



GMS Flash Alert

Immigration Edition

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United States - New Screening of Social Media Accounts by State Department

As part of the visa application process, nearly all U.S. immigrant and nonimmigrant visas applicants will be required to provide their social media user-names, prior email addresses, and phone numbers held over the last five years.¹

In an effort to vet applicants seeking entry into the U.S. and identify potential security threats, the State Department is collecting additional information relating to individuals' personal social media presence. (For related coverage, see [GMS Flash Alert 2018-062](#), April 10, 2018.)

WHY THIS MATTERS

The new screening question about social media use would apply to virtually all applicants for immigrant and nonimmigrant visas, with the exception of certain diplomatic and official visa types. According to some reports, this will impact approximately 710,000 immigrant visa applicants and 14 million nonimmigrant visa applicants.²

Affected categories of travelers and migrants should be made aware of the new requirement concerning social media details so that they may be prepared for the questions during their consular interviews and comply accordingly.

Background

As [reported](#) in our prior newsletter, the Department of State published a notice in the Federal Register in March 2018, proposing to add questions for immigrant and nonimmigrant visa applicants about social media platforms they have used in the past five years. The public had 60 days to comment on the proposed change.

Various groups and individuals weighed in during this comment period. Despite free speech concerns raised by privacy and civil liberties advocates, the State Department is now proceeding with collecting and vetting social media accounts, phone numbers, and email addresses, used over the past five years.

In the past, the State Department only requested such email, phone number, and social media history where the individual was deemed to require further scrutiny. It was also addressed to those who had traveled to regions with a high degree of terrorist activity.

Altered Forms and New Questions about Social Media Use

The question about social media appears in the respective immigrant (DS-260) and non-immigrant (DS-160) applications³ as follows:

Social Media

Do you have a social media presence?

Select from the list below each social media platform you have used within the last five years. In the space next to the platform's name, enter the username or handle you have used on that platform. Please do not provide your passwords. If you have used more than one platform or more than one username or handle on a single platform, click the 'Add Another' button to list each one separately. If you have not used any of the listed social media platforms in the last five years, select 'None.'

Help: Social Media

Enter information associated with your online presence, including the types of online providers/platforms, applications and websites that you use to collaborate, share information, and interact with others. List the username, handle, screen-name, or other identifiers associated with your social media profile. (You do not need to list accounts designed for use by multiple users within a business or other organization.)

A screenshot of a dropdown menu for social media platforms. The menu is yellow and lists the following options: ASK.FM, DOUBAN, FACEBOOK, FLICKR, GOOGLE+, INSTAGRAM, LINKEDIN, MYSPACE, PINTEREST, QZONE (QQ), REDDIT, SINA WEIBO, TENCENT WEIBO, TUMBLR, TWITTER, TWOO, VINE, VKONTAKTE (VK), YOUKU, and YOUTUBE. At the bottom of the list is a selection option: - SELECT ONE -. To the right of the list is a vertical scrollbar. Below the dropdown menu is a text input field labeled "Social Media Identifier".

For now, the new visa application forms list a number of commonly used social media platforms. However, it may be updated to permit visa applicants to list all sites that they use.

KPMG NOTE

Whether applying for a tourist visa, a work visa, or an immigrant visa, U.S. visa applicants should be mindful that consular officers are studying their social media presence in rendering their decisions. Applicants' social media identifiers will be part of the background check process and further examined against watch lists generated by the U.S. government.

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KPMG NOTE (cont'd)

For now, the State Department is only requesting social media identifiers and not passwords to these accounts. Thus, the provided access to social media account handles should only enable the government to access data that is publicly shared. That being said, the information collected and vetted may change in the future.

If any information provided is incomplete, visa issuance may take longer due to additional background checks. Further, if the adjudicating officer determines that a visa applicant has misrepresented himself/herself, this could result in a finding of fraud and therefore result in inadmissibility.

This change may serve as a constructive reminder for employees to adhere to their employer's social media policies (where applicable).

FOOTNOTES:

- 1 See the June 4 Department of State announcement ("[Collection of Social Media Identifiers from U.S. Visa Applicants](#)") on this policy.
- 2 For example, see the Associated Press (AP) online report "U.S. now seeking social media details from all visa applicants," (June 1, 2019), by clicking [here](#). *Please note that this is a third-party (non-governmental, non-KPMG) link. Provision of this link does not represent an endorsement of the underlying website by KPMG.*
- 3 See "[Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application \(DS-160\) – Apply for a Nonimmigrant Visa](#)" on the Department of State's Consular Electronic Application Center web page.

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Contact us

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