Social Media for Community Groups

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my
community life

www.mycommunitylife.com.au

My Community Life is supported by the Community Engagement Team at Kingston Council.

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Contents

1. Introduction

This document has been developed on behalf of The City of Kingston for users of the My Community Life website.

It is a broad guide to help community groups and organisations without in-house communications expertise use social media. The aim is to help all groups improve communication and engagement with the community and get the most from the My Community Life site.

We encourage you to use this guide to explore and establish social media for your organisation in a way that delivers the greatest benefit, makes best use of your time, and protects you from undue risk.

The Guide has been written to be applicable to large community organisations and smaller community groups, so sometimes, especially for small community groups, all the information may not be relevant or practical. Use your best judgement to decide what information is relevant to you.

1.1. FURTHER INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

Although the guide has been written as clearly as possible, as you work through it you may have some questions, especially if it's the first time.

A good place to start is to speak to other community groups in Kingston that have experience using social media. Learn from their experiences, mistakes and successes.

There are also thousands of social media "how to" guides and videos available for free online.

This guide has been developed by Activate Consulting and Symphony3 for the City of Kingston. You will find additional free social media resources available on the Symphony3 website www.symphony3.com.

2. What is social media and why is it important to get started?

Social media are online services and tools used for publishing, sharing and discussing information.

They can include forums, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, micro-blogging sites, mobile communication apps and any other websites that allow individual users to upload and share content in real time from any location.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of social media tools now available. The most popular tools in Australia include:
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Blogs (such as Tumblr and Wordpress)
- YouTube
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn
- Snapchat
- Vimeo
- WhatsApp

Social media services and tools use a variety of different formats, for example text, pictures, video and audio. These are increasingly being used by people on smartphones and tablets while out and about.

These days, you will also find social media tools in most traditional websites, making the internet more interactive and social. This might involve watching a video, using a live chat box, using social media share buttons, adding a comment and much more. Ten years ago most websites were like brochures and we could only read text.

For community groups, social media can provide new ways to communicate, share information and build networks locally, nationally, and internationally. It also allows you to reach new audiences based on common interests.

The unique ability for online tools and social media to enable people to talk, listen, support and collaborate with anyone, at any time and in any place, means that social media is here to stay, and is becoming the norm.

2.1. BENEFITS

Social media can help community groups and organisations:
- Get their message out quickly and effectively to a large number of people
- Listen to what the community is saying online and tailor their services to meet their needs
- Engage and grow online communities (often involving people they would never have engaged through traditional communication)
- Target information to certain users in certain channels
- Collaborate with and get input and assistance from the community
- Communicate in real time with stakeholders (e.g. live from events)
- Share information more easily internally between staff, volunteers and partners

By effectively using social media community groups and organisations can:
- Raise their profile within the community
- Increase the number of participants in programs and events
- Raise more money
- Recruit and retain more volunteers

2.2. IS SOCIAL MEDIA RISKY?

Some people, increasingly in the minority, still think the risks of using social media outweigh the benefits. The risks often cited include:
- Spending lots of time on social media without any benefit
- A member of an organisation saying something untoward that may attract negative attention to the organisation
- A member of the organisation sharing confidential information with the public

While these risks exist they can be reduced by having good policies and guidelines in place, and giving all social media users appropriate training.

The objective of the My Community Life Social Media Guide and sessions is to provide the training and tools you need to enter the social media world with confidence.

Perceived risk	Management technique/tools	MCL guidance/tools provided?
Loss of control of the message	Guidelines and training	Yes
Excessive personal use by staff	Policy and culture	Yes
Critical posts about the organisation	Response guidelines	Yes
Little return on time invested	Integrated in planning processes	Yes
Resource implications	Decentralised approach	N/A
Inappropriate use by members, staff or volunteers	Policy, culture, guidelines and training	Yes

In reality, the biggest risk to your organisation in today's world is to decide not to use social media. The risks of not using social media include:

- Not understanding the needs of your community
- Not being able to get your message to all of your stakeholders (who increasingly consume news and information in these channels)
- Not hearing what the community is saying about you, or about issues relevant to your group
- Not enabling the community to communicate with you in their preferred channels
- Missing out on the large online audience for your events and volunteer opportunities

If you trust your members and staff to speak to the community in person or over the telephone, by letter or email then shouldn't you trust them to appropriately communicate via social media?

2.3. HOW DO I GET STARTED?

This will guide you through the process of getting started on social media. It outlines the key issues your group or organisation should consider, how to choose social media channels to use, and how to put it all together for best effect.

Supporting documents also accompany this guide and are available to all participants. These include:

- The Social Media Guidelines and Response Guide Template
- A Guide to Facebook for Community Groups
- A Guide to Twitter for Community Groups
- A Guide to Instagram for Community Groups
- A Social Media Content Planning Template

Technology is changing so quickly that there will always be new social media channels to consider and often it's a matter of trial and error to find what works best for your particular needs. The most important thing is to listen and learn from the feedback and the data you receive along the way.

