

HHS Uses Innovative Technology to Communicate During H1N1 Pandemic Flu Emergency

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) is the government's principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans and providing essential human services. PandemicFlu.gov was created by HHS as a comprehensive information portal on pandemic influenza for the general public, health and emergency preparedness professionals, government leaders, school systems, and local communities. When the H1N1 virus ("swine flu") became a global cause for concern in April 2009, HHS used the GovDelivery solution, utilizing one platform for quick dissemination of time-sensitive information through various channels.



"The fantastic part of the promotion is that other people promoted it for us! They re-tweeted our 'tweets', they forwarded our emails, they reposted our static content through AddThis® and spread the dynamic content using the widget."

- Kathryn Hambleton, Web Communications Specialist, HHS

Situation

In November 2007, the [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services](#) launched GovDelivery Email and Digital Subscription Management (EDSM), an automated system that uses email, text messaging and RSS to keep the public informed when new information is available on topics of interest. HHS delivers email updates on more than 120 unique topics. Since launching GovDelivery EDSM, the Department of Health & Human Services has sent more than 18.3 million emails to nearly 120,000 subscribers.

Although HHS was already reaching a large audience through its email subscriptions, when the H1N1 pandemic flu outbreak threatened the U.S., the organization needed to reach the largest audience possible to ensure individuals were kept informed and safe. There was an outpouring of flu-related information from various sources, specifically blogs and social media websites, many providing false information and causing unnecessary fear. HHS, specifically PandemicFlu.gov, needed to quickly and efficiently communicate official information to the public through all possible channels, including social media.

Solution

HHS needed to quickly disseminate information to effectively dispel any rumors or falsehoods that had been published through unofficial sources. HHS had established a Web 2.0 presence on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, but needed a way to disseminate content automatically. Working with GovDelivery, HHS was able to deploy two new communication tools to address an expanded audience, including the portion of the public using social media channels.

The Department of Health and Human Services began using GovDelivery's [Share This Email](#) feature allowing the organization to fully leverage its existing email subscriber base by making it easy for subscribers to post content to social media channels such as

Facebook®, Twitter®, FriendFeed® and LinkedIn®. The signup process for email subscriptions is integrated with content shared in social media to help create a viral effect. Anyone seeing HHS content through social media is able to enter an email address in the subscription box for future alerts on HHS content.

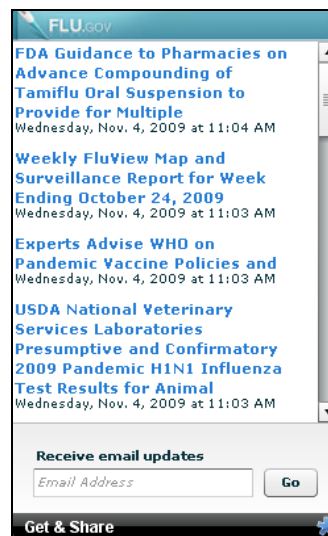


RESULTS

Since launching GovDelivery in November 2007 HHS has:

- Sent more than **47.5 million** emails to subscribers.
- Signed up more than **195,000 subscribers**.
- Incorporated **115+ subscription items** including:
 - Daily Heartbeat Tip
 - Speeches & Congressional Testimony
 - All PandemicFlu.gov, SurgeonGeneral.gov, & HealthReform.gov updates

HHS also became the first GovDelivery client to execute [Information Sharing Widgets](#). The department worked with GovDelivery to create a dynamic widget that streams up-to-date information on flu-related updates from its own department, in addition to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Offering the content in a dynamic widget enables others in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors to add the widget to their sites, streaming updated information from HHS, CDC and WHO automatically on their websites. Additional channels such as blogs, news sites, and social media websites are able to leverage the widget in the same way to bring HHS content to a broader audience.





PandemicFlu.gov NEWS WIDGET RESULTS

During the first two weeks “in the wild” the news widget was:

- Installed on more than 240 web pages
- Viewed nearly 1.7 million times by 650,000+ unique users across the U.S. and globally.

Using these features, the Department of Health and Human Services was able to leverage multiple communication channels to reach the largest possible audience. The content was relevant and had viral appeal; people shared the information with friends and HHS was able to leverage the “network effect,” multiplying the total number of recipients and therefore expanding the total audience reach. Messages were originally communicated to the public through Twitter, email (with a Twitter link in the footer) and RSS. Through “re-tweeting”, information sharing (via AddThis®) and widgets with dynamic content, the audience grew exponentially larger.

Results

In response to the outbreak of the H1N1 virus in the U.S., the [Department of Health and Human Services](#) made use of several digital communication tools with its PandemicFlu.gov website serving as the hub of information. Email subscriptions to PandemicFlu.gov information shot up by more than 10x the normal rate due to higher interest and collaboration with CDC, FDA, and other partners. Average new subscribers daily exceeded 3,000 per day versus the previously established average of 215. Over 1 million emails were sent to subscribers regarding H1N1. Emails included “Share This” links with content being “shared” over 120 times. Emails also included links to follow PandemicFlu.gov on Twitter. The “Find us on Twitter” links generated more than 10,000 clicks and helped boost Twitter followership.

A PandemicFlu.gov News widget was deployed on [PandemicFlu.gov](#) streaming up-to-date information that was also being sent out by email. Within its first two weeks “In the Wild” the Pandemic Flu widget was installed on over 240 web pages including websites of federal and local government authorities, non-profit health and education organizations, media corporations and personal blogs and social media. In this same time period the widget was viewed nearly 1.7 million times, by over 650,000 unique users across the U.S. and globally.

To receive HHS’s free email updates, go to [www.hhs.gov](#) or [www.pandemicflu.gov](#) for flu-related updates.

GovDelivery is the world's leading provider of government-to-citizen communication solutions. GovDelivery's Email and Digital Subscription Management solution is a Software as a Service (SaaS) platform that provides organizations a fully-automated, on-demand public communication system.

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