

PENNSTATE



SOCIAL MEDIA AT PENN STATE

Guidelines for University Communications and Marketing Professionals

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These guidelines were created by Penn State's Office of University Relations.
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Why do we need guidelines for social media?

This document outlines for Penn State marketing and communications employees guidelines for communicating online. Social media has moved quickly to the mainstream and chances are great that you or your employees will use these online tools for personal or professional purposes.

Social media guidelines set employer expectations, while empowering employees to tweet or blog. In addition, guidelines educate staff on issues and items to avoid in both personal and professional status updates.

Employees in communications and marketing positions at Penn State must be aware that when representing Penn State, we need to comply with uniform policies and present one clear message. These guidelines apply to employees when they are participating in social media for work and during personal online activities that may give the appearance that they are still speaking for Penn State.

This document provides guidelines gleaned from first-hand experiences using social media for Penn State. We hope that you will find the information useful.

What is social media?

Blogs, social networks and Web sites such as Wikipedia, Facebook, Flickr, Second Life, Twitter, MySpace and YouTube (to name a few) are examples of social media and provide exciting new channels for us to share knowledge and connect with others.

Because social media channels are still new to many people, we've assembled these "best practice" guidelines from respected online and industry sources to help you use these forums effectively, protect your personal and professional reputation, add quality to Penn State and follow University policies.

The purpose of social media

Social media offers us the opportunity to engage in conversations with those who care about Penn State and to hear directly from them. Social media has helped to initiate new conversations, respond to feedback and maintain an active dialogue with friends, fans and others.

Involvement by University marketing and public relations departments in social media can help grow our brand, strengthen our connection between the University and the publics we serve and make us aware of what people really think about Penn State.

General Guidelines

1. Be responsible in your communications.

The keys to success in social media are honesty, thoughtfulness and awareness of your audience. Make sure your communications are in good taste. Be sensitive about linking to content. Redirecting to another site may imply an endorsement.

Above all, exercise good judgment and common sense. Do not use profanity, slurs or derogatory comments. Be civil.

There's no such thing as a "private" social media site. Remember that what you post has a longer shelf life than you do. 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.

2. Be transparent and authentic. Be yourself.

Be honest about your identity. If you are authorized by your supervisor to represent Penn State in social media, say so. If you choose to post about Penn State on your personal time, please identify yourself as a Penn State faculty or staff member when appropriate. Never hide your identity for the purpose of promoting Penn State through social media.

Never pretend to be someone else and post about Penn State. There have been several high-profile and embarrassing cases of company executives anonymously posting about their own organizations.

The essence of community is the idea that it exists so that you can support others and they, in turn, can support you. Learn to balance personal and professional information, and the important role that transparency plays in building community.

A good resource about transparency in online communities is the Blog Council's "Disclosure Best Practices Toolkit" at <http://blogcouncil.org/disclosure/>.

3. Be accurate.

Make sure you have all of the facts before you post. It's better to verify information with a source first rather than post a correction or retraction later. Cite and link to your sources whenever possible; after all, that's how you build community.

If you make an error, correct it quickly and visibly. This will earn you respect in the online community.

4. Respect copyrights and fair use.

Always give people proper credit for their work, and make sure you have the right to use something before you publish. Only those authorized by Penn State may use the University's marks or logos, so be sure you do not include Penn State brand symbols in your personal postings.

5. Remember to protect confidential & proprietary information.

Being transparent doesn't mean giving out the Colonel's special 11 herbs and spices used in KFC chicken. Online postings and conversations are not private. Do not post confidential or proprietary information about Penn State, its students, its alumni or your fellow employees. Use good ethical judgment. Follow University policies and federal requirements, such as FERPA.

6. Productivity matters – respect University time and property.

University computers and your work time are to be used for University-related business. It's appropriate to post at work if you have been instructed to do so or your comments are directly related to accomplishing established work goals, such as seeking sources for information or working with others to resolve a problem. Maintain your personal sites on your own time using non-Penn State computers.

7. Endorsements

Do not use Penn State's name to promote or endorse any product, cause or political party or candidate.

Also, linking to other sites is usually a good thing, but it's important to consider the associations you want to share with potential applicants, donors and research funding agencies. Do you want to link to your favorite bagel or bicycle shop or would linking to the National Science Foundation, the NCAA, NASA or the American Medical Association make more sense and add more prestige to your site?

8. Monitoring comments

Most people who maintain social media sites welcome comments—it builds credibility and community. However, you can set your site so that you can review and approve comments before they appear. If you choose to delete comments, you should have a

policy on unacceptable posts that is easy for viewers to see, such as: **The following comments are subject to editing or rejection:**

- Comments including blatant profanity, racist, sexist, or derogatory content
- Product advertisements
- Political support
- Comments that are off topic or SPAM
- Comments that are personal attacks on an individual

In general, if the content is positive or negative and in context to the conversation, then we approve the content, regardless of whether it's favorable or unfavorable to Penn State.

9. Be relevant.

Facebook, YouTube and other social media sites are meant to be interactive, current and engaging. If you find your site is not relevant, has few posts or receives little traffic, it would probably be best to kill the site and use your energies on other communications endeavors.

10. Add value.

Social media will more likely pay dividends for you if you add value to your followers, readers, fans and users. If it contributes directly or indirectly to the improvement of Penn State; if it allows the general public to learn more about Penn State; or if it builds a sense of community and helps fans and friends feel more connected to Penn State, then it is adding value.

If your Penn State-focused Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr or Twitter platforms offer links, you are encouraged to tie them into the University's core branded sites, which have a broader appeal, large followings and constant updates. These sites include:

<http://www.facebook.com/pennstate>

<http://www.youtube.com/pennstate>

<http://twitter.com/pennstatelive>

http://twitter.com/penn_state