3. Preparing your organisation for social media

If you are going to use social media in your community group it is important that you have some basic foundations in place to ensure success.

3.1. LEADERSHIP (FOR LARGER ORGANISATIONS)

Using social media means adopting a more open culture in your organisation. For older, more conservative organisations this can be a massive cultural shift. It is important that social media is championed and endorsed by the leaders of the organisation.

Without leadership buy-in and commitment at the highest level social media will rarely be a success. Leadership commitment to social media can open doors to the awareness and resources needed to make it a success.

3.2. PUT SOCIAL MEDIA IN YOUR BUSINESS AND MARKETING PLANS

To make social media a success it should be included in business and marketing plans and there should be some goals attached to its use. This will allow you to measure its success (or failure) and determine its value to the group or organisation.

3.3. CENTRALISED / DECENTRALISED (FOR LARGER ORGANISATIONS)

Many larger organisations start their social media journeys with a centralised approach where there is one department, or even role, solely responsible for all social media.

The alternate approach is a decentralised model where many departments or individuals across the organisation access and use social media (subject to approved guidelines).

The authors of this Guide know, and have seen first-hand, how social media empowers employees and volunteers to do great things and therefore strongly advocate a decentralised approach where all employees and volunteers are encouraged to use social media (where appropriate and with the right training).

3.4. POLICY/GUIDELINES

Once you have decided on how your organisation wants to use social media, it is important to develop a social media policy or guidelines that reflect and support your approach. A policy sets out the 'rules of engagement' to provide clarity and confidence to others using social media on behalf of the organisation and helps reduce potential risks.

A template has been provided for participants to use and accompanies this document.

3.5. RESOURCING

Developing and contributing to social media sites requires resources (time and money). This will vary depending on the channels you use and for what purpose. It is recommended that you start small, choose one social media channel and create a content plan and schedule that can be delivered with current resources. Once you have proven that it can deliver value you can grow your presence and ask for more resources! It is important to note that many organisations are

reallocating resources away from traditional communication channels rather than adding new resources.

3.6. TRAINING

Social media is software. When introducing it you should think of it as software, just like Microsoft Word or a new accounting system. Installing new software should always be accompanied by training and social media is no different.

Don't assume that younger members or staff automatically have the knowledge or confidence to use social media. Remember that just because people use social media in their personal lives doesn't mean they know how it can work for your community group.

We recommend at least two types of training:

1) Social media 101 – an introduction to social media, how it is being used around the world and how best to use it in your organisation and with your community. This includes training on managing risk and targeting the right audience. This training is usually delivered to a larger number of employees or volunteers within the group or organisation.

2) Tool specific training – specific training on Facebook, Twitter or whatever other tools the organisation chooses to use. This training may be for small groups or individuals.

3.7. RECORD KEEPING

It is not necessary to keep all online conversations. However, it is important to keep a record of anything significant or controversial that might become a mainstream media issue or cause legal issues in the future. You can record information through screenshots, links (if available) and detailing the time and location of the post.

To make it easy for larger organisations, there are some free/cheap programs available that will automatically back up all your social media activity at regular intervals and convert it to PDF for you to save in your records. Examples include Backupify and SocialSafe, but there are many more available by searching online.

4. Understand how social media works

Before starting with social media is it important to consider how social media works. In this section we look at two important concepts to help make sense of social media: the network effect and social media communication types.

4.1. THE NETWORK EFFECT

Social media is often referred to as "online Word of Mouth" because people can quickly share information with their networks of friends and colleagues, who can then share it with *their* networks of friends and colleagues. The ability to connect and engage with large number of people in this manner is one of the major benefits of social media. This ability is defined by the network effect.

The network effect is the effect that one user of a good or service has on the value of that product to other people. When a network effect is present, the value of a product or service is dependent on the number of others using it. This is best explained by the telephone. The more people that have access to a telephone the more powerful the whole telephone network becomes (as illustrated in the simple diagram (from Wikipedia) to the right). So while the telephone was useful when there were two people using it (as they could contact each other), it only became really powerful once huge numbers of people started using it.
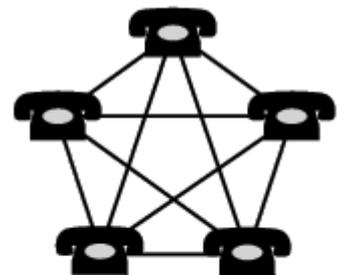
Social networks operate in the same way. The more people that are on a social network the more powerful it becomes. So while Facebook uses great technology what makes it so powerful is the sheer number of people using it on a regular basis to acquire and share information.
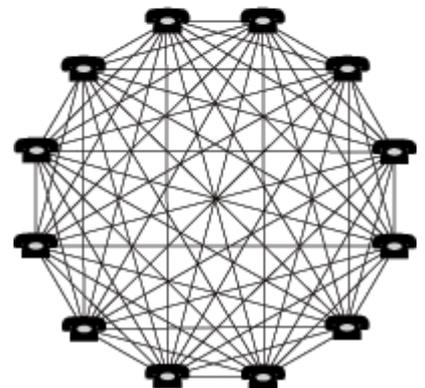
Community groups thinking of using social media must understand what networks their community is using. You may think LinkedIn is a great tool, but if your audience is not using it there is no real value in using it for your group. Conversely you may not personally like or even use Facebook but if your audience like it and prefer getting information in that channel it is probably a tool you should consider for your group. Basically your audience, not you, decides the tool you should use!

