

Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices

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As the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and its employees increasingly use social media, it's important for everyone to understand some basic guidelines and best practices while representing the agency.

The decision to open and expand use of social media at ODE is driven by the great potential that social media has to improve our efforts, our communication and our engagement with both internal colleagues and external stakeholders. It is a powerful way for employees to contribute to local, national and global conversations about ODE's work. To make the most effective use of social media, we all need to follow a few rules of the road.

The policies, guidelines and best practices that follow apply to all forms of social media (blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds, etc.) as well as Web sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Wikipedia, Twitter, Ning and LinkedIn. Keep these principles in mind if you are initiating messages or responding to others, if you are on or off the State of Ohio or ODE Web domains and networks, if you are using state equipment or your own, and if you are engaged during "clock hours" or off the clock. Remember that you represent the agency in both your personal and ODE-related social media efforts and therefore your conduct should remain professional.

For branding consistency and to avoid confusion, an official agency presence on sites such as Twitter, Facebook and the like are reserved for management by the Office of Communication Services. Your manager should know and approve of your interest in developing and utilizing social media tools. The Office of Communication Services is available to support these activities for your center and office.

Policies

Several existing state and agency policies relate to the use of social media. It is your responsibility to read and understand them and to ensure that your social media activities remain consistent with these policies.

- [ODE Information Security Policy ISP-019: Acceptable Use of Information Resources](#)
- [State of Ohio IT Policy ITP-E.8: Use of Internet, E-mail and Other IT Resources](#), particularly section 5.2: Unacceptable Personal Use and section 5.3: Participation in Online Communities
- [ODE Human Resources Policy 208.0: Contact with Media, Executive and Legislative Contacts](#)
- [ODE Information Security Policy ISP-005: Passwords](#)

Personal use of social media is subject to the same rules and limitations as e-mail and Internet use. ODE will regularly monitor and report your Internet and social media use to your supervisor.

Please remember that you are accountable for awareness and understanding of state and department policies. Violations may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination and the possibility of prosecution.

Guidelines

Be transparent

- While participating in social media, use your real name. Do not use pseudonyms. Clearly identify that you work for ODE and specify your role within the agency. If you have a stake in the discussion topic, reveal that at the outset.

Be sure of your content

- Think carefully before posting. Remember that postings on the Internet are available to anyone and everyone, are all but impossible to delete, are traceable back to the author and will exist and be retrievable virtually forever.
- Do not violate any of the applicable privacy, confidentiality or legal guidelines for external communications.
- Be particularly vigilant not to expose confidential student information. Exposing such information is a violation of ODE policy and state law and violations carry serious consequences.
- Be sure that all statements are accurate, factual and not misleading. Be sure that all claims can be substantiated and are approved.
- Never write anything you wouldn't be willing to say in front of the superintendent or see published in the newspaper. Assume that all our stakeholders will read your comments including ODE leadership, parents and students, teachers and administrators, local and state boards of education and elected officials.
- Do not comment, without the proper approvals, on legal matters, litigation or parties who may be in litigation with ODE or the state of Ohio.
- Be smart about what you share. Protect sensitive, restricted or confidential information.
- Never provide links to questionable materials or Web sites – especially those that are indecent, defamatory or extreme.
- Respect all copyright, intellectual property and proprietary rights laws. Do not plagiarize or use unauthorized images, written content, music or video.

Stay focused and work-related

- Keep your participation in social media relevant to your work at ODE.
- Focus your writing and postings on your areas of expertise.
- If you write on a topic that ODE is involved with and you are not the ODE expert, make that clear.

- If you post to external Web sites on ODE-related subjects and are not formally representing the agency, use a disclaimer stating that your thoughts and opinions are your own and do not necessarily represent those of ODE.
- Do not promote personal accomplishments, projects or causes.
- Do not digress into personal conversations.
- Social media outlets are not appropriate forums for addressing employment, personnel or other human-resource issues.

Healthy debate vs. inappropriate anger

- Never denigrate others or the agency. Be respectful and avoid personal attacks and insensitivity.
- We must tolerate respectful criticism and comments; at the same time, it is not necessary to respond to every criticism or negative comment.
- Be considerate – remember you cannot take back words once posted.

Best Practices

Perceptions

- By identifying yourself as a representative of the agency, you set perceptions in the reader about your expertise. Be sure that your content is solid and consistent with ODE values and professional standards.

Tone

- Keep your style both conversational and professional. Do not be overly composed, but be sure that your grammar, punctuation and spelling are correct in order to maintain professional integrity. Review and edit your postings before publishing.
- In general, act as you would with any work communication tool, such as e-mail or the telephone.
- Understand and respect the appropriate content, length and writing style for the medium you are using. Writing for Twitter is different from writing a blog entry, which is different from an e-mail.

Provide value

- The best way to break through the clutter of social media content is to write things that readers will value. The purpose of using these modes of communication is to benefit our coworkers and external stakeholders and foster a sense of community. If you are helping people improve knowledge or skills, do their jobs, solve problems or understand ODE and our work better, you are adding value.

Take responsibility; be accountable

- Remember, ultimately what you write is your responsibility. Participating in social media activities on behalf of ODE is not a right, but a responsibility with the same accountabilities as any other communication published on the department's behalf.
- If you are the least-bit unsure about something you are about to publish – stop. Take time to review these guidelines. If still uncomfortable, consult with your manager or other appropriate agency authority.

Mistakes

- If you make a mistake, be upfront, admit it and quickly correct it.

Attribution

Portions of these guidelines have been adapted, with permission, from *The State of Utah Social Media Guidelines*, *IBM Social Media Guidelines* and *Intel's Social Media Guidelines*.

References

GSA Social Media Handbook,

<http://www.gsa.gov/graphics/staffoffices/socialmediahandbook.pdf>

GSA Social Media Policy,

<http://www.gsa.gov/graphics/staffoffices/socialmediapolicy.pdf>

IBM Social Media Guidelines,

<http://www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html>

Intel Social Media Guidelines,

http://www.intel.com/sites/sitewide/en_US/socialmedia.htm

Social Media and Web 2.0 in Government,

http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/technology/other_tech.shtml

Web 2 0 Governance Policies and Best Practices,

<http://govsocmed.pbworks.com/Web-2-0-Governance-Policies-and-Best-Practices>