



Highlights of [GAO-10-872T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

“Web 2.0” technologies—such as Web logs (“blogs”), social networking Web sites, video- and multimedia-sharing sites, and “wikis”—are increasingly being utilized by federal agencies to communicate with the public. These tools have the potential to, among other things, better include the public in the governing process. However, agency use of these technologies can present risks associated with properly managing and protecting government records and sensitive information, including personally identifiable information. In light of the rapidly increasing popularity of Web 2.0 technologies, GAO was asked to identify and describe current uses of Web 2.0 technologies by federal agencies and key challenges associated with their use.

To accomplish this, GAO analyzed federal policies, reports, and guidance related to the use of Web 2.0 technologies and interviewed officials at selected federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the General Services Administration, and the National Archives and Records Administration.

View [GAO-10-872T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Gregory C. Wilshusen at (202) 512-6244 or wilshuseng@gao.gov.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Challenges In Federal Agencies' Use of Web 2.0 Technologies

What GAO Found

Federal agencies are using Web 2.0 technologies to enhance services and support their individual missions. Federal Web managers use these applications to connect to people in new ways. As of July 2010, we identified that 22 of 24 major federal agencies had a presence on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Several challenges in federal agencies' use of Web 2.0 technologies have been identified:

Privacy and security. Agencies are faced with the challenges of determining how the Privacy Act of 1974, which provides certain protections to personally identifiable information, applies to information exchanged in the use of Web 2.0 technologies, such as social networking sites. Further, the federal government may face challenges in determining how to appropriately limit collection and use of personal information as agencies utilize these technologies and how and when to extend privacy protections to information collected and used by third-party providers of Web 2.0 services. In addition, personal information needs to be safeguarded from security threats, and guidance may be needed for employees on how to use social media Web sites properly and how to handle personal information in the context of social media.

Records management and freedom of information. Web 2.0 technologies raise issues in the government's ability to identify and preserve federal records. Agencies may face challenges in assessing whether the information they generate and receive by means of these technologies constitutes federal records and establish mechanisms for preserving such records, which involves, among other things, determining the appropriate intervals at which to capture constantly changing Web content. The use of Web 2.0 technologies can also present challenges in appropriately responding to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests because there are significant complexities in determining whether agencies control Web 2.0-generated content, as understood within the context of FOIA.

Federal agencies have begun to identify some of the issues associated with Web 2.0 technologies and have taken steps to start addressing them. For example, the Office of Management and Budget recently issued guidance intended to (1) clarify when and how the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 applies to federal agency use of social media and Web-based interactive technologies; and (2) help federal agencies protect privacy when using third-party Web sites and applications.