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Session 3: News Ways of Engaging Audiences  

Social Media: Recent Developments and Changes  
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Abstract  
Statistics Netherlands has been active in the world of social media for the last three years. Progress is slow, partly because of management issues, partly because it is such a new way of communicating. We have to learn how to use this new communication channel as we go. More and more employees at Statistics Netherlands are becoming active in social media both in terms of their work and their private lives. Our department is organising a series of workshops for our employees to explain to them the dos and don’ts of social media from a work perspective. The department is also working hard to coordinate all the interesting initiatives shown within Statistics Netherlands. We are involved in a Dutch government initiative around webcare, and are gradually becoming more active in this area.  

Recent developments and challenges  

1.Strategy  
We are still working on gaining management approval for our strategy and guidelines for employees. We have requested advice from our legal department, our personnel department and our employees council. Fear of the unknown is hard to tackle. In the meantime we are continuing our low-key use of social media.  

2.Statistics  
The number of followers of Statistics Netherlands’ Twitter account has been growing steadily. We now have more than 6,100 followers on our Dutch account (@statistiekcbs) and over 600 on our English account (statisticscbs). We have asked an intern to do an analysis of our followers, but we already know that they constitute an interesting mixture of all ages, occupations and backgrounds. We have moved on to more animated YouTube videos explaining some of the topics we work on. Our most popular video “On a normal day…” has been viewed 21,000 times on YouTube.  

3.New kind of videos  
We have recently started some new developments on our YouTube channel. We have made animated videos to spotlight specific events. For instance to promote Statistics Netherlands’ at the Floriade, a ten-yearly
horticultural exhibition that attracts about one million visitors. We have also made some special videos for our first enhanced e-book on the baby boom generation.

4. **Twitter process**

We have recently changed the Twitter process for our Dutch account. It used to be an automated process, as the English account still is. The first 140 characters of the title and lead of every article we publish was taken from our rss-feed and turned into a Tweet, completely automatically. This resulted in unsatisfactory tweets, often ending in the middle of a sentence or with content that was unclear for our followers. Every now and then we received complaints about our Tweets, or people would stop following us for that reason. We also noticed that the manual messages tweeted in weekends were much more appreciated, and often retweeted. For this reason we started publishing manual tweets only, using Mediafunnel, a web-based service that allows our editors to manage our Twitter account jointly. All editors are now also required to post a tweet in Mediafunnel when they place an article in the CMS.

The other advantage of manual Tweets is that we are able to add hashtags. This way anyone searching for a word with the hashtag will find our Tweets, and thus extend their range beyond our own followers. These changes have resulted in more retweets and more reactions on Twitter.

5. **Tooling**

Until recently we used the tool Tweetdeck to run our CBS twitter account. It is a free tool and perfect for one person to manage the account: it is approachable and user friendly. Since we have changed to the new process, the tool is no longer adequate as we need all editors to manage our account jointly. We have now added the tool Mediafunnel, a paid service: 1 dollar per month per user. We have a total of 14 users, some of whom are only allowed to submit Tweets, others who may also publish or approve the Tweets. The main advantage is that we can also follow who placed which Tweet, and can indicate who will respond to which questions/reactions.

6. **Webcare**

Ever since we started using Twitter, we have also been doing webcare. The tool Mediafunnel makes this very easy to do. At the moment two people follow what is going on on Twitter alongside their regular work. If people respond to our Tweets account or ask questions, we try to answer as soon as possible, just as we do when people send us an email. We regularly see Tweets saying that our online questionnaires do not work in an Apple environment. We do not respond to most negative Tweets that are not directed at our account but just circulate on Twitter, just as we do not respond to items in newspapers that we do not agree with. At the moment the tool Mediafunnel is sufficient for our low-key webcare. If we decide to become more active in webcare in the future, we shall need a new tool. Recently, the Dutch government has started a knowledge group on webcare among all government institutions. The group gets together on a regular basis to learn from each other’s experiences and to share knowledge and best practices.

7. **Internal developments**

Interest in social media within Statistics Netherlands has been growing rapidly recently.
At the communication department we try to retain the control in this area. This is not an easy task. And even though we applaud all new initiatives, we feel the need to keep a grip on everything that is happening. A group from our personnel department is working on employee branding: they want to use LinkedIn and Twitter to get in touch with possible future employees. They have hired an intern who sent out a questionnaire to all our employees with questions on whether and how they use social media. The training programme for management potentials now includes a social media workshop. One department is writing its own social media strategy to improve attention for its work. Again, all interesting initiatives, but we would like to coordinate these.

8. Social media workshops

One of the ways we try to explain what our role is within Statistics Netherlands is by organising workshops for all our staff. We have a workshop for beginners, one for experts, and one on how to use social media for networking. The most important workshop is the one on integrity: what can you say in social media, and what shouldn’t you say. This is aimed at staff who are more active on social media and who have difficulty deciding what is acceptable and what is ‘not done’. For example, recently one of our new employees tweeted about the slowness of our coffee machines. He had calculated that a total of 18 hours was spent each day waiting for coffee. He thought he was just being funny, but we tried to explain that we were not amused.

9. Social media and data collection

There is one area of social media use that we are not trying to be involved in: data collection. Although experiments are underway to see whether social media can be used to collect data for statistical purposes, this is a totally new ball game.