# Governing the Social Network: How U.S. Federal Department and Agency Records Management Policies Are Addressing Social Media Content

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## Abstract

Federal agencies are making use of social media tools to share and exchange information with individuals and organizations that rely upon government services. As a result, federal departments and agencies are increasingly generating government records within these technologies. The National Archives and Records Administration has acknowledged the challenges of managing social media content, and has published *A report on federal Web 2.0 use and record value,* detailing some of the issues related to the management of Web 2.0 records within federal departments and agencies.

This study examines how executive departments and agencies are addressing records generated by social media by conducting a thematic analysis of federal records management policies. The study presents a framework to allow researchers, technologists, policymakers, and practitioners to understand the effectiveness of federal records management policies in addressing records generated by social media.

**Federal Records?**

*Image retrieved from http://blogs.archives.gov/aotus/?p=1853*

## Methods

• Data analysis involved a qualitative thematic analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Records management policies were collected and reviewed to identify emergent themes, coded using an open coding process, grouped into conceptual categories, and the results were analyzed in order to draw conclusions and implications for records management practice within the U.S. federal government.

• Data was collected between 3/27/11 – 4/10/11.

• Examined records management policies and supporting information of all executive department and five largest independent agencies.

• Five largest independent agencies were chosen in order to facilitate data collection, since larger independent agencies were more likely to possess a public facing website containing a records management policy and were more likely to have a social media presence.

## Research Questions

*(1) To what extent are selected federal departments and agencies addressing social media content within their records management policies?*

*(2) If social media content is addressed in the selected federal department and agency records management policies, how is it being addressed?*

*(3) To what extent do the policies reference the NARA guidance for managing Web 2.0 records?*

## Results

### National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Bulletins

NARA issues bulletins to Federal agencies to provide guidance and assistance on the management and disposition of Federal records. The first bulletin issued each fiscal year contains a list of the NARA bulletins still in effect. You can access a full listing of NARA records management guidance at http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/bulletins/.

| BULLETIN NUMBER | TITLE |
| --- | --- |
| 2008-02 | Protecting Federal records and other documentary materials from unauthorized removal |

### How should Social Media and Web records be managed?

"Managing Web records properly is essential to effective Web site operations, including the mitigation of the risks an agency faces by using the Web to carry out agency business," states the "NARA Guidance on Managing Web Records." Issued in January 2005, the NARA Guidance discusses various aspects of managing Web records, including the legal and regulatory framework, risk and risk assessment, managing Web site content, and developing disposition schedules for Web

**Managing Social Media Records**

**NASA Policy Directive**

NPD 1440.6H
Effective Date: March 24, 2008
Expiration Date: March 24, 2013

COMPLIANCE IS MANDATORY

Printable Format (PDF)

Request Notification of Change (NASA Only)

Subject: NASA Records Management

Records
You are here: EPA Home   Records   Frequent Questions

http://www.epa.gov/records/faqs/index.htm
Last updated on Wednesday, June 23, 2010

**Frequent Questions**

**Frequent Questions about Transferring Records**
Do you know what to do with "permanent" records?

**Frequent Questions about Verbal Communications and Records**
Are you documenting every meeting, conversation or voicemail where a decision is made?

