized environment. Establishing a new senior position is a management decision that must be considered in the context of overall staffing needs and fiscal constraints.

**Recommendations 3 and 4**

As indicated in the OIG draft report, Smithsonian Institution Archives (SIA) has already taken steps necessary to further strengthen Institutional accountability for the Smithsonian's social media efforts. With regard to the two recommendations in the OIG final draft report, SIA will work to address those concerns as follows:

**Recommendation 3**

*Update the registry with the missing accounts we [OIG] identified.*

Response: From the list of missing accounts supplied by the OIG, SIA will verify whether the accounts have already been registered by the owning unit since the list was first received, and analyze the remaining accounts for probable unit attribution. Where the analysis indicates the very strong likelihood that the account is an Institutional account but an owning unit cannot be identified, such accounts will be listed in the registry with a notation "unit not identified." Finally, for accounts identified by the OIG that, as a result of the analysis, appear to be owned by parties outside the Institution, SIA will exclude these accounts from the registry, providing written documentation of the justification for each account treated in this manner.

**Recommendation 4**

*Request units to close inactive accounts we [OIG] identified, as necessary, following procedures set forth in SD 814.*

Response: SIA's quarterly and annual communications to the Smithsonian community and all Smithsonian social media account points of contact now point to SD 814 and their obligation to comply with the policies and procedures contained therein. SD 814 Appendix A, section E identifies the requirements and how to meet them, including specifically the requirement to close inactive accounts with certain exceptions. SIA will continue to document its requests to the units that they comply with SD 814. Units that have legitimate reasons for maintaining social media account(s) in an inactive status will document the justification for these retentions.

SIA proposes to complete this work by December 15, 2011. At that time, SIA will submit a request to OIG that these recommendations be closed.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to provide this response to the OIG draft report. We will continue working with our colleagues around the Institution to advance the Smithsonian's mission through social media.

## **APPENDIX C.**

***The following individuals from the Smithsonian Office of the Inspector General contributed to this report:***

Daniel Devlin, Assistant Inspector General for Audits  
Brian Lowe, Supervisory Auditor  
Michelle Uejio, Auditor  
Mary Stevens, Auditor  
Kayla Norwood, Financial Technician