4.2. SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION TYPES

Social media is often used by organisations just to push information out. Using social media for outbound marketing is only one use and if you don't consider its other uses, you are limiting its effectiveness.

Community groups should look to use social media in five ways outlined below.
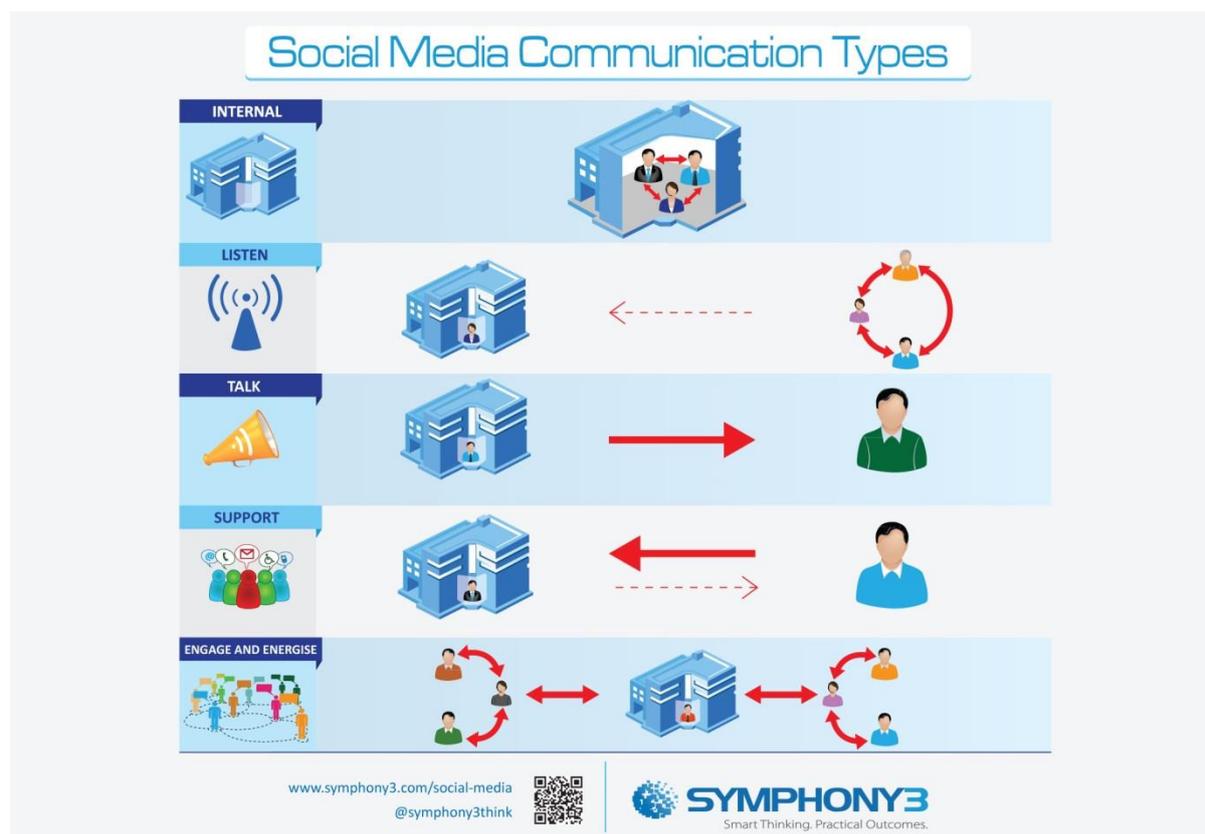
4.3. INTERNAL USE

Social media is a very effective way to reduce unwanted email trails and to share information within community groups and organisations. Consider using tools like www.yammer.com, Google Docs, Dropbox, Wikis and Blogs, WhatsApp and more to share information with your colleagues, members and volunteers.

4.4. LISTENING

Social media is a great channel to listen to what the community is saying. The search functions on Facebook and Twitter allow you to listen in on topics that are of interest in the community. Dedicated monitoring tools like Hootsuite and Sproutsocial allow you to listen to multiple social media channels at the one time. This can help you get a better understanding of the needs of your community and helps ensure your group offers the services and events the community wants. (See Appendix One for more information).

4.5. TALKING

Talking on social media allows your message to reach large numbers of people very quickly. However it is important to understand who you want to talk to, and what they want to hear from you. If you post good content people will listen when you talk.

Content should be:
- Digestible: Content should be easy to read, use simple language, bullet points, clear headings, images, graphics and video where appropriate
- Solve a problem: The content you post should deliver value to people who read it. There is no value in posting content that is not useful to your audience no matter how good it is.
- Relate to your expertise: Content you post on social media (in a non-personal context) should always be in line with your expertise. Post content that relates to the services and value you offer to the community. Refrain from posting content that is not related to the organisation or the community you serve.

