

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES FOR OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY PAGES

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SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINED

Tools allowing individuals to create and publish content to a wide audience changed the media landscape at the close of the 20th century. The ability to network together large groups of individuals with similar interests is the hallmark of the start of the 21st century. These two developments combine to create an environment in which the barriers to mass communication have never been lower in the history of human history. Taking the ability to communicate to large audiences and combining it with interaction is the heart of social media. The one-to-many world of public relations becomes two-way interaction; it is no longer a speech to the people, but a conversation.

The general public seeks more voices, and to achieve that diversity, Northwestern State encourages the use of social media tools by its faculty, staff and students. For employees who maintain social media on behalf of the university, the following policies outline the duties and responsibilities of those engaging the public on behalf of Northwestern State.

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NORTHWESTERN STATE

Departments or university units with social media pages are required to notify Karalee Scouten - Coordinator of Social Media, to register their pages and provide names and contact information for individuals who are responsible for maintaining the social media accounts. The goal is to provide coordination and assistance to all Northwestern State official social media areas, and to avoid duplication and confusion regarding certain social media services which operate with a single master account. A full-time appointed employee of Northwestern State must be identified as the primary contact for information posted on any official social media page. It is recommended that two full-time appointed employees are named co-administrators for any site to ensure continuity of operations. Any social media feed must provide administrative access to the Coordinator of Social Media and the Director of University Marketing and Branding.

As you represent a division of Northwestern State, the university has the right to remove inappropriate, demeaning, insulting or threatening messages on official pages, both in comments and in posts. Additionally, official pages initiated must be maintained with content that meets the quality standards established by the university. To be effective, social media often requires more frequent updating than traditional websites.

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YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES REPRESENTING NORTHWESTERN STATE

Please keep in mind three very important points before you begin a social media feed or website on behalf of your department or unit. By accepting the responsibility of maintaining an official social media presence for your area at Northwestern State, you acknowledge that you will follow the official policies for Northwestern State regarding official social media. Second, while you are speaking on behalf of your department, you are not speaking on behalf of the institution as a whole. Finally, you are accepting any liabilities for your comments, notably adhering to state and federal guidelines.

Creation of an official social media presence for a department or unit comes with acceptance of these policies for individuals who participate on behalf of the feed. This includes linking back to the university master account for the social platform, providing contact information to and following the guidance of the Director of University Marketing and Branding and Coordinator of Social Media.

Advertising or endorsement of external vendors or businesses is prohibited on any Northwestern State University website or social media platform. The only exception is the athletic department official website (NSUDemons.com).

Usage of Northwestern State University's official trademarks, logos, seal and colors must comply with the Northwestern State University Visual Branding Guidelines. This includes the university name and abbreviation in the context of social media.

Release of information deemed official by the university is also subject to oversight by the Division of External Affairs. It is not permissible to release official news of the university without the prior approval of External Affairs.

All state of Louisiana rules regarding purchasing, contract confidentiality, proprietary information, and open records regulations apply, as well as federal guidelines regarding student records (FERPA) and personnel information (HIPPA). No political statements or endorsements are allowed on official Northwestern State social media. Northwestern State University's campus computing conduct codes also apply.

Keep in mind that you are utilizing state resources to update and maintain social media websites on behalf of the university's overall marketing efforts. Because you are utilizing state of Louisiana property, state of Louisiana computer networks and/or state work time, your activities will be subject to any state Freedom of Information Act requests.

Employees of Northwestern State University who violate these policies, or other university privacy and confidentiality policies do so at the risk of disciplinary action or termination.

Social media representing departments shall continue to be updated and with content that meets the quality standards of the university. Administrators of pages must monitor their own pages and be prepared to respond rapidly to any problems that may occur. The security of passwords and the integrity of official social media is the primary responsibility of the departmental or unit administrators of the page. The Coordinator of Social Media and the Director of University Marketing and Branding are secondary contacts in this regard.

