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STRATEGY, PLANNING AND REFORM

Social media

Note by the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document reports on the challenges and opportunities represented by social media and documents the progress made thus far

Strategic direction: No related provisions

High-level action: No related provisions

Planned output: No related provisions

Action to be taken: Paragraph 37

Related documents: None

Background

1 At the 2009 United Nations Communications Group (UNCG) principals' meeting, it was agreed that active and meaningful engagement with social media was critical to the United Nations system's advocacy mandate. The meeting also called on the senior leadership of the agencies in the United Nations system to be open and supportive of the efforts of its staff to engage in these networks.

2 In response, the Department of Public Information set up a New Media Task Force to investigate opportunities, evaluate best practices and promote an overarching set of guidelines that govern the way United Nations staff members employ new media for communications and outreach.

3 In 2010, the UNCG further agreed that "Rapidly evolving information and communications technology, including social and new media, creates dynamic new opportunities for United Nations communicators to engage with the global public while also increasing the need for responsive and transparent communication."

4 The then United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Mr. Kiyoo Akasaka, confirmed the system-wide move to embrace social media when he said: "social media have become essential for the United Nations on a wide range of issues to enable it to keep journalists quickly updated on developments and to build better-informed and more inclusive communities and coalitions for change".

Social media at IMO

5 In 2009, the Secretary-General approved a proposal from the Head, Public Information Services (PIS) to recruit a new media specialist on the retirement of an existing PIS staff member in 2010.

6 The recruitment process took place during the latter half of 2010. In April 2011, IMO's first New Media Officer was appointed.

7 Prior to that appointment, IMO's principal media relationships had been with traditional print and some web-based new media outlets, which were served primarily with written communications backed up with occasional digital photography.

8 This provided a very solid platform in terms of basic content. However, to make the most of the opportunities outlined above, the need was recognized to build onto this platform a range of additional outputs that incorporate the new technology and new techniques now becoming prevalent in the rapidly expanding media arena – conveniently and collectively known as social media.

9 Social media are commonly used for raising awareness, advocacy, communications, sharing knowledge and fundraising. Millions of people around the world are using social media to communicate with both individuals and organizations on global and local levels.

10 IMO's primary goal in using social media is to build greater awareness of the organization and to promote its work and activities to new audiences. In addition, many of IMO's traditional media contacts are embracing social media themselves.

Platforms used by IMO

11 Below is a summary of the social media platforms on which IMO currently has an active presence. In all cases, administrator-access to the official IMO presence is password-protected and restricted to PIS staff.

Facebook

12 For many people, Facebook has now become the normal way to interact with family, friends and acquaintances, to gather and share news about subjects and issues that interest them and to interact, by posting pictures, films, messages, comments and so on. People will look at their Facebook pages daily, or indeed many times a day, and access to Facebook via mobile phone is now commonplace.

13 Thus, Facebook is a central pillar of IMO's social media presence. Organizations such as IMO can create their own pages. Individual Facebook users can then "like" pages. Doing so ensures that news and updates posted on the Organization's page appear automatically on the individual's page. Individuals can, in turn, "like" "comment" or "share" items that appear on the IMO page.

14 The number of "likes" changes every day. But, in late April 2013, IMO had 15,540 "likes" on its Facebook page. Each entry represents a conscious decision to receive updates from the IMO page. Experience shows that IMO Facebook likers are very active, with individual items regularly getting hundreds of "likes" and several tens of "comments" and "shares".

15 IMO posts new content on Facebook whenever appropriate, on average three to four times a week.

Twitter

16 Twitter can be a medium for one-to-one contact between private individuals but is more typically used by subscribers to receive news, comments and updates from organizations or high-profile personalities in which they have an interest. Twitter is characterized by a maximum message length of 140 characters. Individual messages are known as "tweets". Tweets thus have to be short, succinct messages but can include links to more sizeable content hosted on other platforms. IMO typically tweets two or three times each day, on average.

17 To receive tweets from an individual or organization, a Twitter user must make a conscious decision to "follow" the individual or organization in question. Twitter users can then "re-tweet" a message they receive to their own followers. As of late April 2013, IMO had 9,546 followers.

YouTube

18 YouTube is a platform for posting, sharing and watching video. Users can watch videos ad hoc and/or subscribe to "channels" which can be set up by companies, organizations or individuals. Typically, YouTube channels will carry content on a particular theme.

19 PIS now has the capability to create video content in-house and typically (but not exclusively) works with one of the substantive divisions to create that content. PIS has created videos highlighting a number of IMO projects and programmes, messages from the Secretary-General, as well as video features to support IMO events such as the Bravery Award and World Maritime Day.

