Media Guidelines / Best Practices

Definitions

Social media are defined as media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible publishing techniques. Examples include but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

Affiliated sites are social media sites which publicly represent the University of a specific group or functional unit within the University.

Administrators are employees of the University who are responsible for oversight of a particular department, group, or program’s social media site(s).

Users are employees of the University who create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (i.e., videos).

Administrator Guidelines/Best Practices

Prior to launching an NDSU-affiliated social media site, administrators are asked to:

1. Have a plan: administrators should consider the intended messages, audiences, and goals of implementing a social media site, as well as a strategy for keeping information on social media sites up-to-date.
2. Identify the individual(s) responsible for regular maintenance of the site.
3. Ensure the affiliated site will be a positive representation of the university and is supportive of institutional mission, vision, and goals.
4. Become familiar with the terms and conditions of the social media site that will be used.
5. Determine the level of permissions for site users.
6. Determine the process for responding to unfavorable comments made on the social media site.
7. Evaluate if other social media sites exist for your focus area/department/group and determine if an additional site is necessary or if existing sites should be removed to avoid redundancy.
8. Obtain approval from your department head for site creation.
9. Notify the VPSA office of the intended creation of the site.*

*Administrators responsible for overseeing affiliated sites that have already been launched are asked to notify the VPSA office of the current site and to follow the oversight guidelines listed below.
When implementing an NDSU-affiliated social media site, administrators are asked to:

1. Include the following disclaimers in the informational section of any social media site:

   a. **USER-GENERATED CONTENT AND DISCLAIMER**  
      (NAME OF DEPT/GROUP) accepts no responsibility or liability for any data, text, software, music, sound, photographs, images, video, messages, or any other materials whatsoever ("Content") generated by users ("the Users") and publicly posted on this page.

   b. **DISCLAIMER FOR CONTENT ON LINKED SITES**  
      (NAME OF DEPT/GROUP) accepts no liability or responsibility whatsoever for the contents of any target site linked from this page.

   c. **TERMS OF USE**  
      By posting Content on this page You agree to comply with the terms and conditions of (INSERT SOCIAL MEDIA SITE HERE) and in particular You represent, warrant and agree that no Content submitted, posted, transmitted, or shared by You will infringe upon the rights of any third party, including but not limited to copyright, trademark, privacy; or contain defamatory or discriminatory or otherwise unlawful material. (NAME OF DEPT/GROUP) reserves the right to alter, delete, or remove (without notice) the Content in its absolute discretion for any reason whatsoever.

   d. **COPYRIGHT**  
      The Content on this page is subject to copyright laws. Unless You own the rights in the Content, You may not reproduce, adapt, or communicate without the written permission of the copyright owner nor use the Content for commercial purposes.

Following implementation of an NDSU-affiliated social media site, administrators are asked to:

1. Protect confidential and proprietary information related to NDSU, students, employees, or alumni; ensure that applicable federal requirements and NCAA regulations are being followed; and adhere to all applicable university privacy and confidentiality policies.

2. Ensure the content of the site is consistent with copyright, fair use, and intellectual property rights of others and of the University. In addition, University Relations guidelines should be employed regarding use of the NDSU logo.

3. Manage “administrator” access to the site(s) and update as needed.

4. Obey the Terms of Service of any social media platform employed.
5. Keep in mind that the social media site should, whenever possible, link back to the NDSU website or NDSU departmental or program website (versus an external site managed by another entity).

6. Regularly (at least once/week) monitor the social media presence to determine compliance with all of the above guidelines.

7. Terminate the site if it is no longer used or no longer fulfilling its intended purpose or congruent with the goals of the University, department, and/or program/group.

User Guidelines/Best Practices

When creating or participating in an online community, users are asked to:

1. General recommendations: The keys to success in social media are being honest about who you are, being thoughtful before you post, and respecting the purpose of the community where you are posting.

2. Think before you post: There's no such thing as a "private" social media site. Search engines can turn up posts years after the publication date. Comments can be forwarded or copied. Archival systems save information even if you delete a post. If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it's wise to delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed. As a rule, if you would not say it in a staff meeting to your immediate supervisor or post it on a flier in the President’s office, don’t broadcast it via social media channels.

