Create a Social Media Policy

Social media policies come in all shapes and sizes. Some are short and concise, some use humorous examples to get the point across, and others carry on for pages. Whatever the format and tone, these guidelines should establish best practices for employee communications on social networks, and they also should outline a plan for internal social media marketing.

If you're trying to decide in the moment if an update is more appropriate for your business or personal Facebook page, you're more likely to skip it and never come back to it, which may be a missed marketing opportunity, says Sara Lingafelter, a social media strategist with Rogue Outreach and former attorney who specializes in organizational social infrastructure and policy. It sounds like a no-brainer, but in a world of juggling multiple events, developing a social media policy may be the last thing on a meeting planner's mind. It shouldn't be.

Here are a few quick guidelines for creating a social media policy.

Who Should You Involve?
Most importantly, your attorney. "Most companies who draft their own policies want to protect the company's reputation. This often leads to policies that are too broad and violate the National Labor Relations Act," says Ruth Carter, attorney and author of The Legal Side of Blogging: How Not to Get Sued, Fired, Arrested, or Killed. "Companies are more likely to be in compliance with this law if the focus of their policy is to respect their employees' First Amendment rights and on educating their employees about the long-term effects a single post can have on a person's professional life." Carter adds that with the National Labor Relations Board releasing new reports on a regular basis, companies should review and update their policies often.
Attorney Arif A. Mahmood, who advises businesses and legal organizations on intellectual property issues and social media policy, also warns of the potentially serious ramifications of a social media misstep. Sure, you can easily delete something after it goes online, but anything you put on the Web has a footprint. “It is permanent, instantly public and unretractable. … Drafting a policy reminds the owner and employees that the potential audience is unlimited and may include reactionary readers who may have personal connections on the topic and also parties related to clients who may have different perspectives.”

What Should You Include?

The following items should be part of an organization’s social media policy:

1. A statement explaining what the policy applies to. For example, it could say “multiple platforms, including but not limited to Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, for both personal and professional use.”

2. Online etiquette basics such as instructions on how to talk about the company, best practices for personal and professional usage, and a reminder of what information is proprietary and cannot be shared online. “Generally the risks of misuse by a business owner include unintentionally saying something offensive, divulging private information, or infringing on copyright or trademark rights,” says Mahmood. “The risks of misuse by employees is greater, often due to a lack of sensitivity of the impact of statements on the business itself. This is especially true as employees may be using their personal accounts and may discuss the event planning industry generally through their own accounts, feeling free to mix in personal observations.”

When communicating on behalf of your company, always identify yourself and your title and/or role. For personal handles and profiles, you may want employees to use a disclaimer such as “The opinions expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of [company’s name].”

3. Clear, established boundaries between company, personal brand, and personal life. “If you’re a sole owner/operator, you may want to primarily market your personal name. If that’s the case, then you’ll need to be careful with personal privacy settings on Facebook, and perhaps adopt a pseudonym for personal activities on Twitter and Instagram,” says Lingafelter.

4. Guidelines for talking about clients. If you plan to tweet about record registrations, post crowd shots of attendees on Instagram, or announce newly-booked speakers on LinkedIn, get client permission first. “Your social media policy and your engagement agreements with clients should jive with regard to what you have and don’t have permission to post from or about client events, and using client names and likenesses,” says Lingafelter. “You may need to update your engagement agreement accordingly, then honor what your clients agree to.”

5. Proactive encouragement. Give employees examples of what they can do, as opposed to listing all the things they should not do. Many companies struggle with getting a fresh stream of lively, relevant content to their followers, but this is one realm where event planners may have an advantage, suggests Lingafelter. “With rich photos and stories both of completed camera-ready events and fun behind-the-scenes glimpses … event planners are one of the rare groups who may struggle with having too much content to share.”

