

## Safe Use of Social Media

### Best Practices Can Protect Your Organization



If you've shared a photo on Facebook, connected with colleagues on LinkedIn, shared a video on YouTube, commented on a blog post about your favourite restaurant, or Tweeted or Re-Tweeted any message, you've participated in social media.

With so many users participating every day, social media has truly changed the way we communicate, consume and curate information. Organizations and institutions of all sizes have recognized the power of social media to communicate and engage with their constituents. They have come to understand how social media can be used to increase awareness, broadcast news, engage communities of interest, expand their reach and drive critical fundraising efforts.

However, while employees and volunteers may be encouraged to use social media to share information, there is a fine line between the personal and professional. Employees and volunteers need to understand how their comments may impact the organization, even when these are posted from their personal social media accounts.

The misuse of social media may cause serious harm to an organization. Posting questionable Twitter messages or uploading inappropriate photos to Facebook reflect negatively on an organization's brand and image... and can cause irreparable harm.

Here are some social media best practices to share with your colleagues, employees and volunteers:



## Do

- Post meaningful comments, be respectful to others and use common courtesy.
- Keep your comments polite and professional if you disagree with a comment and wish to post a response.
- Post information that supports the organization's brand, products and services.
- "Like", "favourite", or share information from other sources that reflects positively on the organization.
- Make it clear when you are using a personal social media account that while you work for a particular organization you are not a spokesperson. Some organizations ask employees and volunteers to include a disclaimer on blog posts that their comments do not reflect the views of the institution.

## Don't

- Post something you're not sure about—there is no "delete" on the Internet.
- Post confidential information about the organization—financials, strategic plans, legal matters, or details about products or services that are not public knowledge.
- Post information or comment on topics outside of your area of expertise. Instead, pass them along to your supervisor or the appropriate department.
- Comment on negative posts about the organization. Have a plan in place for who will deal with such matters and pass the information along to that person in a timely manner so that an appropriate response can be posted.
- Engage in topics that can be considered controversial or a crisis situation—leave this for senior management.
- Post images/photos of children and young people unless it is part of your organization's mandate and you have the approval of senior management.

## Social Media Policy for Employees & Volunteers

Establishing a social media policy can protect your organization. Such policies often reside within the Human Resources department along with other policies and procedures. It is important that employees, volunteers or anyone who is acting on behalf of your organization knows the rules, and acts responsibly and in a manner that protects the organization's image and reputation.

Employees and volunteers can be your greatest brand ambassadors, especially those who are social media savvy and have a large network, but they may be wary about sharing or commenting about the organization. Developing clearly defined rules and guidelines of what individuals can and cannot

say when communicating information about the organization can protect both.

A key to ensuring the adoption of a social media policy is to keep it simple—a long, cumbersome document likely won't be read. If your legal counsel recommends having a comprehensive policy, you may want to create a one- or two-pager highlighting the main points to distribute to employees and volunteers. Consider reviewing the policy with employees as part of onboarding, and perhaps have a signed copy in their HR file. Include a review of the social media policy as part of volunteer training and orientation.

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## Ongoing Social Media Moderating

For employees or volunteers who are monitoring or posting to social media and engaging with followers on behalf of the organization, a separate social media policy or plan is helpful. This activity often resides within the marketing, communications or public relations department.

In this case, the policy would address scenarios such as how to respond to negative comments, who to contact when information is out of the scope of their expertise, when to escalate a complaint, and when a situation becomes a crisis. Some social media teams consist of representatives from various departments such as customer service, IT or finance so these individuals can quickly respond to questions or comments in their area.

## What to do if...

In the event there is a violation of the policy, you will need to have an action plan in place to respond quickly. Your Board of Directors and/or leadership team will likely be involved in determining the consequences based on the severity of the situation. The action plan may also include crisis management if there is negative publicity about your organization in social media not initiated by an employee or volunteer.

For more information and related Risk Control Bulletins, visit [www.ecclesiastical.ca](http://www.ecclesiastical.ca)

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