3. Monitor activity: Check your page frequently to quickly answer questions and to check for any inappropriate comments or postings.

4. Be transparent: Be honest about your identity. If you are authorized by your supervisor to represent NDSU in social media, say so. If you choose to post about NDSU on your personal time, please identify yourself as a NDSU staff member. Never hide your identity for the purpose of promoting NDSU through social media. It's both poor practice and prohibited by NDSU Policy 158 Acceptable Use of Electronic Communications Devices.
   a. In December 2009, the Federal Trade Commission implemented regulations requiring bloggers and those who write online reviews to reveal if they have been compensated in any way—a free copy of a book, dinner, complementary admission—or have a relationship to a company, product or service they review. Already a "best practice" for most bloggers, such disclosure is now being enforced.
5. Be accurate: Make sure that you have all the facts before you post. It's better to verify information with a source first than to have to post a correction or retraction later. Cite and link to your sources whenever possible; after all, that's how you build community. Review content for grammatical and spelling errors. This is especially important if posting on behalf of the organization in any capacity. If you make an error, correct it quickly and visibly. This will earn you respect in the online community.

6. Be respectful: Understand that content contributed to social media could encourage comments or discussion of opposing ideas. Responses should be considered carefully in light of how they would reflect on the poster and/or the organization and its institutional voice. You are more likely to achieve your goals or sway others to your beliefs if you are constructive and respectful while discussing a bad experience or disagreeing with a concept or person. In addition, the Acceptable Use Policy prohibits threats or harassment by using NDSU's computing resources to "transmit material or data that causes or encourages physical or intellectual abuse or that causes or encourages harassment, explicit or implied."

7. Be a valued member: If you join a social network like a Facebook group or comment on someone's blog, make sure you are contributing valuable insights. Don't post information about topics like NDSU events or a book you've authored unless you are sure it will be of interest to readers. Provide valuable information and content to your audience.

8. Consider your audiences: Social media often span traditional boundaries between professional and personal relationships. Use privacy settings to restrict personal information on otherwise public sites. Choose profile photos and avatars carefully. Be thoughtful about the type of photos you upload. Consider a “Community Guidelines” section somewhere on your page.

9. Maintain confidentiality: Do not post confidential or proprietary information about NDSU, its students, its alumni or your fellow employees. Use good ethical judgment and follow university policies and federal requirements, such as FERPA and HIPPA. As a guideline, don’t post anything that you would not present at a conference.

10. Respect university time and property: University computers and your work time are to be used for university-related educational and business purposes. It’s appropriate to post at work if your comments are directly related to accomplishing work goals, such as seeking sources for information or working with others to resolve a problem. Limited personal use of computing resources is acceptable as long as it doesn't violate any
policies, but for the most part, you should maintain your personal sites on your own time using non-NDSU computers.

11. Be aware of liability: You are legally liable for what you post on your own site and on the sites of others. Individual bloggers have been held liable for commentary deemed to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous, or obscene (as defined by the courts). Employers are increasingly conducting Web searches on job candidates before extending offers. Be sure that what you post today will not come back to haunt you.
   
   a. Obviously, using university computing resources to threaten or harass anyone is a violation of the Acceptable Use and the Anti-discriminatory Harassment policies, which "forbids any unlawful harassment which includes any behavior (verbal, written, or physical) that abuses, assails, intimidates, demeans, or victimizes or has the effect of creating a hostile environment for any person based on protected characteristics (i.e., race, color, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, marital status, parental status, family relationship status, physical or mental disability, military status)." Violating any university policy while using social media can trigger disciplinary action.

12. Be thoughtful: If you have any questions about whether it is appropriate to write about certain kinds of material in your role as a NDSU employee, ask your supervisor before you post. Remember that policies such as FERPA apply to social media.

13. Keep your personal views separate: Uphold the university's mission and values, including its position as a student-focused, land-grant, research university in your activities. Don't include political statements – use of university resources to support a political candidate or political campaign could endanger NDSU's tax-exempt status as a 501(c) 3 organization.