(See Appendix Two)

4.6. SUPPORTING

Social media can be used to support your community. Are you prepared to accept private messages from your stakeholders requesting assistance? Do you have a roster of people to answer questions as they arrive via social media?

Social media is a great way to offer support to your community and people are increasingly looking for help on sites like Facebook and Twitter, especially because they can access these tools anytime of the day via smartphones. (See Appendix Three)

4.7. ENGAGING AND ENERGISING

Consider using social media to engage and energise the community. Can you get the community to share your content in their networks to give you wider reach (the network effect)? Can you ask the community to give you feedback or to contribute ideas and content? Can you get the community to post live on social media from your events? These are all fabulous ways to use the community to help spread your message and the value you offer.

Exercise: Under each of the five communication types write down three ways you can use this type of social media type for the benefit of your stakeholders.

Exercise: At the end of this document you will also need to complete a content planning template (see Part 6: Next steps)

5. Planning your use of social media

5.1. WHY?

Why do you want to use social media? Think about this question for a few seconds.

Until you can confidently answer this question and explain the benefits you want to get from social media you should not consider using it.

Social media should only be used if it can directly benefit the organisation and more importantly your members, volunteers and community. We believe almost every organisation can benefit from proper use of social media, but you must be clear about what you want to achieve. Answering this question thoroughly will set you on the right course and save you a lot of wasted time.

> Exercise: Take five minutes to write down in a sentence or short paragraph why your organisation should use social media.

> Tip: Your answer should include some mention of the benefits to your stakeholders/audience it may produce.

5.2. IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

Social media is all about communicating with your stakeholders in the community. You must clearly understand who it is your organisation engages with and/or wishes to engage with. Most organisations will have at least two or three different types of audience each with different needs.

If you know your audience and understand their needs, using social media becomes easier. Knowing your audience means you:
- Know the social media platforms they use and what they use them for
- Understand when and where they use these platforms
- Understand what type of content and messages they like to receive on those channels

It's a good idea to put together a basic profile of your audience(s) including:
- Age
- Gender
- Location
- Interests
- Other factors including education level, income, family status may be important
- What they need from your organisation
- What you want to say to them
- What communication platforms do they currently use? Have you asked existing stakeholders whether they use social media? If so which platforms and communication channels they would like to hear from you in?

> Exercise: Create basic profiles for up to three of your audiences. Share and discuss with your colleagues.

5.3. WHAT PLATFORMS SHOULD WE USE?

There are many choices and platforms to choose from in social media. Most community groups and community organisations tend to focus on the three main social media networks – Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Instagram and Pinterest are also growing in popularity. However, there are dozens of new social media channels, some of which may have a large audience base in the group you want to communicate with.

Determine which social media platform is appropriate for your organisation by looking at the following:
- Is our target audience using this platform?
- Are our competitors or similar organisations using this platform and are they having success? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Do we have content that can be shared on this platform?
- Will our updates be mostly text or visual?
- Will we be making any videos?
- How is our audience or community using this platform?
- Do we have resources available to manage an account on this platform?
- What are our targets and how will we measure success?

> Exercise: List the two social media tools you believe will be most effective for your group. Answer the questions above for each tool.

5.4. BRANDING

All your social media sites should have clear branding and identification. Branding helps build credibility and trust with your audience by providing a consistent and recognisable impression on every platform they interact with you on.

Like all other communications methods (letters, website, newsletter etc.) your social media site should follow the same branding/style. While it is possible for anyone to develop social media branding, the visual aspects of it will be much more engaging and encouraging if professionally designed. If you are a smaller community group, your local TAFE students may be able to create your branding as part of their coursework.

Social media branding requires:
- **A logo** – this is usually the formal logo of your organisation or of the specific program/service, if applicable. The logo will appear next to all of your updates, often in a square format. It is sometimes necessary to alter formal logos so that they present well in a square format.
- **Account name** – try to use the formal name of your organisation or program, however if it needs to be shortened check what the formal or commonly accepted abbreviations are. If your program name is especially long, it is acceptable to use the acronym as an account title.
- **Vanity URL** – most social media channels will allow you to customise your account's URL/web link. Generally URLs will match account names, however if your vanity URL is common name, it may already be taken. In this instance, try adding AU, AUS, official or suburbs to the end of your URL.

- **Images** – a variety of images may be needed to customise your social media platform, such as profile images, landscape/background images and header images. Find out the size needed for each image and crop your images accordingly. Do not upload oversized images because these may be scaled back by the social media platform in a way that reduces the effectiveness of the image. Always check how images interact with one another. If your profile image sits on top of your background image, can you incorporate them with each other? Do the images and colours complement or clash?