Updating with engaging, interesting content is the responsibility of the social media administrators. Please make every effort to create a steady stream of information to your community. A stale page is more damaging to the reputation of the university than having no page at all.

Understand the terms of service of many services, and if you have any question regarding copyright or other issues surrounding the agreements with social media services, please contact the Coordinator of Social Media or the Director of University Marketing and Branding.

Finally, as a de facto representative of Northwestern State, inappropriate language, ethnic slurs, personal insults, or conduct deemed unprofessional will not be tolerated. Please recognize that as state employees, there are limitations on what is prudent to say. While social media encourages a casual voice, please take care with spelling and language. As a rule of thumb, do not act in a manner that would be unacceptable in the halls of your university unit. Is this something that you would like the president to read in the local newspaper?

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DECISION TO START

If you have not created an official social media feed, consider whether it suits the needs of your unit. Do you need to interact with students? Does your area generate lots of content – images, video, text? Is the goal to reach out with news or to build bonds with communities? Take a moment to decide if you really should have these kind of accounts, and do your people have the time, expertise or resources to maintain them.

SOCIAL MEDIA: FACEBOOK

Personal interaction, commentary, sharing of images and small videos – this is the heart of the way Facebook operates. The pace is casual, but to be effective expect to post at least once a day, if not twice. The community you build through a social media site will want to interact with each other as well. Moderation is a part of having a social tool enabled.

REAL-TIME REPORTING: TWITTER

Headlines, alerts to larger pieces of content available on other social platforms, and as the name implies – reporting in real-time from events. Twitter and other micro-blogging sites serve to alert followers. Twitter is a staple of public relations and news outlets to message breaking news to those who have subscribed to follow them.

SOCIAL COMMENTARY: BLOGS

Traditional opinion and information columns, known as first as web logs then by the common term blog, are a staple of the intellectual exchange online. Subject matter experts within fields are encouraged to create longer form written and visual content. In turn, these are perfect sources for links and posts on social or real-time reporting tools.

PARTICIPATORY MEDIA: MESSAGE BOARDS

Where the general public joins in as equal partners with media and institutions, the message board world should not be entered lightly or without consultation. Individuals posting anonymously or under screen names are common, but the level of protection of identities is not as strong as most believe. The IP address series of state computers are well known to message board owners, and staff members who attempt to post from work need to be aware of the logging of addresses as a regular practice of any message board system.

CONTENT CREATION: YOUTUBE, VIMEO, FLICKR, & ITUNES

Northwestern State maintains an official YouTube and Vimeo channel, a Flickr photo stream, and digital content via iTunes. The campus website system also provides the ability to distribute approved content via its own podcasting system. If individual campus units wish to publish official content to these or other video and audio sharing website, please contact the Coordinator of Social Media or the Director of University Marketing and Branding before uploading content.

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YOUR CHECKLIST TO BEGIN

DO YOU HAVE THE TIME

Even before deciding on the need, are the people available to support the social media you plan to start. The daily check-in and posting can quickly expand. Is your standard NSU website for your college/unit/area up to date? If it is not, do not circumvent the need for keeping current on your SilverStripe pages by shifting updates, news and information to social media.

DO YOU REALLY HAVE THE NEED

Is there information about your area that is appropriate to share in a social, open setting?

WHAT IS YOUR STRATEGY

Starting social media without a plan is no different than joy-riding in a car: you will not get anywhere without a goal and a road map to get there. Consider why you want to have the social feed. What do you want to achieve? Some of the worst efforts in social media result from “because so-and-so did it” or “it looks cool”.The more work that is done at this stage, the better the result.

IDENTIFY THE COORDINATOR(S)

A full-time appointed employee of Northwestern State must be responsible for the social media service, and it is highly recommended to have more than one for back-up.

APPROVALS

First at the department level, then the university. Make sure your senior management within your area is on-board with your plan. Also, make sure the Coordinator of Social Media is aware and approves your new social media page/feed, and you have provided him with contact information and an outline of your strategic plan.

