

Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices for Brown University

Social media are powerful communication tools that impact organizational, professional, and personal reputations. They also easily blur the lines between institutional and personal voices. The following guidelines explain the best use of social media to enhance professional and personal communications while protecting reputations. This text is adapted from materials prepared by Ball State University and DePaul University.

Guidelines for Institutional Use

- **Be confidential.** Be careful not to reveal confidential or proprietary information about Brown students, employees or alumni. Adhere to all applicable University and federal and privacy and confidentiality policies.
- **Protect property.** Follow **copyright, fair use and intellectual property rights**. In some cases, content posted to a social media site becomes the property of the platform operator.
- **Protect the shield.** The Brown logo cannot be modified or used for personal endorsements, and the Brown name cannot be used to promote a product, cause, political party or candidate.
- **Respect Brown.** Remain professional. As a representative of Brown, avoid postings that could be misinterpreted. Ask your supervisor or Public Affairs if you are unsure. Respect university time and property—Brown computers and time on the job are reserved for University-related business.
- **Respect others.** Social media sites are designed for two-way communication, and content contributed to a social media site may encourage comments or discussion of opposing ideas. As an administrator, you can and should respond when relevant, but consider how your response may reflect on you, your department and the University. If you are unsure about posting something or responding to a comment, ask your supervisor. You may remove comments libelous or offensive, but do not remove posts with which you personally disagree. Also, avoid criticizing other people and institutions. Doing so may alienate you from your audience, reflect poorly on Brown or escalate into a conflict.
- **Stay accurate.** Get the facts straight before posting them on social media sites. When possible, link back to the original source. Review content for grammatical and spelling mistakes. If you make an error, correct it quickly and visible.
- **Remain transparent.** Be honest about your identity. Because no individual departmental social media site represents all of Brown, clearly link pages, account names, images and content to a particular department or unit within Brown. If you choose to post about Brown on your personal time, please identify yourself as a Brown student, faculty or staff member. Never hide your identity for the purpose of promoting Brown through social media.
- **Be safe.** Be cautious of "phishers." Phishing is the attempt to gain control of a personal or institutional social media site by deceiving a user into revealing the account's username and password. Monitor your social media sites carefully to ensure you notice quickly if

an unauthorized person gains access—the larger your audience, the more tempting your site becomes as a target.

- **Connect thoughtfully.** Connecting to other social media members and sites builds credibility and community but could also give the unintended impression that your site endorses a certain cause, group or person. Consider carefully who you “friend,” “follow,” link to or allow into your site and to what extent you will allow comments. Help the Brown community stay connected by linking back to the Brown homepage and other Brown social media sites. When possible, link to a Brown news source instead of an outside source.

Guidelines for Personal Use

- **Think before posting.** Privacy does not exist in social media. Public posts are indexed in search engines, and private comments can be forwarded or copied and easily made available to the public. Use privacy settings to restrict personal information on otherwise public accounts, but be aware of the limited protection this provides. Remember that what you post on your personal page could haunt you professionally.
- **Be authentic.** Be honest about your identity and don't misrepresent another person. If you identify yourself as a Brown faculty or staff member in a personal post, also make clear that your views are your own that that you are not formally representing Brown.

A common practice among individuals who write about the industry in which they work is to include a disclaimer on their site, usually on their "About Me" page. If you discuss higher education on your own social media site, we suggest you include a sentence similar to this:

"The views expressed on this [blog, Web site] are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of Brown University."

This is particularly important if you are a department head or administrator.

- **Take the high ground.** If you identify your affiliation with Brown in your comments, readers will associate you with the university, even with the disclaimer that your views are your own. Remember that you're most likely to build a high-quality following if you discuss ideas and situations civilly.
- **Be a valued member.** If you join a social media site like a Facebook group, or comment on someone's blog, make sure you avoid contributing self-promoting content unless it is of interest to readers. In stead, focus on offering valuable insights or useful information. Generally, in social networking, self-promotion is viewed negatively.
- **Protect your identity.** While you want to be honest about yourself, don't provide personal information that scam artists or identity thieves could use against you. Don't list your home address, telephone number, or e-mail address. Be aware of "phishers" or those who might try to hack your account, and reset your password in the event of a breach. Always log out of your account when using public computers.
- **Be aware of liability.** You are legally liable for what you post on your own site and on the sites of others. Individual bloggers have been held liable for commentary deemed to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene (as defined by the courts). Employers are increasingly conducting Web searches on job candidates before extending offers. Be sure that what you post today will not come back to haunt you.
- **Protect the shield.** The Brown logo cannot be modified or used for personal endorsements, and the Brown name cannot be used to promote a product, cause, political party or candidate.
- **Link back.** You are welcome to link from your social media site to the Brown homepage and Brown social media sites.

Best Practices for Social Media Site Managers

- **Plan first.** Consider messages, audiences, goals and your strategy for keeping information timely. Some audiences may be on one social media platform and not another, and some sites provide more flexibility than others. It is time-consuming to maintain more than one social media site at a time so choose carefully. Creating a content calendar can also help organize postings and ensure that you won't forget to post new content.
- **Assign responsibility.** When possible, identify a full-time appointed employee responsible for social media content and monitoring. If responsibility is not assigned, new content might not be posted, and the site will wither and die. As your site grows, you will also need someone familiar with the site to attest what is and isn't working for your audience.
- **Launch for success.** A common misconception about social media is that if you build a site, people will automatically come. Fill your new site with content, so your site doesn't feel empty. Remember no one wants to move into a ghost town. When you launch, announce it through your traditional channels: email, newsletter, and website. New audience members may not participate right away, but let them know you value their presence by sending them a welcome message or thank you for joining. Oftentimes, people don't want to be the first to break the ice, so try and recruit friends or co-workers to stimulate the discussion.
- **Interact with your audience.** Social media is meant for two-way communication. Nobody likes a robot that only spits out content and does not reciprocate communication. People google or read the news to get information, but people visit social media sites to interact with other people. Welcome new audience members, respond to comments, or follow up a posting with a question about the content. Engaging with your members will also make your site more valuable to them and keep them coming back.
- **Monitor comments.** Most people who maintain social media sites welcome comments—it builds credibility and community. Consider posting a disclaimer or comment policy to let audience members know what is and isn't appropriate. On some social media platforms, you can set your site so that you can review and approve comments before they appear. This allows you to respond in a timely way. It also allows you to delete spam comments and to block any individuals who repeatedly post offensive or frivolous comments.
- **Measure for results.** Make use of analytics and tracking tools to evaluate posting activity and interaction within a social media site. Facebook has built-in analytics for fan pages. Google Analytics can be used with blogs. When posting links on any social media site, use a link tracking service such as bit.ly. Some Twitter applications have this feature built into their software interface. These tools help you to refine your strategy and better understand your audience's preferences and behaviors.
- **Connect to the community.** Help Brown keep its online community connected. If you currently have a social media site, contact Public Affairs at 401-863-9273 or e-mail scott_turner@brown.edu, so we can list your site along with other Brown social media sites. Public Affairs will also assist you in reviewing multimedia to ensure its content represents Brown accurately and is in accordance with University identity guidelines. If

your department or group plans to start using social media, consider contacting Public Affairs to coordinate with other Brown social media sites and content, discuss best practices, and for general assistance.