Making public comment and participating online (social media)
Guidance for employees

communicate
facilitate
regulate

Contents

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1.1 About this Guide

1.1.1   The following guidelines accompanies the Management Instructions on Protective Security and sets out the ACMA's instructions on a use of social media in an official and unofficial capacity.

1.1.2   The guidelines help inform ACMA employees and Members of the Authority of their rights and responsibilities when making a comment online and of the ACMA's requirements to ensure that comments are made in a legal, ethical and responsible manner.

1.2 Complying with this User Guide

1.2.1   These Guidelines apply to all ACMA employees, Members of the Authority as well as contractors and other third parties undertaking duties on behalf of the ACMA.

1.2.2   For the purposes of this guide, the term 'employees' or 'users' refers to all the relevant parties described above to whom this document applies.

1.2.3   This document is considered a lawful reasonably given management direction and employees are expected to apply this in word and intent. Non-adherence to the guidelines may be a breach of:

> the *Public Service Act 1999* (specifically the APS Values, Employment Principles and Code of Conduct);

> the contract terms for contractors and third parties undertaking activities on behalf of the ACMA; and

> other governing legislation including *Crimes Act 1914*, *Criminal Code 1995* and *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*.

2 Social Media Policy

2.2 Introduction

2.2.1 Social media encompasses a broad range of services that enable interaction and collaboration between communities of shared interest. Social media technologies typically help users compile a variety of content types and publish them direct to the web through third party web services. Many social media tools have functionalities to let users engage, discuss and collaborate around content.

The ACMA uses social media to engage with ACMA external stakeholders and this function is managed by Media.Comms. There are also some sections within the ACMA (such as Research and Analysis) who hold their own Twitter accounts. These accounts operate to the same governance principles and requirements as the overall ACMA account, with input from Media.Comms as and when relevant.

Media.comms's management and governance of social media does not extend to the use of social media by employees of the ACMA. However the ACMA does have guidelines for the use of social media by individuals. These ACMA guidelines are based upon the guidelines of the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC).

The document is designed to familiarise you with the APSC guidelines and how the ACMA guidelines work within those.

As an employee of the ACMA and the Australian Public Service (APS), you are a potential advocate of the ACMA and APS brand, both online and offline. These guidelines are not intended to curtail your online freedoms, but to remind you of your responsibilities as an APS and ACMA employee.

2.3 APS Guidelines

2.3.1 In 2012, the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) updated its **guidance on public comment which states**:

Online engagement by public servants, involving robust professional discussion as part of their duties or as private citizens, benefits their agencies, their professional development, those with whom they are engaged and the Australian public. This engagement should be enabled and encouraged.

However, there are some additional considerations that apply to online participation. The general principles for APS employees include:

> behaving with respect and courtesy, and without harassment

> dealing appropriately with information, recognising that some information needs to remain confidential

> delivering services fairly, effectively, impartially and courteously to the Australian public

> being sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public

> taking reasonable steps to avoid conflicts of interest

> making proper use of Commonwealth resources

> upholding the APS Values and the integrity and good reputation of the APS

> not acting in a way that would call into question the APS employee's ability to be apolitical, impartial and professional in the performance of their duties.

The APS Code of Conduct requires employees to behave at all times in a way that upholds the APS Values and the integrity and good reputation of the APS. When APS employees are making public comment in an unofficial capacity, it is not appropriate for them to make comment that is, or could be perceived to be:

> being made on behalf of their agency or the Government, rather than an expression of a personal view

> compromising the APS employee's capacity to fulfil their duties in an unbiased manner. This applies particularly where comment is made about policies and programmes of the employee's agency

> so harsh or extreme in its criticism of the Government, a member of parliament from another political party, or their respective policies, that it raises questions about the APS employee's capacity to work professionally, efficiently or impartially. Such comment does not have to relate to the employee's area of work

> so strong in its criticism of an agency's administration that it could seriously disrupt the workplace. APS employees are encouraged instead to resolve concerns by informal discussion with a manager or by using internal dispute resolution mechanisms, including the APS whistleblowing scheme if appropriate

> a gratuitous personal attack that might reasonably be perceived to be connected with their employment

> unreasonable criticism of an agency's clients and other stakeholders

> compromising public confidence in the agency or the APS.

2.4 Social media defined

2.4.1   Social media is a set of internet-based tools used for sharing and discussing information among people. Social media refers to user-generated information, opinion and other content shared and discussed over open digital networks.

