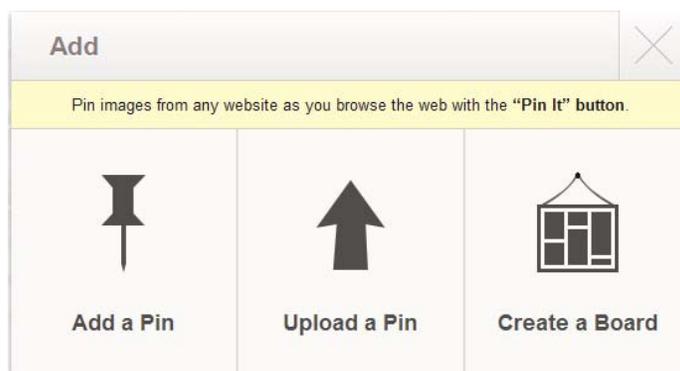January 30, 2013

Using Pinterest for Official Duties at the Department of Commerce

As a Commerce employee, you should use Pinterest to connect with and inform your customers, extend the reach of your bureau's existing messaging, provide an informal human voice to your office or program and help your bureau achieve its mission.

Using Pinterest in an official capacity is subject to the same rules, regulations and requirements that exist for all other communications and activities as well to the Department of Commerce Social Media policy. To help you better learn Pinterest and how it can be used, the Office of Public Affairs suggests first creating your own personal account to explore the site and learn by doing.
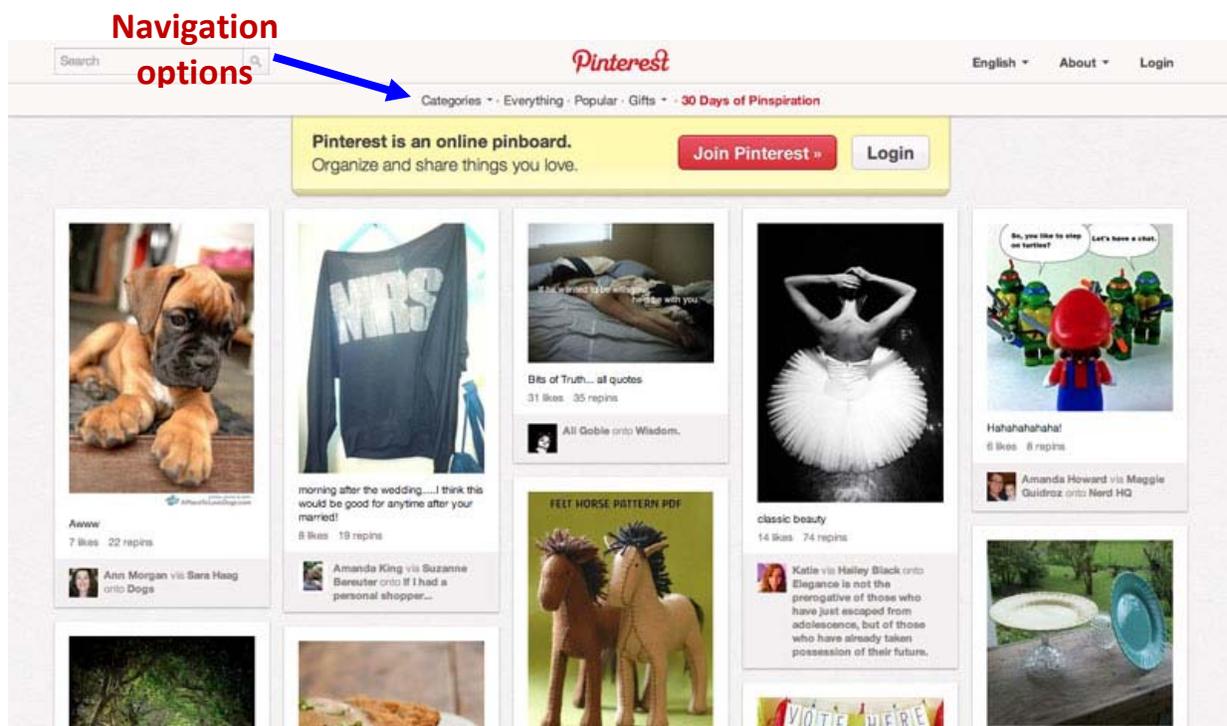
Pinterest in a nutshell
Pinterest is simply a virtual pinboard that allows users to "pin" or collect images to create and share theme-based virtual "bulletin" boards. Once you open an account, you can begin to collect images and create pinboards under your username and define them by topic, activity or category. You can either create a pinboard first and start adding images to it, or you can start by pinning an image and creating a pinboard from there. A pin is an image added to Pinterest either from a website, using the Pinterest button/bookmarklet, or uploaded directly from a device.

Once you add the Pinterest button to your browser, you can click on it when you find an image you want to clip from the Web. The bookmarklet will grab the images on that page and let you select the one you want to pin. Once you have selected the image, you will be prompted to add a description of your pin and to place it into one of your boards using the "Create Pin" pop-up window. Each pin added using the bookmarklet will link back to the site the image came from.