5.5. PAGE/PLATFORM RULES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR USERS

You should consider having page/account guidelines or 'house rules' that clearly tell users of your social media pages/groups/profiles what their responsibilities are when using your pages/groups/profiles. Set clear expectations about the level of responsiveness and engagement they can expect from you. This is particularly important on Facebook where people engage and comment directly on your page (for more 'fluid' tools like Twitter 'houserules' are not as important or relevant).

Consider covering the following on your site's 'about' section:
- What are the rules of participation?
- Is the membership of the group limited, and to whom?
- What would you like people to do?
- Acceptable/unacceptable posts
- Expected response timeframes
- Expected posting rate
- Other ways to contact you

A good idea to get you started is to look at the guidelines on other people's pages – this will help you decide what you may like to include and how to write it. The City of Kingston's Facebook guidelines can be found here: https://www.facebook.com/CityOfKingston/notes. Like all social media messages make sure your guidelines are concise and easy to read.

5.6. PRIVACY AND SECURITY

Most sites have privacy settings that can be adjusted to control who can access your profile and the information you post, however the default setting is usually set to full open access. If you want your profile restricted you need to understand the privacy settings on each site and adjust your settings to best suit your needs. Consider the implications of restricted access to your profiles and pages before changing your settings. For example, if you are trying to reach new people, restricted access to your social media channel would not make sense.

Login information should be kept secure and changed at regular intervals to protect unauthorised use or hacking of your page. Remember to:
- Choose passwords that combine upper and lower case letters and numbers
- Store login information in a secure location
- Change passwords every six months and when an employee/member/volunteer with access to social media channel leaves the organisation or group

5.7. PROMOTION

Once your page is up and running, it's time to look at how to build your audience. How will your content be found? How will people know your page is there?

There are ways to promote your page/profile without having to pay for an advertisement. The best way is to integrate it with existing communication channels, such as:

- **Online** – place links on your website, in e-bulletins and in your email signature block
- **Print** – promote social media accounts in your email newsletter, relevant brochures/posters/fliers, major publications, business cards and other stationery
- **Traditional media** – link to your social media accounts in any local newspaper advertisements, media releases and mention them on radio.

Other methods of free promotion include:

- **Liking/following related organisations online** – you can tag them in posts and this will appear on their wall/account.
- **Cross promotion** – when a project or initiative has a number of partners, you can post about it on your account, tag those organisations and ask them to do the same.

Most social media platforms allow for paid advertisements, which can be a good way to grow a base audience for new sites. Depending on the platform, social media advertisements can be targeted to audiences based on their location, age, gender, interests and whether they like/follow other sites. Social media advertising is cost effective with campaigns starting for as little as $10 or $20 to reach hundreds or even thousands of people.

> Exercise: List potential events and activities you would like to advertise on social media and the dollar amount

5.8. ACCESSIBILITY

Social media offers new ways to involve and interact with the community in many aspects of their lives. In the community access to social media accounts may be constrained by:

- Lack of computer access
- Inadequate skills or technical support
- No reliable internet connection
- Platform not compliant with web accessibility requirements

This is why it is essential to also provide information via other sources. It is recommended that you don't entirely replace traditional media with social media. Always provide information in other channels such as newsletters, bulletins, letters, brochures, posters, media releases and advertisements, etc.

5.9. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Copyright

Only use or reproduce copyright material, or the intellectual property of others, including applications, sound recordings (speeches, songs), footage (video), graphics (graphs, charts and logos), images, artwork, photographs, publications or music if you have permission from the creator or owner.

If you are using someone else's work, always make sure it is properly attributed and linked back to the original source. Never post images you don't own or have permission to use. However, you can share posts on some social media sites without asking for permission if the original source has made the 'share' function available. If the share option is not available on an image/post you want to share, it means the page owner has tightened their security settings and does not want anything shared.

Defamation

Defamation laws are actionable regardless of the medium. Even if you did not create the defamatory material, anyone who shares information on social media can also be liable for defamation action. There are some exceptions to defamation, including that the statement was an honest opinion or was true. Always uphold acceptable content standards.

Privacy

Be sure to maintain confidentiality and respect the privacy and property of others. Only discuss publicly available information and preserve the confidentiality of internal discussions and personal or private information about people.

Seek the permission of anyone who appears in any photographs, video or other footage before sharing it via any form of social media and, if asked, remove materials as soon as practicable. Verbal consent is usually fine for adults, but a good rule of thumb is to always have written consent for images or videos of children.

> Exercise: List any legal concerns you may have and the actions you must take to ensure all planned activity is within the law.

6. Next steps

Congratulations, you are now ready to get stuck into social media! If you have worked through the exercises in the previous pages you have done the pre-work and explored why social media is right for your group and how it can best work for you.

You should now:
- Progress to training and setting up your social media profiles and pages
- Read through Appendix Two (about talking on social media) and then complete the content planning template provided in Appendix Six. Once you have done that you are ready to take the plunge!

Get started, be brave, have fun and you will see the benefits!

Appendices

7. How to listen effectively

7.1. LISTENING

One of the often overlooked benefits of social media that you can use it to listen what others are saying about your organisation and local issues. Good social media listeners listen in many different ways.