20 IMO has therefore established its own YouTube channel. In late April 2013, IMO had created, and posted, 21 videos, which collectively had been viewed 30,344 times. The channel had 328 subscribers.

Flickr

21 Flickr is an online photo library, with some very useful functionality. It allows hosts to create their own sites and, within those sites, arrange photos in theme-based "collections" and galleries. It also allows users to view and download photos in hi-res, which makes it an ideal platform for sharing images with the media.

22 IMO uses its Flickr page to display images illustrating the Organization's key substantive issues, and for events such as World Maritime Day, key meetings, presentations, etc. IMO staff on mission are encouraged to take photographs and submit them to PIS for inclusion on Flickr, if appropriate. As of late April 2013, IMO had posted nearly 600 images, which had, collectively, been viewed 166,463 times.

Tumblr

23 Tumblr is a blog-hosting site (a blog is an online diary able to contain content in a number of different formats). PIS has created a blog, on Tumblr, for the Secretary-General, with a view to using some of the more interesting and unusual visits made by him to highlight key aspects of IMO's work and the issues currently on its agenda. The blogs feature both written and photographic content.

24 At late April 2013, IMO had posted blogs from the Secretary-General's visits to Antarctica, the Panama Canal, Finland and the Great Barrier Reef.

Pinterest

25 Pinterest enables users to create online "pin-boards", on which images and videos can be "pinned", typically grouped around a particular theme. Those with a shared interest can "follow" either individual pin-boards or all the pin-boards created by another user. Individuals may also be invited to "pin" their own content on other users' pin-boards.

26 IMO is experimenting with Pinterest to see if it is an effective way to raise the Organization's profile and promote interest. Thus far, nine separate boards have been created, with 256 followers.

Slideshare

27 Slideshare is a medium through which Powerpoint and PDFs presentations can be shared. It has a limited and very specialist use and, again, PIS is experimenting to see if it can be of real value to IMO.

Podcasts

28 Podcasts are audio-only information packages that can be either streamed or downloaded for later listening. IMO Podcasts are typically short interviews conducted with Secretariat staff, usually to provide information about an upcoming meeting or a particular issue.

29 While not themselves part of the social media, Podcasts represent a new form of content that is rapidly and easily disseminated via the social media. IMO podcasts are both hosted on the IMO public website and available through iTunes and broadcast via United Nations Radio. Other platforms to host and disseminate IMO podcasts will, in due course, be explored.

Campaigns

30 One of the most important aspects of social media is that they are interactive. This is particularly useful in campaigns, in which like-minded individuals or organizations can easily participate, thereby spreading messages and content to their own social media contacts and creating a very strong cascade effect.

31 IMO has used this to very good effect. In particular, promotion of the Day of the Seafarer (DOTS) was achieved through multi-platform, interactive social media campaigns which was generated by IMO but rapidly gained traction outside of the Organization. As well as establishing a specific social media presence for DOTS, "toolkits" have been created for use by third-parties to enable them to participate in the campaigns. More detailed

information on DOTS will be submitted under agenda item 18(h) "Report on the Day of the Seafarer 2013".

Cross-promotion

32 One of the most valuable and exciting features of social media is the inherent ability to cross-promote the same material across various different platforms. This not only makes best possible use of the resource required to create content, it also helps maximize breadth and depth of coverage. Extensive use has been made of this capability.

33 If, for example, a meeting summary or speech has been posted on the IMO website, a link may be tweeted to the URL and posted on Facebook; photos to accompany a press release may be posted on Flickr and a link published as part of the press release; when a podcast or video is uploaded, again the link may be tweeted and posted on Facebook. These are just a few examples of the many synergies that the social media allow IMO to exploit.

Social media and our United Nations partners

34 As mentioned previously, there is a strong momentum within the United Nations system as a whole to embrace and make maximum possible use of social media. This momentum is also working to bring the various parts of the United Nations system closer together, and IMO has taken every opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, it.

35 On Facebook, for example, various United Nations agencies share IMO content with their own community which, of course, IMO reciprocates; IMO follows several United Nations agencies and programmes on Twitter and re-tweets their messages to IMO followers – and they do the same for IMO; IMO Podcasts have been used as content for United Nations radio. Again, these are just examples to indicate the kind of opportunities afforded by new media.

Conclusion

36 Social media are already an integral part of the communication landscape and, in line with the United Nations system as a whole, IMO has not only embraced them but is also using them actively, creatively and very much to the Organization's advantage. In the future, their importance is set to grow still further. Already the traditional printed maritime media are focusing on their online and social offerings, and the Organization will continue to develop and adapt its own social media presence to ensure it remains relevant and timely.

Action requested of the Council

37 The Council is requested to note the information contained in this document.