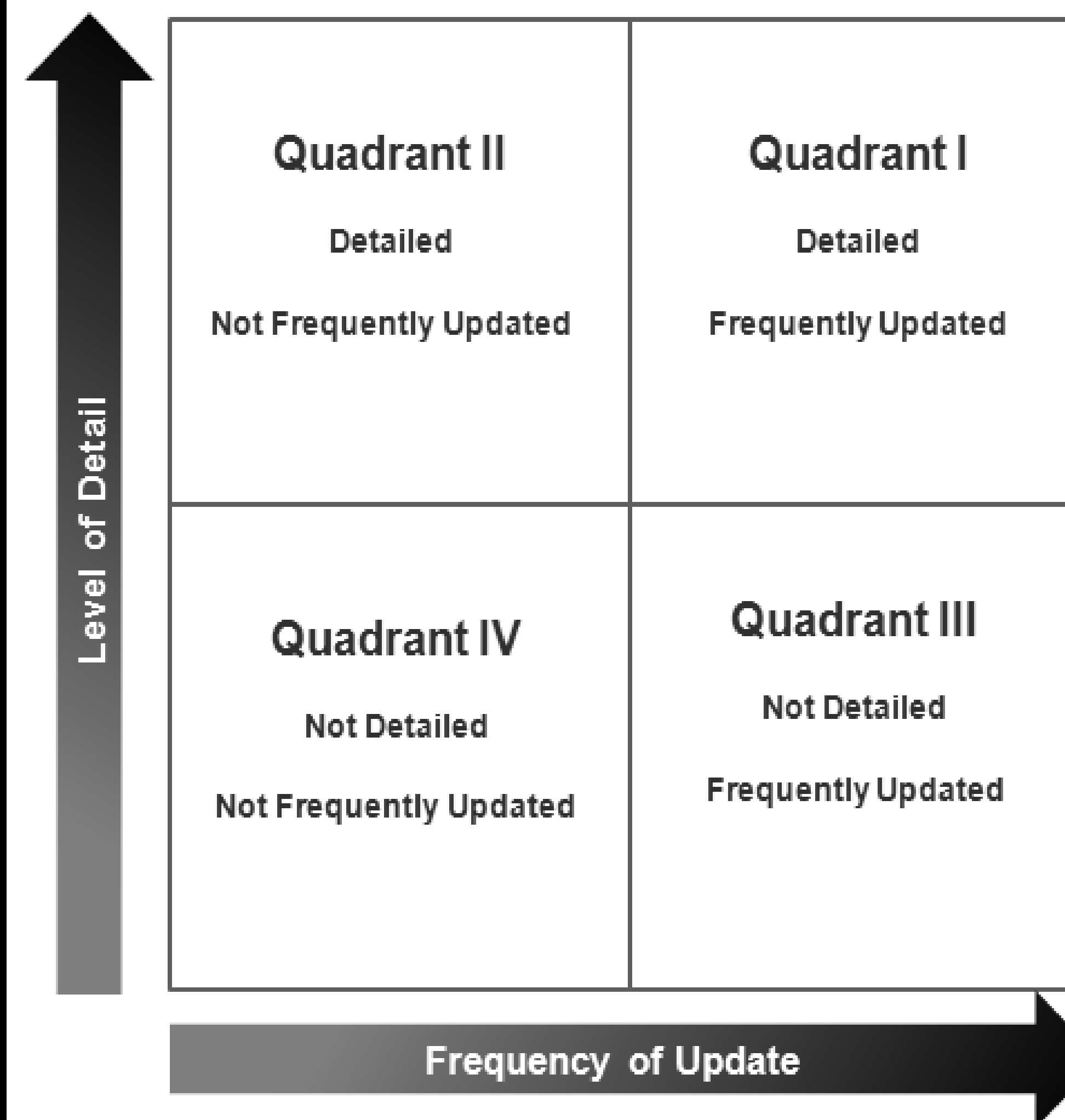**Frequent Questions about Web Sites/Wikis/Blogs and Records**
Do you know what, if anything, related to your Web site is a record? And if it is a record, do you know how to manage it?

### Emergent Themes

• Level of detail of the policy
• Frequency of policy update
• Method of addressing specific technologies
• Inclusion of supplemental information on department and agency websites

## Conclusions

### Records Management Policy Quadrants



| | |
| --- | --- |
| **Quadrant II**<br>Detailed<br>Not Frequently Updated | **Quadrant I**<br>Detailed<br>Frequently Updated |
| **Quadrant IV**<br>Not Detailed<br>Not Frequently Updated | **Quadrant III**<br>Not Detailed<br>Frequently Updated |

Level of Detail → | Frequency of Update →

**Quadrant I:** Level of detail and recent updates allow policy to address specific details of new technologies, as well as the most recent guidance. Most effective approach, though the approach may be difficult to maintain over time.

**Quadrant II:** Less effective because policies only address the management of certain technologies prevalent at the time of the initial publication or last revision, while newer (and potentially more prevalent) technologies are not addressed.

**Quadrant III:** The existence or non-existence of recently updated supplemental information is an essential factor in determining the effectiveness of the policy in addressing social media content and NARA guidance. Less effective than policies situated in Quadrant I, because supplemental information does not carry the weight of official policy.

**Quadrant IV:** These policies can not effectively address social media content and the NARA guidance without including a significant amount of supplemental information to provide the level of detail necessary to make the policy useful and accessible to staff in the agency.