



A GUIDE TO USING U OF A SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

2015

Intent/Scope

This document provides guidelines for staff, faculty, students, and alumni who manage (create, moderate, and/or coordinate content) social media accounts on behalf of the University of Alberta. The same guidelines are suggested for contractors or agents of the university who may also be appointed to co-ordinate university social media accounts.

These guidelines do not constitute University of Alberta policy, but they are consistent with numerous applicable **U of A policies** that protect privacy and ensure safety within our community. They are intended to highlight best practices and encourage the use of social media to advance the reputation of the university.

These guidelines are not meant to apply to faculty, students, staff, and alumni sharing their views on their own personal social media accounts.

Preamble

Social media is an effective way to advance the values and reputation of the University of Alberta. It allows the university the opportunity to engage with and respond to current students, prospective students, alumni, faculty, staff, and other interested audiences. The University of Alberta supports the use of social media by members of the U of A community, and faculties, departments, units and services are encouraged to have an official presence on third-party social media sites.

The University of Alberta will make every effort to establish and maintain excellence and accountability regarding the use of university social media accounts. As a social media account co-ordinator on behalf of your faculty, department, unit or service, it is your responsibility to represent the university in a professional, clear, and consistent manner, and these guidelines are intended to help you do so.

Those who use university social media accounts should not disclose any University of Alberta information or content that they are not specifically authorized to disclose, and should familiarize themselves with any and all applicable **university policies**, as well as provincial and federal **laws and regulations**. Further, it is expected that those who use university social media accounts will familiarize themselves with the university's **brand standards** and accompanying documents.

Getting Started

- Consider how your communication plans, department goals, or customer service objectives will be met in using a university social media account.
- Consider the implications, risks, and rewards in using social media in general, and familiarize yourself with the social media tool you would like to use before using it in an official capacity.
- Determine who will be empowered to respond directly to other users. If you are part of a team, determine protocol for who responds and when.
- Consider protocols and governance structures for passwords, management tools, and mobile applications.
- If applicable, get approval from the responsible supervisor to create and use an official university account.

Guidelines for using official U of A social media accounts

You are the university. Keep in mind that the things you say on University of Alberta social media accounts reflect upon the reputation of the university. This includes individuals acting as spokespeople for the university on its social media accounts. Understand that comments on university activities posted on university accounts should be appropriate to your position or role at the university. The sharing of personal views should take place on your personal social media accounts.

Think before you post. There is no such thing as a “private” social media site. Search engines can turn up posts years after the publication date. Comments can be forwarded or copied. Archival systems save information even if you delete a post. You can be held legally liable for what you post on your site and on the sites of others. Posted material you consider intellectual property may be considered otherwise due to the fine-print rules of the social media channels you use. Be sure that what you post today will not come back to haunt you or the university.

When in doubt, ask. If you are uncertain about how to respond to a comment, what information should or should not be shared, what type of tone or language to use, or even the best way to use a particular social media tool, ask for help from a supervisor or colleague. Work in concert with other social media co-ordinators on campus to develop and implement university strategies and initiatives. Share links and information. Let someone know if you are directing a user or question their way.

Maintain confidentiality. Do not post confidential or proprietary information about the University of Alberta, its students, faculty, employees, or alumni. Use good ethical judgment and follow university policies. As a good rule of thumb, don't post anything that you would not present publicly at a conference.

Be aware of policies, regulations, and laws. Familiarize yourself with any and all applicable **university policies**, as well as **laws and regulations** related to privacy, consent, copyright, and the collection of information.

Be consistent, clear, and accurate. The University of Alberta has an international reputation for academic excellence. It's important to make sure the tone and content of social media messaging reflects this. Make sure that you have all the facts before you post. It's better to verify information first than to have to post a correction or retraction later. Cite and link to your sources wherever applicable and possible. If you make an error, correct it properly, quickly, and openly.

Be honest and transparent. Be careful not to misrepresent the University of Alberta by posting unsubstantiated information. This includes posting copyrighted material without appropriate permissions. This also includes making inaccurate claims or promises. Be honest about your identity. If you are authorized to represent the university in social media, say so.

Be respectful and accountable. What you write is ultimately your responsibility, but it is very important to remember that you are representing the University of Alberta. You are more likely to achieve your goals, and the goals of the university, if you are constructive and polite. When disagreements, complaints, or mistakes occur, remember to be positive and respectful in your comments. If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it is wise to delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed. Your reputation, and the university's, is best served when you remain above the fray.

Be engaged, thoughtful, and relevant. Make sure posts are of interest to your audience. Relevant information could include, but is not limited to:

- Sharing news stories, photos, video, and other content about your faculty, unit, department, service, or program.
- Announcing sports games, public speakers, plays, concerts, and other campus events.
- Announcing notices of interest to the UAlberta community (students, staff, faculty, alumni):
 - Website issues
 - Facilities updates
 - Academic scheduling
 - Deadlines (e.g., for fee payment)
 - Authorized emergency alerts

- Providing relevant and timely information about university resources:
 - Libraries
 - Bookstore
 - ONEcard
 - Student Services
 - Information Services and Technology
 - Campus Recreation
- Retweeting or sharing articles, information, and announcements from other University of Alberta social media accounts.
- Responding to and consulting users:
 - Admissions information
 - Issues with facilities
 - Getting around campus
 - Informed referrals to other university social media accounts
 - Feedback on user experience, campus experience, university services
- Engaging with users:
 - Good morning! Isn't the campus beautiful today?
 - Good luck on your exams!
 - Share your convocation photos with us!
- When relevant to your audience and appropriate to the university's brand and reputation, retweeting or sharing articles, information, and announcements from trusted external accounts.

Be timely. Monitor your social media accounts regularly. Respond to questions and concerns in a timely manner, even if just to say you don't have an answer yet but are following up. Correct misinformation quickly, and be quick to share timely information with followers.

Be alert. Report to and seek assistance from your supervisor or other relevant persons if you see something of concern, such as aggressive or hateful comments, bullying, fires or other emergencies, or an individual at risk. Also report to your supervisor if your social media account has been hacked or accessed by someone without permission.

To prevent the spread of false, misleading, or confusing information in the event of an emergency or crisis situation, share only information provided through the emergency version of the University of Alberta website, the main **university** and **University of Alberta Protective Services** Twitter accounts, or the main university **Facebook** page.

These guidelines are adapted from guidelines developed by University of Alberta Libraries, and the University of Alberta Information and Privacy Office. Many other university social media guidelines were used as reference, including guidelines at **Michigan State University**, **Brock University**, the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**, and the **University of Manitoba**.