Examples include:
- Monitoring what people are saying to their organisation directly
- Listening to what people are saying to the general public
- Analysing trends and data
- Listening to what other organisations are doing

7.2. MONITORING

The level of monitoring required can vary depending on the platform and type of account. Issues can very easily be shared and quickly grow on sites such as Facebook and Twitter, so larger corporate accounts may need to be checked multiple times daily. However, accounts created for programs or services that generally aren't problematic or divisive, such as libraries and leisure centres, can be monitored less frequently.

There are monitoring tools available that make social media monitoring easier.
- **Sprout Social or Hootsuite** – can be set up to help you monitor activity across all your social media channels in the one place and allows you to search specific terms in your social media content. It also allows you to incorporate Google alerts.
- **Google alerts** – can be set up for specific key words and send you email notifications when it finds them in web pages, newspaper articles, or blogs. You could set up search terms such as your organisation/group name, president, suburb, service area or current event or program names.

7.3. ANALYTICS

Most social media platforms and your website will have inbuilt analytics available to measure the success of your channel and posts. This information can help you assess whether you are reaching your target audiences and can tell you:
- The demographics of users who like your page or read a specific post
- The level of engagement (likes, shares, comments) for posts
- How many users clicked on web links

Analytics are an important part of assessing the benefit of social media and showing return on investment. They should also be used to learn about what types of posts get the best engagement with your audience and to review the content strategy for each of your platforms.

Examples of social media channel analytics:
- **Twitter** – provides a summary of your audience and activity, as well as a list of tweets, mentions, direct messages and new followers
- **Facebook** – find out a summary of your fans, page views and referrer URLs leading traffic to your page
- **Google Analytics** – measures what happens on your website and where traffic is coming from. It will quickly tell you which social media channels and content are effectively sending traffic to your website.

7.4. REPORTING

Reporting on the progress of your page can help examine how well you are meeting your objectives and engaging with your audience. A good evaluation consists of quantitative (numerical/ comparable) and qualitative (interpretive value-based) measures.

Examples include:

Quantitative	Qualitative
Number of page likes, post likes, comments and shares	Positive or negative feedback from stakeholders
Reach of posts	Quality of comments in response to posts
Number of people who clicked on links in your posts	Observation

It's important to document what you are going to measure, when and what quantitative or qualitative measures you want to reach in order to be successful. These then become Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that you track along the way to see how you are going.

Example quantitative target measures:
- Page likes – 1000 likes within two years
- Reach – Average reach of 500 people per post within two years
- Shares – 100 total shares each month
- Link clicks – 200 users click on links in posts each month

When compiling reports it is important to provide associated insights and recommendations. Reporting data on its own has limited impact. By providing insights and recommendations the organisation can make decisions on what to do differently which in turn lead to improvements and better use of social media.

An important aspect of reporting is that it helps to keep social media top of mind in the organisation and can be used to demonstrate its value – which is a great basis for future business cases.

8. How to talk effectively

Talking effectively on social media is depends on having good content.

Good content should do three things:

1. **Digestible:** Content should be easy to read, use simple language, bullet points, clear headings, images, graphics and video where appropriate

2. **Solve a problem:** The content you post should deliver value to people who read it. There is no value in posting content that is not useful to your audience no matter how good it is.

3. **Relate to your expertise:** Content you post on social media (in a non-personal context) should always be in line with your expertise. Post content that relates to the services and value you offer to the community. Refrain from posting content that is not related to the organisation or the community you serve.
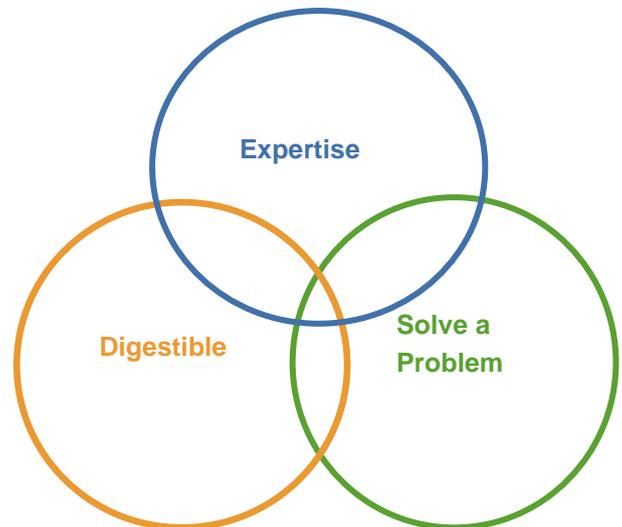
It's important to put some time and thought into what you post on social media. Much like any form of communication, the better the quality of the content the more engaging it will be.

Here's some additional advice to help increase the engagement and effectiveness of posts:

Keep it short and simple
Regardless of which channel you are using, succinct posts always get more interaction. Longer posts tend to perform poorly. The ideal number of characters in a post is between 100-199 characters, which is about two sentences. If you have more to say, it is best to include a link back to your website for further information, or include a video!

