

Using Social Media to Achieve Better Government-Public Communication and Serve the People

Reporter: WANG Zhenyu



Ding Limin

Director of Shanghai Release Office under the General Office of the Shanghai Municipality Government. The Shanghai Release created by his team is one of the most influential new governmental media in the country. The micro-blogging fans are totally more than 11.6 million, and the Wechat fans are more than 1.1 million.

The greatest opportunity for the government brought by the emergence of social media is it provides the government the possibility to make breakthroughs over the traditional ways of information disclosure and dissemination. While the biggest challenge is: the government should have to directly face the people's appeals, and make timely and effectively response and communication.

Reporter: What do you think is the biggest opportunity and challenge faced by the government in the social media era?

Ding Limin: The greatest opportunity for the government brought by the emergence of the social media is it provides the government the possibility to make breakthroughs over the traditional ways of information disclosure and dissemination.

Previously, the government information disclosure is based on some of the traditional means, such as Government Gazette which is sold at news stands such as Dongfang

Newsstand. But due to the publication cycle, it can't provide news in timely manner, and the public cannot keep in knowing the government issues. The second is through portal website for government release, but due to that it is generally a one-way dissemination, so it couldn't make real-time, effective interaction with Internet users. The third is through the media for release, but due to that every media has its own market position and might filter some information, so ultimately it may not help the government achieve a comprehensive, entirely and complete information disclosure. However, after emerging of new media such as micro-blogging and Wechat, things become different, and the government is able to directly dialogue and exchange views with the people, so to promote government information more effectively out-reaching and spread.

As for the challenge, my personal experience is: After emerging of the governmental new media, the government will have to more frequently and directly face people appeals, this, indeed, will require it to make timely response and effective communication, which would force the government to enhance efficiency. For example, now, if an unexpected thing breaks out in a place or a field, and if relevant counties or government departments release the news through micro-blogging or Wechat, then Internet users will directly communicate with the government, and the government should make response in a very short period of time. Currently, governmental new media has developed rapidly with large numbers. But, for a government to make effective exchange with netizens, the first thing it should do is to innovate new ways of communication and exchange.

Reporter: You once said, "To effectively guide public opinion in the services" is a purpose of Shanghai Release, then in your opinion, what is the position of the government's new media? And what are the characteristics of its services?

Ding Limin: Positioning of a government New Media is actually different from that of the common media. It is aimed to promote open government information, promote the

work of the government agencies, rather than pursue of hot news and influence as the general media do.

The first feature of government new media is that its most important function is to publish authoritative government information. Around 60% information of Shanghai Release is governmental information which should go through an extremely rigorous process to ensure its accuracy and authority, so as to protect the government's credibility and ensure citizens' right to access information. Each year, Shanghai Release participates in important government affairs such as the "National People's Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference, as well as local major events of Lujiazui Forum, Shanghai International Film Festival and Shanghai Book Fair, through microblogging and Wechat to deliver the news timely to the users

Second, it emphasizes to improve information services, particularly, improving intimateness and interaction with users. For this regards, firstly, it pays a special attention to the information related to the people's livelihood. Secondly, we take advantage of the micro-blogging platform's characteristics of highly interactivity. For the hot and difficult issues that face Shanghai urban development and management, we listen to public opinion and gather their wisdom, and after summary we report to the relevant government departments, as a reference for their governance policy. For example, as to the issue of "Black/illegal Cars" that the public concerns, we collected opinions and suggestions through the micro-blogging and Wechat, and feed it back to the transportation departments.

Third, for major emergencies, we timely release news to respond to social concerns. We will response to social concerns with authoritative source of information in the first place as soon as a major emergency occurs, to mitigate and eliminate the breeding ground of rumors. In addition, we will classify and grade hot events through the government new media group. For example, for some of local emergencies, we will contact the new media team of relevant local government or agencies, to make jointly

response.

Fourth, make full use of Wechat functional development, to innovate services for convenience of the people. Thanks to more rights that Wechat opens to its user accounts, as well as Shanghai government's well-placed information infrastructure, we have moved 13 public inquiry services to the Wechat of Shanghai Release. Citizens can easily enquire the bus timetable, balance of Public Housing Accumulation Fund account, real-time traffic information and other livelihood information, just by fingertip sliding on the Wechat. You can also make an online appointment for dealing with passport, marriage registration and other public services.

Reporter: Currently in Shanghai Release, what issues are people mostly concerned about? What are your opinions about this?

Ding Limin: From our operational practice, we see education, health care and transportation are areas that the public are most concerned about. The most concerned sector is the integration of 13 inquiry functions of the "Town Hall" services. Currently, the Page Views (PV) has reached 43 million. We can see only the issue of the real-time bus queries alone, it has exceeded 10 million PVs in the last two months. It can be seen, the information that is closely related to the public life is the information they need most; it can bring convenience to them and is what they like most.

Reporter: As a government new media, how can you and your team identify users' demanding, so as to provide a corresponding service?

Ding Limin: First of all, among our users, those under 30 is accounted for over 70%, and member of the Shanghai Release team are young, generally born in 1980's or 90's, and are ordinary citizens living in the city sharing similarity with the public users. Therefore, before each release of information, we will make anticipations by presuming that we were the public users with the general public's point of view. We

will ask ourselves: whether the public has demands for such information, whether they are interested in the information? And whether such expression of information can be accepted by the users? If we assess that the content is concerned or interested by our users, then we will no doubt publish and spread the information through various channels and forms.

Secondly, we will identify the needs of users based on the feedback and research data. For example, for the inquiry services we promoted last October, we don't pursue its all-inclusiveness, but instead focus on citizen needs of high-frequency public services, and in consideration of the IT development of relevant agencies or Bureaus of the government, we move their information correspondingly with our technical power and rework it, and eventually move it to the Wechat platform. It should be said, with gradually increasing in query service functions, the cluster effect has also become increasingly eminent. Now, there are many government departments coming to contact us, hoping to move to the platform some of their high-frequency services that the public has high demands.

Reporter: In the new media era, what new requirements do you think are raised to civil servants?

Ding Limin: For the team of Shanghai Release, first of all, the basic requirement is to get familiar with the new media, and have the ability to skillfully use the new media. If you know nothing about the new media, how could you use new media to serve the people?

Second, they should pay attention to the change of trends. While Micro-blogging was still popular in 2013, we launched the governmental Wechat. Practice has proved that we had captured the trends at right time, and have achieved smooth operation and promotion of the government Wechat. Just think, if we wait until now to launch government Wechat, it is highly possible that we had lost the best time to launch and

we could not reach the effect we have now. This suggests that in the new media age, we need to keep a close eye on social media and have certain sensitivity, and to the degree as far as possible, do forward-looking observations and judgments of the trends.

Third, pay attention to the changes of ways of expression and language. In Government system the working language is mainly standardized. However, if we copy such language to the network, users might think it alien, and it is difficult to achieve communication effects. So, it requires the team of government new media to be familiar with the Internet language, and can use the language and the expression ways that the netizens are familiar with, to complete release and interpretation of government information, and realize better communication between the public and the government.