



## **Interview with Michele Martin DiscoverAbility NJ Project Coordinator**

**[Announcer]** This podcast was presented by the NTAR Leadership Center, helping state leaders help adults with disabilities to employment and better economic opportunities through collaboration, innovation, and change.

**[Laurie Harrington]** Welcome to Lead.State.Gov a feature podcast of the NTAR Leadership Center. I'm your host Laurie Harrington. Michele Martin is an independent workforce and social media consultant who specializes in helping organizations use social media tools for work and learning. She provides training, program design, and technical assistant services to government and nonprofit clients from all over the country. She is currently coordinating the DiscoverAbility New Jersey Project for the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Disability Services. This is a multiyear plan that is helping individuals with disabilities, their families, service providers, and employers using social media and other tools to support the employment of individuals with disabilities. She is also working with the Independent Living Research Utilization Program at TIRR Memorial Hermann to implement social media and staff development projects with Centers for Independent Living throughout the U.S. Welcome to our podcast, Michelle. In your opinion how do you think it's going? Do you find that state employees are actively embracing and engaging the social media efforts?

**[Michele Martin]** We have some challenges in the technologies. One, I do find that employees are to some extent embracing it, but there are a lot of fears. There are, you know, people who are just -- feel kind of overwhelmed by the amount of technology and so, you know, I really try to make things as easy as possible in the projects that I do. We try to give as much instruction as possible. The one project that I'm working on in Pennsylvania with the Youth Network, we're having people post to a group blog and so we actually are doing, you know, extensive instructions with screen shots and everything so people understand. Plus I'm trying to pick tools that are as simple as possible to use. But another huge challenge, frankly, that we have in working with states using social media is the states themselves are not necessarily -- they're blocking a lot of sites. And so even though we have, you know, a federal government that's trying really hard to use social media and in some cases, you know, some parts of state government, what I'm finding in, you know, the arenas that I'm working in is that we are having some challenges with people even being able to access a lot of the sites that we're using from work. And so even when we have employees say, yes, I want to use these tools, they still have the hurdle and frankly, it's often several hurdles of, you know, getting sites unblocked. So that's a big deal and something that I think that we need to have some conversations about because it really is an incredible way to stay connected with people, particularly constituents, but also for staff to remain knowledgeable and connected to people in the field.

**[Laurie Harrington]** Based on your experience how can social media be leveraged to really help adults with disabilities find and keep employment?

**[Michele Martin]** Yeah, I think there are a number of ways that social media can be used to help people with disabilities find and keep employment. One is that what we're finding and



particularly with, you know, higher level more professional kinds of jobs that's where the employers are, is online. And so having a Facebook profile, for example, so that you can connect to, you know, employers that are using Facebook. LinkedIn is another big one. In fact that's probably an even bigger one in a professional arena. Many, many companies and certainly all the large companies are on LinkedIn. They use LinkedIn to find qualified people and so just like any other job seeker people with disabilities need to be seen, and they need to be in those networks where employers are looking for people. I also -- we're also seeing that a lot of employers are starting to use Twitter as a way to put out job openings, and so if you're following the right organizations or the right Twitter feeds on Twitter, you're gonna get notification of different job openings. I think for one of the things I've seen a lot of people doing in this whole personal branding space is using social media to create their own brand online. There's a great quote from -- in Wired magazine that Google is not a search engine; it's actually a reputation management engine. Because the reality is that employers when they're looking -- if they find out about someone they'll go Google them. And so they want to see what do I find out about this person online. So if a job seeker has a blog and, you know, maybe a Twitter feed, and you can use a Wiki to set up an online portfolio. If you've created all of these online spaces then you're much more findable by employers, and they're gonna see the kinds of work that you're doing. So from the job seeker's perspective of getting into the right networks and being visible, social media offers a ton of opportunities. If a job seeker, you know, is working with a job developer, well, you know, all of this stuff can be used by job developers as well. That's how they get connections into, you know, the employers that they may want to talk to is by having a LinkedIn profile by following them on Twitter, and seeing what the job openings are and what's going on in that particular company. You can have, you know, your own blog which again is gonna get you as a job developer a reputation that builds and builds a brand, if you will, that can get you connected to and noticed by the employers who are online. So, you know, one thing we're really seeing is that employers are online, and they're really looking at how to use social media for hiring and retention and the key is that, you know, like any other job seeker, people with disabilities need to be using those tools to sell themselves and get into the right networks.

**[Laurie Harrington]** Lastly, what advise would you give to a state agency or department that would like to explore new methods of communication through social networking? How does the state go about tapping into the right Twitter feeds, for example?

**[Michele Martin]** Well, I think that the first thing that government needs to do is to seriously look at, you know, their policies around using social media and having a policy. There are lots of sample policies that are out there. They really need to think through, you know, how do we want to use it? What goals do we have for social media? And what kinds of policies do we need to set up? Because there's a lot of fear and control issues that go with that. Honestly, I would say the place to start is and I think they have a -- they archived this, a couple of days ago, Cory Booker did a keynote at a workshop or whatever that was sponsored by Verizon talking about how to use social media in government. And you know, he's the Mayor of Newark. And they are doing phenomenal things in social media. And he really talked about, you know, what are the struggles that they've had and what are the keys to using social media successfully as, you know, a state agency or a government organization. So, you know, just watching that I think is an hour long talk, huge amounts of information in that and great ideas for how to use it and helping people



understand. I mean, the purpose of government is to serve the constituents. The voters, the people in their communities and social media offers, you know, great opportunities for that and so like I said, it's just a really excellent primer, if you will, in how government can use social media. The other thing -- the only other thing I would say is that it can help to sort of pick a tool or pick one of these tools to play around with and dabble in it because what you find is like, for example, if you want to go into Twitter, you start to follow a couple of people, and you see who they're following and then you can add them to your, you know, list and so on. It's just a participation that starts to show you where -- who are other people that I can connect to. You know, where am I gonna get that kind of, you know, information that I'm looking for etc. So just jump in and start playing around with it. Most, you know, like you probably have staff who are already doing this. So, you know, talk to them. See what they're interested in what -- where they're going because they are, you know, people who can give you a ton of information about it as well.

**[Laurie Harrington]** Thank you, Michele Martin for speaking with us today. I've been talking today with Michele Martin, an independent work force and social media consultant for the DiscoverAbility New Jersey Project, for the State of New Jersey about how social media can help improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This is Laurie Harrington for Lead.Sate.Gov with the NTAR Leadership Center. For more information about the NTAR Leadership Center and its research activities visit [www.ntarcenter.org](http://www.ntarcenter.org).

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