14. Respect trademarks and copyright: You can use the university's logo on an official university social media site; contact University Relations to get a logo optimized for the site you are using. Photographs also are copyrighted, including those commissioned by the university. You should only post photos you have taken yourself or have permission from the photographer to use.

15. Don't endorse without permission: Don't use a university account to endorse any product, vendor, or site unless you have permission from your supervisor to do so. For more information, review NDSU policy 700.1 Use of University Name.
Platform Specific Guidelines/Best Practices
All accounts which represent an NDSU Department or program area, must grant access to an administrator from that Department or program area.

Twitter
- Add a short bio.
- Always include a URL to more information on your program or service. Custom URL shorteners are available.
- Concentrate first on establishing who you are; begin to build trust.
- Avoid posting more than 4 items in 24 hours, unless tied to a specific promotion.
- Post at least 3 to 4 times per week.
- Use the @username when replying or referring to other twitter members.
- Retweet as often as possible, provided the content relates back to your goals.
- When composing your tweets, read them back to yourself and if it wouldn’t be interesting enough for you to click on them, someone else probably won’t find them interesting either.
- Always spell check your tweets before sending them. But remember that twitter allows for shorthand. For example, “Tomorrow” can be “tmrw” to conserve characters.
- Leave enough characters empty in your post to allow someone to easily retweet it. Try to stay around 100 characters so someone has room to add “RT @username:” to the beginning.
- Be sure to follow those who are following you, but take the time to look at each profile. You do not want to follow spammers, robots, or questionable profiles advertising questionable activities such as clubs or bars.
- An individual should own your twitter account; this ensures a consistent voice for the account.
- The majority of your tweets should be general interest information to others (45%), followed by marketing updates (35%), replies to followers (10%), retweets (5%), and posing questions to your audience (5%).
- The best time to post is in the afternoon, early in the week – from 1 to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Avoid posting after 8 p.m. and on Fridays after 3 p.m. Peak traffic times are from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

Facebook
- If your primary audience is external, please create a “Fan” Page.
- If your primary audience is internal, please create a “Group” Page.
• Please do not create “personal” pages for official school, college, department, program, office, organization, or student-run organization Facebook pages.
• Make sure at least one person is identified and responsible for your Facebook page. This will establish a consistent voice and accountability for updates/moderation.
• Customize the page as much as possible, but adhere to the NDSU branding style guides so your fans know you are affiliated with NDSU.
• Always include a URL directing toward more information when possible. Avoid including the complete URL when on Facebook; once the thumbnail has been established the URL can be removed. Select ‘no thumbnail’ for links which do not include images. Custom URL shorteners, (i.e., cri.gs/IMtrack) are available.
• When composing status updates, read them back to yourself and if it wouldn’t be interesting enough for you to click on, someone else probably won’t find them interesting either.
• Always spell check your status updates before sending them.
• Avoid posting more than 2 things in 24 hours.
• Post something at least 2 times a week.
• Use the @ symbol when referring to other Facebook when appropriate. You are encouraged to link back to the main NDSU page as often as possible.
• Develop an appropriate image to use as a profile picture. Do not leave it blank and do not use a generic image.
• Actively build your page by adding photos, videos, event postings, etc.
• The main department page should be listed as a “Favorite Page” off any additional departmental pages.
• Avoid posting after 8 p.m., before 8 a.m., and on weekends. Traffic peaks midweek/Wednesday, 1 to 3 p.m.

