



**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.**

## **Best Practices Can Protect Your Organization**

With so many users participating every day, social media has truly changed the way we communicate, consume and curate information, and is embedded in our everyday lives. Organizations and institutions of all sizes have recognized the power of social media to communicate and engage with their stakeholders. They have come to understand how social media can be used to increase awareness, broadcast news, involve 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 personal and professional views. 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 Tweets 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. Use neutral or positive language when responding to a negative comment and ask the person if you can send them a private message to contact them to obtain more information or clarification.
- Have key messages prepared for negative comments that your organization could encounter.
- Address all negative comments in a timely manner. Do not let them sit unresolved for other customers or clients to see.
- Post information that supports the organization's brand, products, and services.
- "Like", "favourite", or share information from other sources that reflects positively on your organization or aligns with your organization's brand.
- 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.
- Check to make sure you are posting from the right account.
- Create a social media policy on use and behaviour for your employees and volunteers to read and sign when they are inducted to your organization.
- If using a personal image of an employee or a volunteer, then you require their permission to do so. Have them sign a release form granting authorization for your organization to use the image(s). It is a good idea to discuss and have forms completed at orientation sessions.
- Check that all images, photos, and videos that you post have nothing contained in them that breaches the organization's privacy or a person's privacy.
- Encourage employees and volunteers to report any social media concerns or policy breaches.

## » Don't

- Post something you're not completely sure is true or accurate— 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 personal information about other employees or volunteers.
- Post information or comment on topics outside of your area of expertise. Instead, pass them along to someone in your organization who does. If your organization cannot offer a professional opinion, try to recommend a trusted alternative organization who can help them.
- Engage in topics that can be considered controversial or sensitive — refer this to senior management.



## Creating a social media policy

Establishing a social media policy can protect your organization. Even if your organization does not use social media, your employees and volunteers are very likely to. The policy should clearly define what is considered personal and professional use. Key departments should be involved in creating the policy such as IT (whether inhouse or outsourced), Human Resources, legal and marketing/communications/public relations. Such policies usually reside within the Human Resources department along with other policies and procedures.

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 will not 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. Employees and volunteers should be aware of the consequences for failing to adhere to the social media policy. Consider reviewing the policy with employees as part of onboarding. It is also recommended that the social media policy be refreshed annually and signed off each time.

## What to include in a social media policy?

- Definitions of personal and professional use, and how both can impact the reputation of the organization
- Details about the types of people who can represent the organization on social media, which platforms used, and what training will be provided to them
- Guide and expectations for posting and monitoring posts
- How to respond to comments, both positive and negative
- What steps to take on social media if your organization is facing a crisis
- Controlling access, security, passwords, and frequency for changing passwords
- Legal compliance
- Disciplinary policy for failing to comply with personal or business social media use

You may decide to create two versions of this policy: a general one for all employees and volunteers, and a more detailed version for those who have permission to post on behalf of the organization. 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 that touch 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 with your Human Resources department. Your Board of Directors and/or leadership team will also likely be involved if the situation is severe.

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

## Reference:

<https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-policy-for-employees/>

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