CONSISTANT STREAM OF INFORMATION

Decide what the comfortable level of interaction you can maintain. Nothing kills the enthusiasm of those involved with a feed more than “yo-yo” posting – five today, eight tomorrow then nothing for a week.

BUILD UP BEFORE LAUNCH

Take some time to understand the tool, make some posts and be sure that what you are planning fits your mission. Share the site or feed with others in your field away from Northwestern State for feedback and to begin to build momentum.

LAUNCH

After testing and tweaking, tell the world about your site. Promote your site in email signatures within the department and when approved by university marketing and branding, promote them within literature for your department.

ANALYTICS

As sure as having a road map to know where you are going, make sure you have a dashboard to let you know what is performing and what is not. The part of your work that you think is most beneficial may not be what is causing traffic or interaction. Use the analytic and feedback tools of your service to guide you. Also, you will be asked to report monthly to the Coordinator of Social Media a copy of the tracking provided by the service used.

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ADDITIONAL POLICY GUIDELINES

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

When participating in social media, there is no one else to blame besides the person at the keyboard. Keep in mind, you cannot claim to be misquoted or misinterpreted by a reporter – you are the reporter. And, you will not have the benefit of editors to clean up misspelling or poor grammar, or others that can assist or to share your responsibility.

CONTENT APPROVAL

Content posted on official university social media is subject to the approval of Northwestern State University Division of External Affairs, and content created by non-university groups may be considered for use on official feeds if it meets the university's quality standards.

POST OPENLY

Transparency is one of the most important factors in social media and state agencies. Identify yourself by name, and when possible, choose screen names or account names that include your name. Attempting to post anonymously will result in discrediting yourself when revealed, and in turn, the university as a whole. If more than one person is creating information for a social media feed, the individuals should "sign" their posts with their name or initials, commonly done with a "^^" sign before the initials (for example, ^^JH would be Jim Henderson). If you make a mistake, do not attempt to delete the mistake, but correct the error as soon as possible. Altering previous posts without noting a change or correction being made is considered at the least poor internet etiquette; at worst unethical sanitizing.

DO MODERATE

Unfiltered commentary is not conducive to civil discourse. Be prepared to accept and respond to comments on your site and feeds. Recent studies show that the majority of participants in social media expect institutions not only to listen to their unsolicited comments, but also to answer and react to them. To protect yourself and your site, consider moderating all comments before posting. Begin with placing a disclaimer on your site stating you reserve the right to remove inappropriate comments, those using obscene or vulgar language, that attack groups or individuals, that are clearly offensive, and those that are commercial endorsements or other attempts at spam. To guide your decision making regarding responding to comments and questions, please refer to the decision matrix attached to this policy.

GUIDING THE CONVERSATION

Be prepared for comments that are not positive, and to respond to customer service complaints regarding the university as a whole or your department in particular. Respond in a professional and positive manner. Many times what may be seen as a negative comment is merely a concerned supporter of the university wanting to help correct a situation. The opinions expressed by individuals are their own. Inaccurate facts or misinterpretation of facts are the opportunity to respond. Deletion of comments that are viewed as negative will only lead to a larger outcry than the discomfort of the original statement.

IN AN EMERGENCY OR CRISIS SITUATION

DO NOT POST INFORMATION TO YOUR INDIVIDUAL FEEDS WITHOUT APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY'S OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION SOURCES. If an event is unfolding on the campus, refer all traffic to the Purple Alert system, the university's main website and official social media feeds. When you repost information from official university sources during these times, be sure to copy carefully the information and all links back to the official university source. NEVER SPECULATE or report unconfirmed information in a crisis. If you see erroneous information in a crisis, contact members of Northwestern State's External Affairs Division immediately and forward links to the errors.

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UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NSU

INTERNET PROTOCOL

Online activity is monitored and logged on a routine basis by all internet providers. The IP address of the origination point for any communication – email, blog entry, Twitter post, social media update – is attached to that information. There is no such thing as anonymous posting, especially for individuals using state equipment and state networks.

