Australian Government

Department of Communications

Use of Social Media

Guidelines

Purpose

Social media—defined as media that allows the creation, exchange and distribution of user-generated online content[1]—offers us a range of new opportunities for engaging in conversations.

As a Department that seeks to provide a leading digital-edge experience to our citizens, stakeholders and staff, and be seen as the digital leader in Government, we encourage you to appropriately use social media channels.

However, the lines between our professional and personal lives are blurring—we are taking our work home with us and bringing our personal lives to work. It is important to remember your public service responsibilities and ensure clear separation between your official identity and your personal and private identity.

These guidelines have been created to ensure the safe use of these tools, protecting both you and the Department.

It is every employee's responsibility to read and understand the policy.

Principles for use of social media by departmental employees

Staff who use social media networks, need to take a commonsense approach and consider the Australian Public Service Commission guidance on making public comment and participating online, as well as considering the Department's own values and culture (Corporate Plan 2014-17).

The discretion that you would apply when engaging in a public forum or at a social gathering, also applies to what you say on social media channels. Once something is tweeted, posted or blogged—it is public. Remember that you are a member of the Australian Public Service (APS) and a member of the Department and have a responsibility to uphold the APS and departmental values and culture, and this should factor into any comments you make in public, whether they be face-to-face or online.

Where staff may want to raise awareness of work-related activities on their personal social media channels with friends and family, the following principles apply:

- Don't discuss confidential or classified material. This includes For Official Use Only and Protected – Commercial, Protected – Sensitive material.

- Respect Copyright

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[1] PM&C   Social media, Web 2.0 and You April 2010

- Respect privacy

- Be polite. Employees are expected to treat their peers with respect both in the physical workplace and online.

- If it's clear who you work for, be clear your views are your own. Avoid perception of deception. Be clear and transparent. Using government logos or insignia may imply you are authorised to speak on behalf of the Department. You're probably not. On your social media networks, you only represent yourself. Inappropriate remarks could damage the Department's, or colleagues, or your reputation.

Further:

- Any comment must not compromise or be capable of being perceived to compromise your capacity to fulfil your duties in an unbiased manner. This applies particularly where comment is made about policies and programmes of this Department.

- Any comment cannot be, or be capable of being perceived to be, so harsh or extreme in its criticism of the Government, the Opposition, a Member of Parliament or Senator from another political party, or their respective policies, that it raises questions about your capacity to work professionally, efficiently or impartially. Such comment does not have to relate only to this Department or portfolio.

- Any comment cannot be, or be capable of being perceived to be, so strong in its criticism of the Department's administration that it could seriously disrupt the workplace. You should instead resolve concerns by discussion with a manager, by using internal dispute-resolution mechanisms and mechanism such as whistleblowing/public-interest disclosures.

- Any comment cannot be, or be capable of being perceived to be, a gratuitous personal attack that might reasonably be perceived to be connected with your employment, and

- Any comment cannot be, or be capable of being perceived to be, unreasonable criticism of the Department's clients and other stakeholders, or compromising public confidence in the Department or the APS.

For more information, view the Australian Public Service Commission's (APSC) social media guidance[2].

Personal use of social media at work

The Department allows access to social media sites in accordance with its ICT usage policies. The Department supports reasonable personal use of the internet and social media websites. Personal use of the internet and social media while at work should not impact your work priorities and obligations to your

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[2] www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-circulars-and-advices/2012/circular-20121

team or branch.

Safe social networking

While social media sites make it very easy to share information with others, it means you also need to be more aware than usual in your use of these sites. Remember to think before you click, post or tweet.

It is always a good idea to check your account and privacy settings so you know who can access postings. It's recommended you visit the Department's Stay Smart Online website to check out security best practice and adjust your security settings accordingly. You also need to consider whether visitors to your site will have particular privacy requirements.

Guidelines for use of social media channels

The Department currently uses a number of social media channels to communicate with stakeholders and the public. The Department is currently implementing its Digital Business Strategy that will provide advice on the channels the Department should focus on that will best meet our objectives of being a digital leader in Government and providing a leading edge digital experience to our stakeholders. A Community Manager, based within the Digital Communication Branch, will coordinate, develop and maintain content across our social media channels and will work closely with the Twitter Group and other areas of the Department to ensure the Department's use of social media channels is strategic, consistent and in line with our objectives.