Use images/infographics
Visual posts get more engagement than text-only posts. Photos and infographics allow users to understand your message at a glance, even if they are quickly scrolling through their news feed they can still get the gist of your message from an image with a few words placed on it. Remember to get the dimensions of your image right so it doesn't get stretched, cropped or squashed.

Ask questions
Question posts get almost double the comments and replies than standard text-based posts. However, it is important to note that questions tend to get fewer likes and shares (on platforms that allow those functions). Certain types of questions will attract more comments. Posts that include should, would, which and why get more responses than those that include why and how questions. This is because the former can be more easily answered.

Curate and share content
You don't always need to say something original. When you see something interesting posted by another person or organisation, you can show this to your followers by using the 'share' function (if available). This is an easy way to ensure you maintain a regular presence on social media without needing to develop your own posts. However, content you share should still meet the three criteria for good content. Be mindful of posts you are sharing and what impression that may give about your organisation or group.

Tone and language
Social media is social. Language shouldn't be overly formal. It can be fun and interesting, similar to how you would speak to someone in person. Try to use strong, vivid language and active verbs to encourage more engagement.

8.1. PREPARING CONTENT

To prepare content you should develop a simple content plan. We have provided a template to accompany this document which you may use or change according to your needs. A content plan sets out a plan for the development and sharing of content over a period of time (e.g. three months). It should show:

- Who is responsible for the writing the content and by when
- When the content will be published (posted)
- The topic
- The content details – what is the thrust of the content, will you use imagery, video, infographics?
- Keywords to be used (so your content is seen on Google and in social media searches (e.g. hashtags))
- The intended audience
- The call to action (what you want the audience to do (e.g. book for this event))

	TOPIC/TITLE	CONTENT/DETAILS	KEYWORDS	TARGET AUDIENCE	CHANNELS	CALL TO ACTION
Author: Reviewer: Due Date: Publish Date:						
Author: Reviewer: Due Date: Publish Date:						

8.2. FREQUENCY AND TIMING

It's important to consider both *how often* you publish content on your social media platforms (frequency), as well as *what time* and *what day* you publish (timing).

Tailor the frequency of your updates for all of your social media platforms and experiment with what works best for your audience. There is no magic formula – the best advice is to put yourself in the shoes of your audience and think about how you would respond to receiving your updates.

Also consider the time of day to post on social media. On weekdays, more people tend to be online from 3pm onwards. At this time, most users are near the end of their work or school day and tend to become distracted or seek a break from what they are doing by going online. Of course, time of day will depend on who you are trying to reach.

8.3. PLANNING AND SCHEDULING

Once you have developed your content plan you can use scheduling functions on sites such as Facebook, or tools such as Sprout Social or Hootsuite which allow you to schedule posts on a wide variety of social media channels simultaneously. Posts can be scheduled up to six months in advance and in five-minute intervals.

Remember to keep a record of your scheduled posts and be mindful of posts you have scheduled well in advance because circumstances may change or new issues can emerge that make them no longer relevant or appropriate.

8.4. RESPONDING

Monitoring and responding to comments and questions quickly will make your audience feel welcome and help your community grow. Social media is about interaction and having a conversation – if you cannot commit to responding, this should influence the channel you choose, how you use it and the page guidelines you set.

Knowing when and how to respond to posts tends to be one of the most frequently raised issues, especially in the case of negative posts. There are no hard and fast rules, but here are some tips:

- **You can't pick and choose** – you must be consistent with the posts you respond to, not just the good ones, otherwise your audience will not feel that there is genuine engagement
- **Do not delete** – no matter how negative a post may be, do not delete it except if it violates the page guidelines (i.e. inappropriate language, defamation etc.). Often the best remedy is a polite, calm and factual response. Remember, your posts are seen by many more people than just the author of the specific post you are responding to.
- **Be timely** – set an expected response timeframe for your channel (for example 24 hours on business days) and do your best to stick to it – even if it means just placing a 'holding' response while you gather the information to respond fully.

To assist you, a suggested response guide had been developed to help guide you through the different types of feedback and how to respond (refer to the Social Media Guidelines and Response Guide Template provided).

Importantly, never respond when you are tired, angry, upset, under the influence of alcohol or not in a calm and clear mind frame. Give yourself time to clarify your thoughts about responding and even test your response with a colleague before posting.

9. Summary of major channels, benefits and considerations

Tool/Channel	Benefits	Considerations
Facebook	• Updates can be in the form of text, images or videos and apps allow special features such as polls. • Communicate with general or interest-based audiences. • Has a wide audience of all ages (minimum 13 years), locations and both male and female. • Accessed multiple times daily by users, creating the ability to provide timely or urgent updates. • Inbuilt analytics can provide insights on effectiveness of pages and campaigns. • Free, unlimited accounts with low cost promotion options. • Promotions can be targeted to specific locations, age groups or interests. • Posts can be scheduled for future dates. • More than 13 million Australian users.	• Requires regular monitoring. • Should be updated on a regular basis, unless event or campaign based. • Visual posts are more effective than textual, which can require additional time/resources to create. • Possibility for negative feedback from the community.
Twitter	• Predominantly text based, which requires less time/resources, however images and links to videos can be posted. • Provide concise updates on topical issues. • Tap into interest-based communities using hashtags. • Requires minimal bandwidth, which is ideal for use in emergency situations. • Effectiveness can be measured through use of hashtags and number of followers. • Almost 3 million Australian users.	• Requires regular monitoring. • Should be updated on a regular basis, otherwise tweets are buried by newer updates. • Updates cannot be longer than 140 characters. • Website links must be shortened using a service such as bit.ly, which creates another step and extra time to update. • Twitter is busy – with more than 340 million tweets per day it can be hard to cut through the noise. • Possibility for negative feedback from the community.