6. A plan of action. Arm employees with instructions on how and when to respond to complaints and negative feedback. “Don’t shy away from engaging in hot topics in public,” says Lingafelter. “A simple ‘holding message’ to let the complainer know that you’ve heard them and are looking into the issue doesn’t promise a follow-up but does acknowledge that they’ve been heard. You may need to shuttle the conversation to the phone … but remember that they chose social media as the channel to reach out, and that means they’d likely prefer a response via social.”

—Article originally published in Rejuvenate magazine, June/July 2013 and was written by Maria Carter, an Atlanta-based writer focusing on business, travel and other topics.
Yes, Your Church Can Stream Live Video

Into all the world. ... Never before has this mandate for ministry been attainable by so many. With the advent of live, Internet video streaming, it has never been easier. Live Internet video streaming allows you to broadcast your worship service in real time. An unfortunate misconception held by many churches is that this new technology is complicated and expensive. If your church has the desire to go online, it is possible to do it easily and inexpensively!

Every successful live Web streaming effort is made up of five elements: capturing video, preparing it for the Internet, using your Internet connection to send it to a big computer, distributing your video from the big computer to your audience, and having your audience view your video content.

**Capturing Video**

This is the most important part and something your church probably already does. While it would be great to use six-figure digital cinema cameras, you can get your ministry streaming online using what you already have. Virtually all smart phones have the ability to stream video live. Smart phones have the advantage of being a video camera, computer, and a telecommunications devices all in one, so you can capture, prepare your content for the Internet, and send your video to a big computer for distribution to your audience.

Many older high-quality video cameras have a firewire connection. These older cameras can interact with a computer with firewire to send your video content online. If you have a newer camera, there are low cost adapters available that will enable you to use your existing computer equipment.

**Preparing Video for the Internet**

This step is called encoding and is done by a computer. This computer can be one you already have. Software like Flash Media Live Encoder are free and WireCast gives you a few more options for a few hundred dollars.

**Sending Your Video to the Internet**

You need an Internet connection fast enough to support streaming your video to the Internet. This connection can be anything from a 3G cellular connection to a high speed DSL or fiber connection. Get the fastest speed you can afford.

**Distribution**

You will want to use a service like Livestream.com, Praizevision, Truthcast, Churchpond, or Ustream. These companies take your single video and distribute it to dozens or tens of thousands of viewers. These services range from free to a reasonable monthly subscription.

**Audience**

Like any process of communication, you must keep your audience in mind. For example, if your community is just getting online or primarily using mobile devices, you need to cater for the speeds and formats that mobile users can view.

You don't have to spend a fortune to live stream your ministry and you can start with what your church already has.

Colin Sandy is an expert in live Internet streaming, is co-owner of Sandy Audio Visual LLC in Laurel, Maryland, and can be reached at csandy@savweb.com.
Many ministries utilize social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to showcase what is happening. While Facebook and Twitter are great ways to spread the word about new and existing content, it is by no means the only relevant social media platform available to ministries. Google+ has broadcasting components that can make the promotion of content easier and can create more interactive reader experience.

**Back End SEO**

Simply setting up a Google+ page automatically gives you a little more search engine juice. Because Google+ is a feature of Google, the platform is designed to be more easily found by the Google search engines. Through the simple stages of page set up, you can choose to incorporate title tags, meta tags, and keywords through Google+’s step by step process – no extensive knowledge of coding needed – making your blog, Google+ page, and even individual blog posts more easily found through Google searches.

**Claim Ownership**

One of the best features of Google+ for a blogger is the ability to claim ownership of articles on your own blog as well as other blogs and sites. Should a post of yours gain notoriety or is simply something you find important, you can claim ownership of it. By claiming ownership of a specific post, your name will be seen, along with your blog post’s title, every time the piece shows up in the Google results pages.

The more often your name gets seen, the more likely you will be seen as an authority, and authorities are the ones who are more likely to have trusted content that readers share.