HELD TO A HIGHER STANDARD

While clipping copyright material for use on personal social media may be accepted by the general public, the institution must uphold intellectual property rights. If you do not have proper permissions to post or use copyright material – in particular audio and video files – consider linking to the official sources. When making material for social media distribution – again, audio and video – understand the limits of fair use.

YOUR ACTIVITY FOLLOWS YOU

Posting as an official social media feed for Northwestern State may subject an individual’s personal accounts to more scrutiny and a higher level of attention. Understand that posting information on a personal account that could not be posted as a part of the official feed may become a problem for the individual. The security settings on social media are only as good as the human interaction. Today’s best friend may become tomorrow’s copy –and–paste enemy from your personal accounts.

ONCE POSTED, ALWAYS AVAILABLE

The delete key does not work on the internet. Digital files – text, photos, video or audio – are easily copied and extremely portable. Please think before you post. Many services archive all data posted, and viewers often copy or screen capture posts. Assume everything is archived somewhere – because it is. The key factor to remember is how difficult it will be to recover what you believe you deleted. Whatever you post can and often is shared globally. Keep in mind this quote: If it gives you pause; pause.

DON'T REACT

Comments are a natural part of the social media world, and should be taken in the spirit in which they are offered. Understand that social media tools which allow for “handles” or aliases feed into something known as the disassociation effect. The avatar and name become a mask, and people say things they would never say to individuals face-to-face. As a representative of Northwestern State, you operate at a disadvantage in these situations, and it is not appropriate to lash out at those making comments.

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BEST PRACTICES

CREATE EXCITEMENT

The most important part of your participation in social media is bringing the point of view of Northwestern State into the conversation. It is important for our personnel to represent the brand, and the help explain and enlighten our supporters. Remember, the heart of social media is the conversation – it's no longer a speech in which we tell the public what is important.

USE EXPERTISE

Comment on what you know and who you are. Being social means sharing with others. If you have an area of particular interest, promote that within the context of your department or unit's feed. National news, especially academic research and other information related to your area, will enhance your feed.

YOU WILL BE SEEN AS THE EXPERT

What you say can, and will be used against you the court of public opinion. Whether you intend it or not, the general public will consider you as speaking for Northwestern State so please be as accurate as you can when making posts.

BE A PART OF THE GROUP

One of the benefits of participation in the Social Media Group on campus is to get the shared amplification of projects your area has through the entire university social media community. It also provides you with content to keep your feeds moving by coordinating with others to pick up and repost information from other feeds.

BE CONVERSATIONAL

Remember that it is "social" media – having a particular voice and a conversational tone is encouraged. Being less formal is good, but take care with slang. Spelling and grammar still matter when representing Northwestern State to the public.

KEEP THE CONTENT MOVING

There is something worse than not having a social media presence: doing it poorly. A page that is idle implies that your area does not care about its supporters. Worse, it implies that the university does not care about your area. The general public often does not recognize that an official page is not maintained by the university. Once a feed or page is started, update it regularly with engaging content. Remember: stale social media is more damaging to the university than no page at all.

