

# PRESS RELEASE

---

**PRESS RELEASE**6. December 2012 || page 1 | 2

---

## Police forces benefit from using social media, new European study shows

**»Best Practice in Police Social Media Adaptation«, the European COMPOSITE project's new report, discusses in detail how social media can be used to support police work in a number of areas. The report is based on in-depth analyses, interviews and group discussions with IT experts and officers representing the police forces of thirteen European countries. Besides being a source of information on criminal activities, social media are a very efficient means of communication with the general public, even in situations of crisis or unrest. Used in the right way, social media can help to improve trust and understanding between the people in an area and their police. The full report is available free of charge.**

COMPOSITE (COMparative POLice Studies In The EU) is a project carried out by researchers and police experts from ten European countries. Their second report on technology adaptation, just released, is based on interviews and workshops with IT experts from the police forces of, among others, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. It brings together the experiences of the pioneers and early adopters of social media among the European police forces. As one example, in many police stations in the UK the active use of social media is a regular part of their normal business. Acting like their own press department, the officers use the social media to keep the people in their constabulary informed about their activities, to publish warnings or search warrants.

Active use of the social media by the police directly impacts the relationship between the police and the general public on several different levels. Through closer interaction and dialogue, the police work becomes more transparent. Citizens see their police officers more as 'human' and have better trust in them. This effect is intensified by the personal style of communication typical of social media, a stark contrast to the normal bureaucratic language of public administrations.

»Police work in general and specific incidents are discussed in the social media anyway. Therefore, the question is not whether the social media are appropriate for police topics, but how the police forces get involved and reap the benefits. If the police is not active, others fill the void«, remarks the project's coordinator, Dr. Sebastian Deneff from the Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology FIT. One example is an unofficial Facebook page with news on the Berlin police, with more than 15,000 fans. And in the Dutch region of Haaglanden, a Twitter channel of a self-appointed police fan has some 2,500 followers. The lack of a trustworthy police presence in the social media can thus provide a fertile ground for rumors, speculations and misunderstandings.

---

**Editors**

**Alex Deeg** | Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology FIT | Phone +49 2241 14-2208 |  
Schloss Birlinghoven | 53754 Sankt Augustin | [www.fit.fraunhofer.de](http://www.fit.fraunhofer.de) | [alex.deeg@fit.fraunhofer.de](mailto:alex.deeg@fit.fraunhofer.de) |

**FRAUNHOFER INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FIT**

---

**PRESS RELEASE**6. December 2012 || page 2 | 2

---

Social media also have a unique function as communication channels to the younger segments of the population, groups that are very important for many aspects of police work, but can hardly be reached through traditional media like newspapers, TV or radio. Social media also proved to be very useful in exceptional situations like a terrorist attack or a disaster. In a major crisis, social media are a proven means of communication to keep people informed independent of the police IT infrastructure.

We can see the social media as new public spaces in our societies, where the police must be present and visible. As an example, in April 2011 the Helsinki police assigned three officers full-time to the task of producing a virtual police station on a number of social media platforms. In the first few months alone, they received about 250 reports from the public. The Netherlands, too, already have virtual police stations in operation.

In spite of the potential benefits, important questions are still to be answered, for Germany in particular on the legal side. In other countries, e.g. Great Britain or the Netherlands, the legal hurdles appear to be lower. A major legal and procedural issue for the police forces is the cooperation with service providers like Facebook or Twitter, private companies that are based abroad, under foreign jurisdiction. Here, the police forces will have to collect and evaluate additional experience. However, these efforts are seen as worthwhile against the potential benefits of social media use for the police, which are described in the report.

The full report can be downloaded from:  
<http://www.fit.fraunhofer.de/content/dam/fit/de/documents/COMPOSITE-social-media-best-practice.pdf>

The report on Best Practice in Police Social Media Adaptation is a result of the European project Comparative Police Studies in the EU – COMPOSITE. Additional information on this project is available at: [www.composite-project.eu](http://www.composite-project.eu)