

Introduction to Social Media Guidelines

Social media outlets provide an opportunity to engage with internal and external audiences in a nontraditional way. Using these mediums, we do more than push out a message; we have the opportunity to contribute to communities. While social media is free, it serves us well to have a solid understanding of what it means to be part of the larger social media community and join the global conversation about our institution and the work we do.

If you participate in social media, consider following these guiding principles:

- Stick to your area of expertise and provide unique, individual perspectives regarding what's going on at Ohio University, your community and in the world.
- Post meaningful, respectful comments.
- Always pause and think before posting. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.
- Respect proprietary information and content, and confidentiality—particularly if you are involved in sensitive research.
- When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep it appropriate and polite.
- Be engaging. Be authentic. Be yourself. Serve, don't sell. Maintain a personal/professional tone.
- Don't fuel fires.
- Be very careful about grammar and spelling errors.
- Be diligent about fact checking.
- Never fabricate "viral" material. A post (or photo or video, etc) is said to be viral when many, many people share it over their networks. Some viral videos have been viewed many millions of times). Opportunities are everywhere for genuine viral content; find them and use them. Just for the record, it is almost impossible to predict what content may become viral, and when you try to create it, it tends to backfire.

Guidelines of Engagement

Listen. Don't jump into social media without goals or a plan. Discuss options, ideas, and strategies before engaging. Having a goal related to social media will guide discussions regarding what elements should be included in the social media plan on a case-by-case basis. Everyone will have a different path involving social media. Decide which social media community best fits the needs of the department. Get to know the community you would like to engage and be an observer. Then engage respectfully with purpose and direction as you become more comfortable and confident in the environment.

Read. If you are engaging in social media for marketing purposes, find books on the subject (even if the media changes, the principles do not), go to conferences or webinars, read articles and more—get to know the medium. Follow bloggers who write about social media (or your given topic) and learn from those who have more experience.

Be transparent. Your honesty—or dishonesty—will be quickly noticed in the social media environment. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out.

Write what you know. Make sure you write and post about your areas of expertise, especially as related to Ohio University. If you publish to a website outside Ohio University, please use a disclaimer such as: “The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the positions, strategies, or opinions of my employer, Ohio University.” Also, please respect brand, trademark, copyright, etc. See University Policy 15.015 on Copyright, University Policy 91.003 on Computer and Network Use, Policy 31.010 on Publication of Periodicals distributed to Off-Campus Audiences, and Policy 31.001 on News Media Relations. Remember, you may be personally responsible for your content.

Perception is reality. In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as an OHIO volunteer, you are creating perceptions about your expertise and about the University by our stakeholders, students, and the general public. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your work and with Ohio University’s values and professional standards.

It’s a conversation. Talk to your readers like you would talk to real people in professional situations. Don’t be afraid to bring in your own personality and say what’s on your mind. Consider content that’s open-ended and invites response. Encourage comments. You can also broaden the conversation by citing others who are blogging about the same topic and allowing your content to be shared or syndicated.

Are you adding value? The best way to get your content read is to write things that people will value. Social communication from Ohio University sites should help our audiences. It should be thought provoking and build a sense of community. In general, social media content adds value if it enhances readers’ knowledge or skills, including but not limited to helping them to perform their job duties more effectively; solves problems; or helps people understand Ohio University better.

Be a good leader. Try to frame what you write to invite differing points of view without inflaming others. Be careful and considerate. Once the words are out there, you can’t really get them back. And once an inflammatory discussion gets going, it’s hard to stop.

When we make mistakes. If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and be quick with your correction. If you’re posting to a blog, you may choose to modify an earlier post—just make it clear that you have done so.

If in doubt. If you’re about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don’t shrug it off and hit ‘send.’ Take a minute to review these guidelines and try to figure out what’s bothering you, and then fix it. If you’re still unsure, you

might want to discuss it with your manager or legal representative. Ultimately, what you publish is yours—as is the responsibility. So be sure.

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