

**NCSHA 2010 Awards  
New Media Initiative**

**Category:** Communications  
**Sub-Category:** Promotional Materials and Newsletters  
**Entry Name:** New Media Initiative

*“What distinguishes new media is ... the dynamic life of its content and its interactive relationship with the consumer.”*

- Wikipedia

## Background

“New Media” is a broad term that emerged in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Wikipedia, “What distinguishes New Media from traditional media is not the digitizing of media content into bits, but the dynamic life of the ‘New Media’ content and its interactive relationship with the media consumer. This dynamic life moves, breathes and flows with pulsing excitement in real time., making it irrelevant for you to talk to people or read books. Another important promise of New Media is the ‘democratization’ of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content.

Very rapidly in the past few years, social media internet sites and applications have evolved to become legitimate communications tools, not just for individuals, but for organizations and businesses as well. In a climate where the power and scope of traditional print media is decreasing and customers now expect more immediate information, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development recognized more than two years ago that we must embrace the power of social media to promote its mission and vision to our partners and the citizens of Maryland. DHCD strives to use its social media outreach as an engine to drive customers to more detailed program information on DHCD’s website and to provide updates on the department’s events and outreach in the community.

DHCD’s marketing and communications staff did extensive research to understand the activity and life cycles of social media sites to incorporate their use into the department’s comprehensive communications strategy, specifically dealing with moderation and ongoing management. Several of the components addressed include: content creation, group formation, engagement tactics, knowledge sharing practices, and audience participation. With a clearly defined strategy, goals and objectives can be identified, clear measurements for success (return on investment) can be established, and the life cycle of the social media community becomes the map for understanding these goals and objectives.

## Social Media Tools

DHCD fully embraced New Media in 2010 and focuses its activities in four key areas: Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and two agency blogs, “Community Review” for external audiences and “Our DHCD” for staff.

Facebook is currently the most widely-used social media site on the internet, recently exceeding 500 million users. DHCD originally joined Facebook with a standard “friend” page, but it soon became apparent that the agency would be better served in the Facebook arena as a “fan” or “like” page. DHCD made the transition to a “like” page in early June 2010, and, in just two months, the amount of “fans” of the DHCD “like” page has exceeded the amount of “friends” the agency had on its original page. DHCD strives to post frequent updates, alerting our Facebook “fans/likes” of press releases, event information

Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development  
100 Community Place, Crownsville, MD 21032  
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and program initiatives on our website, as well as the event photos we post on the photo-sharing site Flickr. The Department also uses Facebook to cross-promote the activities of the Governor's office and our sister State agencies when appropriate, including interagency initiatives like Maryland's Base Realignment and Closure activities and the *Smart, Green & Growing* initiative.

DHCD uses Twitter in a similar fashion to Facebook, with slight adjustments due to Twitter's inherently condensed approach as a micro-blogging site. One unique aspect of Twitter that makes it an invaluable tool for DHCD's communications staff is that it provides a wonderful and nearly instantaneous method to communicate with reporters and other members of the press to pitch potential stories, respond to articles, and generally strengthen relationships with the press. As the print media landscape is changing rapidly, maintaining positive relationships with individual reporters is of the utmost importance, and Twitter helps to facilitate that.

Flickr is a Yahoo-owned, photo-sharing website. Early on when developing DHCD's New Media strategy, communications staff tackled the issue of finding a single repository for photos, so as to avoid posting copies of the same photo to multiple sites and the ineffective use of time under that scenario. Flickr provided a ready-made solution, and DHCD is beginning the process of archiving its event photos to Flickr.

DHCD now maintains two blogs. "Community Review" is designed for our external customers, providing them quick bits of information on DHCD activities and pointing readers to the DHCD website for more information. "Community Review" also provides an avenue for DHCD to discuss and promote certain things that may not be appropriate or practical to place on DHCD's main website such as press articles, or other, non-DHCD, state initiatives. "Our DHCD" is a blog designed for DHCD employees to provide professional enrichment and keep them informed of Departmental news such as safety alerts, employee news and events, "green" initiatives, or other appropriate information.