Developing content for social media

The Community Manager can assist line areas to develop a social media content plan to support their project. This may mean creating a schedule of planned posts throughout the duration of your project that have branch head and Community Manager approval. The Community Manager can provide advice on the right tone, messaging and channels for your content, but the general rule is to create content that can be distributed easily across a broad range of channels, thereby maximising exposure to the message.

You must also ensure that your content is accessible and conforms to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0[3] (WCAG 2.0).

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[3] http://webguide.gov.au/accessibility-usability/accessibility

Moderation policy and process

The Community Manager will provide advice to you about appropriate moderation policies and processes. A moderation policy helps people understand what type of behaviour is acceptable. It also helps the moderator understand how to govern the activity on your site. An open approach to moderation is encouraged, with as little vetting of comments as possible, and the removal of comments only in the case where they breach the terms of use.

You can moderate content before or after it is published—this is also called pre and post moderation. If you decide to moderate comments before they are published you maintain greater control over the content that appears online. However, this approach often requires more resources and reduces your ability to engage in real time. Post moderation allows greater real-time interaction but increases the risk of inappropriate content being published.

It is important to develop a moderation policy and process that suits your project and to make sure the policy is available to all potential users. This will require thought and discussion on the benefits and risks of each approach. Your moderation policy should be cleared by the Community Manager and Legal Services Group to ensure it complies with law.

Responding to comments

The Community Manager can also provide advice on if, when and how to respond to comments about departmental projects or policy on social media channels. Developing clear protocols for responding to comments made on social media platforms is integral to responding quickly and engaging effectively online.

Social media monitoring

The Community Manager will oversee the Department's social media channels; however, it is important that employees engaging in our social media channels on specific projects are also monitoring comment and feedback. Whether or not you are participating in online conversations and interactions, you should always monitor for mentions of your programme, policy, initiative or related industry—this information should inform your online engagement. Consistently review and monitor mentions related to your programme, policy or initiative and listen to the sentiment. Is it negative? Is it positive? Are you able to turn that sentiment around? By listening and monitoring online conversations you are better able to respond and nurture the opinions of your audience. There are several social media monitoring tools that are used to help track online conversations and mentions. Talk to the Community Manager for more information about choosing the right monitoring tool.

Measurement, evaluation and review

Measuring, evaluating and reviewing your project will identify if you have successfully achieved your goals.

Delivering both qualitative and quantitative results is a good way of evaluating the success of your project. The Community Manager can provide advice on metrics used by the Department to evaluate online and social media initiatives. Some of these may include:

- reach
- frequency and traffic
- influence
- conversions and transactions
- engagement
- interaction.

These metrics are measured using a variety of web and social media analytics, methods, and tools.

Internal Social Network

The same guidelines apply to the Department's internal social network (accessed through the Department's intranet) as they do to external social networks, as well as the usual rules, ethics, restrictions and caveats that apply to any professional interaction under the APS Code of Conduct. That is to say, as always, when working with colleagues, we all have an obligation to communicate in a civil and constructive way—regardless of the communications channel.

Additionally, as conversations on the Department's internal social network are recorded (captured in a database) it is important to remember that the usual caution around sharing sensitive or classified information applies—in the same as it does via email or any other form of communication.

Keeping in mind our Freedom of Information (FOI) obligations, it is important that any policy formulation carried out on the internal social network is of a "deliberative" nature—in the same way a team meeting would be carried out with its usual meeting minutes. Once this deliberative phase of the policy discussion is completed (regardless of the communications setting) it is important to move to a more formal draft policy document.

Finally, the internal social network management (the Digital Communications team) will review content at the end of the each day. This means that there is a potential of removing content after it has been posted. The purpose of this "post moderation" is not to sensor staff. Instead, it is to ensure the above deliberative policy conversations are in line with our FOI obligations. And if, for whatever reason, content is published which appears to be in breach of the APS Code of Conduct or inappropriate for some other reason, then it will be removed, as it would be in any other environment.

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