YouTube	• Updates in the form of videos only. • Some investment required in good video and basic editing equipment. • Take viewers through premises or show them your events. • Easier to explain complex or topical subjects through talking directly to viewer and providing visuals. • Videos can be exciting, inspiring and generate a great deal of interest. • Clips can be created on any budget. • Requires less ongoing monitoring and does not need to be updated regularly. • Almost 13 million Australian users.	• Requires more resourcing. Low/no budget videos tend to be less engaging than professionally made clips. • Greater investment in time needed to produce videos, anywhere from 1-4 hours per minute of finished video depending on the number of locations, subjects, planning, editing and revisions. • Videos should not be longer than about 2 minutes. • Possibility for negative feedback from the community.
LinkedIn	• Updates can be text based, images and videos. • Reach local professionals and businesses. • LinkedIn groups are a great place to network and share information. • Almost 4 million Australian users.	• Can take time to build connections. • Audience is very narrow and specific. • Higher levels of engagement come from user-based accounts (real people) rather than corporate accounts.
Instagram	• Updates in the form of photos only. • Create interest and excitement through visuals on things such as festivals, construction projects, etc. • Take viewers on virtual tours. • Tap into interest-based communities using hashtags. • Does not require regular updates. • Large text limit for captions (2200 characters), however text should always be concise. • Effectiveness can be measured through use of hashtags and number of followers. • Approximately 2 million Australian users.	• Instagram is about quality, not quantity. Photos are often of a high or professional quality and may be filtered or professional enhanced. To be successful, time and resources will be required. • Limited reach - users are mainly female and in metropolitan areas. • Possibility for negative feedback from the community.

Flickr	• Updates in the form of photos and videos. • Free accounts will display advertisements and has image and video size limits. • Can create general or interest-based groups. • Two-way interaction possible through comments on photos and videos. • Create interest and excitement through visuals on things such as festivals, construction projects, etc. • Give viewers visual introductions to your services • About 750,000 Australian users	• Additional resources required to create engaging photo and video content. • Can take time to develop an audience of followers. • Lacks detailed information on users, making it harder to establish whether you are reaching your target audience. • Less popular than other photo sharing sites, such as Instagram, and other video sites, such as YouTube. • Possibility for negative feedback from the community.
Pinterest	• Updates in the form of images, which are known as "pins" and can be grouped together on a "pin board". • Ideal if you want to target females, as the majority of users are women. • Content does not age in the same way as other social media sites, each board can remain prominent and relevant long after it is posted. • Almost 400,000 Australian users	• Additional resources required to create quality images. • Less effective for projects/programs with few images. • Can take time to develop an audience. • Less popular than other photo sharing websites.
Tumblr	• A versatile platform where updates can be made in seven different ways – text, photo, quote, link, chat, audio and video. • It's a free service. • Posts can be scheduled for future dates and drafts can be saved. • More effective at reaching a younger audience. • Almost 5 million Australian users.	• Can take time to develop an audience of followers. • Concise content works best on this channel. • It is possible to be anonymous on Tumblr, whereas similar platforms such as Facebook, require real names to be used. This increases the possibility of negative feedback from the community.
SurveyMonkey	• Highly customisable and easy to use survey service. • Analytical tools can provide quantitative data, some level of text analysis is also available and custom reports can be produced. • Easier for the community to register an account and answer surveys.	• Surveys are only free if they have less than 10 questions and basic features. • This service only offers surveys.
Google Plus	• Updates can be in the form of text, photos or videos. • Integrates well with search engines, making content accessible to more than just Google Plus users. • Updates do not have a character limit. • About 65,000 Australian users.	• Still has a relatively low reach. • Not supported by older browsers (some of which are still commonly in use). • Possibility for negative feedback from the community.

WordPress	• Updates can be in the form of text, photos, videos, surveys and more. • Free to use, however themes can be purchased. • Easy to use and customise. • Tags can be used to group information, making it easier to find details on specific topics. • Inbuilt search function for users. • Comments can be turned on or off. • Information can be as detailed as desired, which is good for community building, interest-based issues and following the progress of major projects. • Does not necessarily need regular updates, but expectations should be set in the "about" section. • More than 6 million Australian users.	• Requires regular monitoring if comments are allowed. • Blogs will be more engaging if professional designed, which requires resources. • The software is open source, making it more vulnerable to hacking.

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