LISTEN AND OBSERVE

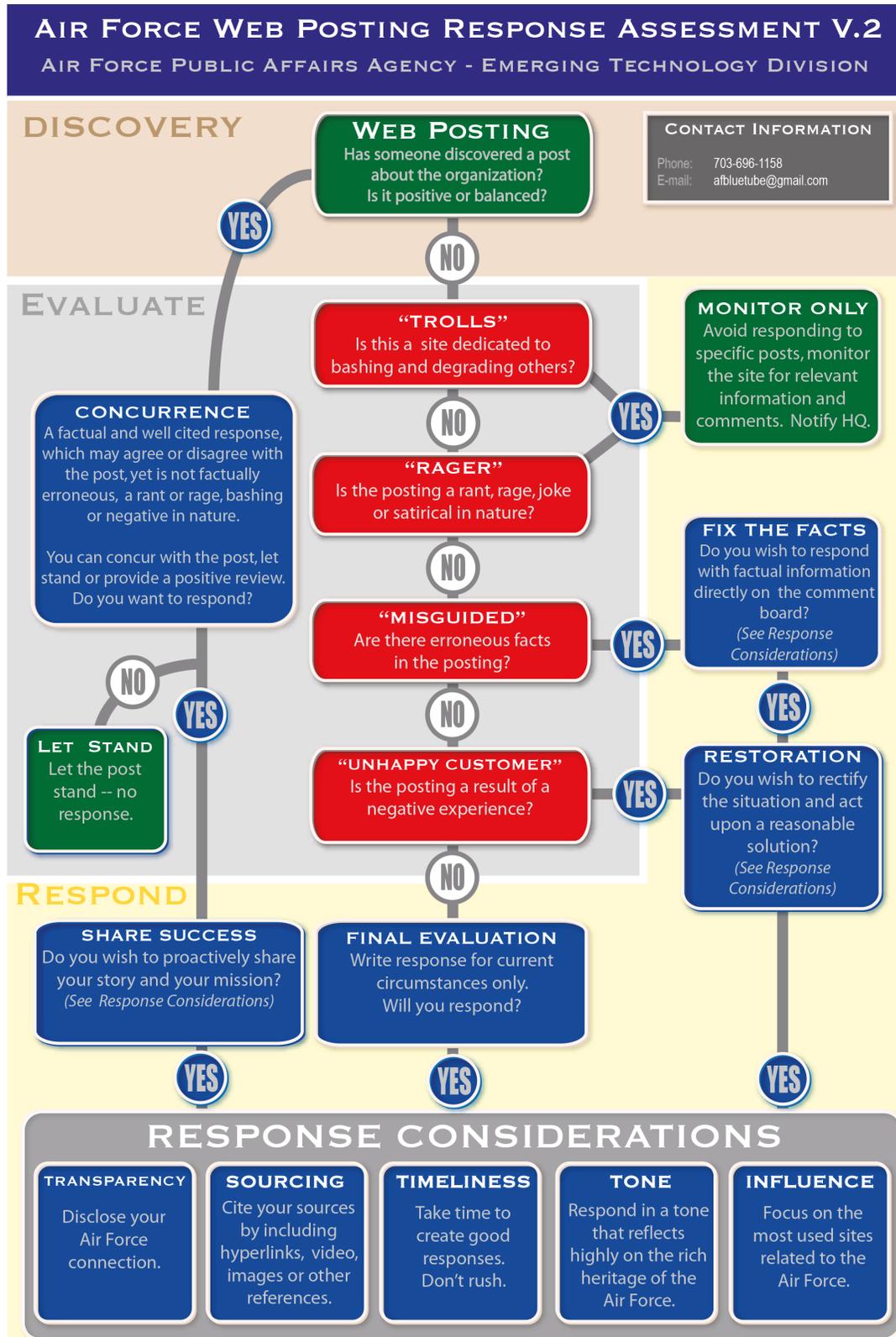
Be a consumer of social media as well as a generator. Monitor others in your fields for ideas and information that can be a part of your social media.

COMMENT AND LIKE

The goal of social media is to be social. Offering comments encourages people to visit your site, and shows activity for your feeds. Keep in mind that if you are commenting as an official part of your job, indicate who you are and your affiliation. Nothing will undermine your credibility faster than attempting to "astro-turf" – making fake grass roots posts. Remember that even if you do not use your name or a known account to post, your IP traffic is logged and can be discovered. If you see comments that you feel require a university response, please alert the appropriate members of the Northwestern State External Affairs Division.

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FLOW CHART EXAMPLE - AIR FORCE



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CONTACT INFORMATION

WE ARE HERE TO HELP

If you want to learn more about using social media to interact with colleagues or students, please reach out to the Coordinator of Social Media or the Director of University Marketing and Branding.

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