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Pinboards can be categorized by selecting one of many predetermined Pinterest categories ranging from "Science and Nature" to "Sports" and "Other." Pinterest also provides an option for boards to remain secret or to be shared with a select list of contacts via Pinterest username or email address. This is a good way to practice creating a pinboard and learning to arrange it however you want before making it public. Public boards, on the other hand, are available for all Pinterest users to see, comment, like and re-pin images to their own boards, which is what makes the platform social and a great resource for sharing visual data. As users pin and re-pin images, those images become available for other users to see and re-pin. This public pinning and re-pinning cycle us captured on the main Pinterest page when the "Everything" tab is selected. Users also have the option to see pins only from users they have chosen to follow by clicking on the "Following" tab, browse by category by clicking on "Categories," and so on for the handful of navigation options at the top of the Pinterest home page. These options may change from time to time.

When you reach your comfort level, begin to engage with other Pinterest users, continue pinning, re-pining, creating boards and learning about the Pinterest commenting cycle. Using your own personal account should be a much more comfortable environment to learn in than using an official account.

When you are ready to start pinning in your official capacity, the following best practices should help you be effective and stay within established limits.

Applying for a Pinterest Account
- Pinterest accounts must be applied for through the Department of Commerce Social Media Application process at: https://socmed.my.commerce.gov/.
- Once your Social Media request has been approved, go to www.pinterest.com and open a new account. Make sure your username clearly relates to your organization and mission.

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Requirements
- Multiple individuals must be able to access, post to and/or delete from all official Pinterest accounts at any time.
- Use an office e-mail address, rather than a personal address. For example, The Office of Digital Strategy generally uses webmaster@doc.gov. Using a personal account (i.e. Bob-Smith@DOC.gov) can lead to complications when the account holder leaves DOC.
- OPA will monitor official Pinterest accounts on a spot basis to ensure compliance with the guidance in this document. If compliance with the guidance in this document is not maintained, OPA may revoke approval for Pinterest accounts and/or disable, deactivate, and close non-compliant accounts.

Best Practices
Do:
- Choose images that are appealing and clearly relate to your bureau's message and mission.
- Choose names for your pinboards that clearly relate to your bureau's message and mission and help your customers understand and easily navigate through your pinboard collection.
- Use images to tell a compelling story, expand the public's knowledge of your organization or update your customers on recent events and developments.
- Make sure all images have been approved for public sharing before pinning.
- Make your pinboards interesting. Nobody wants to see a pinboard full of logos or blurry images.
- Use your pins and pinboards creatively while adhering to all applicable policies.
- Use the description/caption section strategically to expand on your visual message using plain language. Remember that Pinterest is a visual platform; keep it predominantly so.
- Review the [Department of Commerce Social Media Policy](#) periodically to make sure your account is compliant.

Don't:
- Share personal images or official images not approved for public sharing.
- Pin or re-pin inappropriate images.
- Misspell words.
- Endorse commercial products or services.
- Pin random images or create random pinboards. Pinterest works best when there is a clear and engaging story or theme behind your images.

Following other accounts
- Once you start pinning, other users will be able to see your images on the "Everything" public board. From there, they can choose to follow as many of your pinboards as they want.
- Other users do not need permission to follow you/your pinboard(s).
- You do not have to follow others for them to be able to see your pins/follow you. Unless you choose to share your pins with only a select group of people, every image you pin will appear at least once on the main Pinterest page.

Replying/Comments
- Every image publicly pinned is available for other Pinterest users to comment on.
- You can tag users you follow or who follow you by typing @ in the comments section below a pin and typing or selecting their names from the drop-down list that will appear as you begin typing

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- Edit and actively manage your Pinterest account to make sure that only the minimum amount of PII necessary to effectively use the platform is being generated/collected.

Special Communal features
- Liking a pin on Pinterest only adds it to your "Likes" page; it will not add it to any of your pinboards or show it as a re-pin on the main Pinterest page.
- Although Pinterest does not use the hashtag feature, crosspollination across platforms is not uncommon and users might use the hashtag in their comment entries even if there is no actual use for it on Pinterest.
- You can link your Pinterest account to your Facebook and Twitter accounts and share your pins across multiple platforms. Make your message resonate throughout your online presence as applicable.

Sharing
- Pinterest can be a very effective way to drive traffic to your more text-driven sites. Some say images speak louder than words; harness that power to your advantage. Tell a visual story.
- Visual documents rarely available to the public due to lack of Web real estate can be easily shared on Pinterest, e.g., maps, nautical charts, scientific images.
- As with other Social Media platforms, you can increase traffic to your pinboards by adding a Pinterest button to your site(s).
- Check out Pinterest's guidance on what works and how to use Pinterest to promote your business/brand and for additional general ideas on how to effectively use the platform to advance your organization's message/mission: http://business.pinterest.com/

Questions?
Please contact Mike Kruger, Director of Digital Strategy, at mkruger@doc.gov