YouTube
• Make sure videos are shorter than 3 minutes unless they are compelling enough to warrant something longer.
• Customize the account as much as possible so your viewers know you are affiliated with NDSU.
• Post at least once a month. Often, series of videos can be completed at once such as “how to” videos and then released over the course of a semester.
• Try to brand videos with opening and closing graphics. The standard is to include the NDSU and website URL on a black title screen at the end.
• Be sure that descriptions and keywords match your content for search ability.
Blogging

- Identify your audience. What are you trying to achieve with your blog? Why would a visitor read your blog?
- Don’t write a novel. Keep your content scannable by writing short paragraphs. Think of your blog as your web journal.
- Break up text with headlines, sub headlines, bullets, images, and more. Use of images within your post can draw your reader’s attention and add interest to your post. Remember, over use of images can take away from your post, but a single image is worth a thousand words.
- Use bullet points or lists. Use formatting such as bold, capitols, italics, to emphasize points, but don’t go overboard. Using headings and subheadings throughout your posts helps to draw your reader’s eye down the post and helps highlight other sections. Your title describes your entire post, but a heading and subheading is a line of text that includes what the content below it is about.
- Break down your blog into categories. Try to have one topic per post. This will keep your blog posts shorter and increase ease of writing.
- If you allow comments, try to respond to them in a timely fashion. Don’t ignore comments visitors make.
- Create good content. Keep your blog interesting by creating unique, useful, insightful content your readers can’t get elsewhere.
- Remember blog entry titles are important. Your title is your first impression. Make it known that your post is relevant to your user through your title. Keep your title simple and grab your reader’s attention. Titles should describe what the reader would get in the post.

Guidelines for Handling Negative Posts

When you’ve developed a vibrant social media community, it’s inevitable that you’ll get some negative posts. Most of these posts, handled well, create an opportunity to strengthen your community by solving a problem or generating a good discussion. Some may require a team response. Here’s an overview of what to do:

1. It’s important to be calm, thoughtful and strategic when dealing with a negative post. The person who wrote the post is often upset and may have launched a personal attack; never respond in kind. Take the time to consider whether and how to respond.
2. Analyze. Decide if the post either requires deletion or a response. It’s fruitless to try to have a conversation with a “rager” (the social media term for a person who is chronically angry) or a “troll” (the term for people who enjoy stirring up trouble). You can usually tell the difference by looking at other posts by that person.

3. Confirm facts. Make sure you know the facts and current university policies and procedures related to the post. Contact a supervisor in the affected area. He or she may have handled similar issues before and can help you craft a response. In some cases, you may want to send an e-mail to the person who wrote the post to get additional facts.

4. Sympathize. Consider whether to apologize. Often people who are upset simply want to know their complaint has been heard. Saying, “I’m sorry that you’re unhappy. How can I help?” can go a long way toward turning a complaint into a conversation.
   a. An apology conveys that the university has done something wrong. If you, your supervisor and the supervisor of the affected area agree that a mistake was made, then an apology is appropriate.

5. Consider going offline. In many cases, the person who wrote the post will be willing to talk with you if you provide your work e-mail address. This is important to preserve people’s privacy or to get all the facts before finding a resolution. If you and the person work out a solution, consider whether to add a post that you successfully resolved the situation.

6. Say “Thanks.” Social media depends on conversations to thrive. And one of social media’s great strengths is its ability to help identify issues. It’s good practice to thank people for their posts, even if their post is a complaint or otherwise negative. Use judgment here – you don’t want to thank someone for posting something that violates community guidelines – but saying thanks is a way to underscore NDSU’s commitment to personal attention and civil discussion.

7. Clarify. Sometimes social media posts are so brief that they can be misunderstood. Make sure your intent is clear. You also may want to be sure you understood the intent of the person who posted; if the person seems really upset or the topic is sensitive, you may want to do this offline.

8. Monitor. Often a broad, hostile statement draws no attention at all. Keep an eye on it, and if no conversation develops, leave it alone. You may want to contact the person privately to see if you can provide assistance.

9. Let your group help. Frequently, other members of your social media community will spontaneously rise to the university’s defense with counterarguments and useful information. Allow time for this to happen.
10. Use the channel’s rules. Every social media channel — Facebook, YouTube, etc. — has rules in its Terms of Service regarding hate speech, harassment, and similar attacks. Cite these rules when you remove such posts and, if necessary, block repeat offenders.

11. You are not alone. A number of people at NDSU have experience in social media, crisis communications, and the specific needs of groups such as students, alumni or community activists. If you are unsure how to proceed, contact University Relations for assistance.