Social media may include but is not limited to:

> social networking sites—Facebook, LinkedIn

> video and photo sharing websites—Pinterest, Tumblr, Instagram, YouTube

> blogs, including corporate blogs and personal blogs

> micro-blogging—Twitter

> forums, discussion boards and groups—Google groups, Whirlpool

> wikis—Wikipedia

> vod and podcasting—Google Hangout, YouTube Live

> email and instant messaging.

Social media also includes all other emerging electronic/digital communication applications.

2.5 Official use of social media

2.5.1   As an ACMA employee you may be required, as part of your role, to interact with stakeholders via your personal social media profiles. An example may include a post to your LinkedIn connections about an upcoming ACMA event or recently released report. When posting, it is your responsibility to always adhere to the ACMA's values and communicate in a manner that is clear, concise, accurate, ethical, respectful and transparent.

Users should ensure any use does not bring the ACMA or the APS into disrepute and avoids references to workplace social activities. Care should be taken to ensure comments made in a private capacity are not seen as official comment, but rather, your personal opinion.

All social media interaction should be done ethically. It should be honest and transparent to users and consistent with **APS Values.**

2.5.2 Disclosure

For work-related social media interaction, always disclose that you work for the ACMA (this may already be available in your LinkedIn profile).

2.5.3 Public information and confidentiality

Only provide information that is publicly available, such as information that can be found on the ACMA external website or in the annual report, or information that you have authorisation from your section manager to release to the public.

Ensure all information provided is factually correct.

Do not publish confidential information on external social media sites and platforms.

If you are unsure whether something is classified confidential, ask your section manager before posting online.

2.5.4 Media interaction

Do not comment to the media, concerning ACMA issues, via online comments without first going through the appropriate internal channels for approval. Media procedures still apply when using social media.

2.5.5 Amendments

If you post incorrect information online, move quickly to correct it; be open to the fact you've made a mistake and that the information has since been revised.

If you come across material on an external website or network that is incorrect or misrepresents the ACMA, send the link to the social media producer or media manager who can work with you to arrange a formal response on behalf of the ACMA. Do not correct the mistake from a personal account. Corrections should come from the ACMA, not individuals.

2.6 Unofficial use of social media

2.6.1
When making a public comment in an unofficial capacity, it is not appropriate for you to make a comment that is, or could be perceived to be, being made on behalf of the agency or Government, rather than a personal view.

Before posting personal opinions, consider whether your comments could cause the ACMA/APS stakeholders, including members of Parliament, to lose confidence in your ability to work in a professional and impartial manner.

2.6.2 Respect and privacy

When participating in online conversations, always act with integrity and ensure you respect an individual's privacy and opinions.

Do not post personal information that was given to you privately (for example names, private conversations, emails and photographs).

Ensure the comments made are in line with how the community in general expects a member of the public service to operate and behave.

Adhere to the 'terms of use' of any website or network you interact on, and do not act in a dismissive or threatening way. If you are concerned about the terms of use please refer the matter to your supervisor.

2.6.3 Copyright

When using social media, it is acceptable to link to another person's work. In general, a short excerpt (typically no more than a paragraph) can be quoted. The author and/or publisher should be acknowledged.

If another person's intellectual property is not in the public arena and you plan to post it, obtain the author's permission before doing so.

Be particularly careful using images or altering images without the permission of the creator. Only copyright-free images should be used without clearance and in compliance with the rights holder's requirements.

2.6.4 Themes of what may be deemed inappropriate

It is important for employees to consider their specific role within the ACMA before commenting on possibly contentious issues. For example, an ACMA employee working on Telecommunications Protections Code compliance openly criticising a telco or internet service provider online, would be viewed as a breach of guidelines.

Further examples of inappropriate comments may include:

> Being seen to endorse products that you may use to conduct your work
> Being seen to endorse certain ACMA stakeholders e.g. one telecommunications provider over another.
> Favouring one political party or policy over another. These type of comments may see the public question whether you are an impartial APS employee.
> Negative comments regarding your work at the ACMA, or the ACMA as a whole. Issues such as these should be discussed with your Section Manager, not posted online.
> Being insensitive to the diversity of the Australian public.

2.7 Permitted use of social media at work

2.7.1 A member of staff found to be posting incessantly on their social media accounts during work hours may suggest there is minimal official work being done. For further information, consult the **Acceptable Use of ICT** document.

2.8 A final note

2.8.1 Social media provides the ACMA, and the APS, with an opportunity to engage directly with stakeholders and the public. However, involvement may also present its own set of challenges.

It is important that you use common sense when interacting online. As with all of your official interactions, it is ultimately your responsibility to ask for additional guidance, should you require it.

For advice on social media matters, please contact the ACMA Social Media Producer, Louise Tapsell on x7954

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