**Create Circles**

With Google+ Circles, you are able to place followers within certain groups. While this may seem cumbersome and even unnecessary for everyone, being able to place key influencers into a Circle can actually be highly beneficial. There’s a little check mark box before you share a G+ post that says “Also send email to this circle?” While you certainly don’t want to check that box every post and spam everyone in your circle, using it sparingly can mean more key people will see your blog post. They will get an alert in their inboxes that you shared a post with them.

Creating specific Circles will make sure that all of your followers aren’t feeling spammed by constant information that may not interest them. You can tailor what they see in your news feed.

**Join Google+ Communities**

Don’t be afraid to join as many communities that are relevant to you and your ministry. I am part of a church tech community and many other communities that involve technology. You can also share your individual blog post with different communities just as you can share it with different Circles.

**Multimedia**

Reading your content is great but seeing the person behind the content is even better. Don’t be afraid to also utilize Google+ Hangouts in addition to the other features the platform offers. Ministries can host Q & As through Google Hangouts, attend real time video chats with followers, and post tutorials that can help further establish themselves in their specific ministry field. Because Google+ Hangouts on air stream live on YouTube and automatically record to your YouTube channel, you have multimedia content ready to go when you click ‘End Broadcast.’ Or, use the free YouTube editor to add enhancements to your video. All you need to host or join a Hangout is an Internet connection and a webcam.

While Facebook and Twitter dominate the text based social landscape and it’s important to have a presence there, consider the face to face benefits of Google+. Its free digital tools are allowing more ministries to become broadcasters.
WHO/WHAT IS THE SOCIETY OF ADVENTIST COMMUNICATORS?
The society is a collaborative effort of Seventh-day Adventist communicators within North America to nurture the spiritual, social and professional growth of its members, foster a spirit of cooperative mission and mentor students interested in a communication career.

WHO ATTENDS THE ANNUAL CONVENTION?
Recent convention attendance averages upwards of 200 individuals—including a growing number from around the world.

Attendees could include professional communicators employed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church or volunteers working at the church level. Others attending are media professionals and university students who hope to become communication professionals. Whatever the role, this convention provides a great opportunity for networking.

Presenters at the convention include some of the brightest and best media and communication professionals in the country—and in 2013 many of them will come from the Salt Lake City area.

WHERE IS THE 2013 CONVENTION?
The convention will be held at the Sheraton Salt Lake City Hotel. The hotel offers a resort type experience in the heart of downtown Salt lake City. There is also complimentary shuttle service to the surrounding area as well as the airport. All meetings and exhibits will be located at this hotel.

WHAT’S THE THEME?
The theme is Communicating Christ in Chaos. The world we live in seems to be in constant chaos. How can we effectively share the good news of Jesus in times of crisis? This conference will examine ways to get the message of Christ across in times of chaos.

WHAT IS THE SCHEDULE?
The SAC convention runs Thursday, October 24, through Saturday, October 26. Thursday will feature media-related tours in the morning, afternoon workshops, and a fantastic opening reception with a communication showcase. Friday morning and afternoon will include a wide variety of workshops, an opportunity to participate in a community service project, and morning and evening keynote addresses. Saturday’s agenda is spiritual enrichment focused with worship, fun; and all capped off by the annual evening SAC Awards Banquet.
Join us at the Sheraton in Salt Lake City, Utah!

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24
7 am - 6 pm  Registration
8:30 am - 12:30 pm  Communication Tours
1 pm - 1:20 pm  SAC Welcome
1:30 pm - 4:30 pm  Workshops
4:45 pm - 5:45 pm  Communication Showcase
5:45 pm - 6 pm  Awards Part 1
6 pm - 7:30 pm  Opening Reception/Lite Fare

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25
7 am - 8 am  Breakfast/Awards Part 2
8 am - 5 pm  Registration
8 am - 8:45 am  TechTalk Live with Bryant Taylor & Chip Dizard
9 am - 10:15 am  Keynote Address: Kurt Kennedy, brand manager, speaker and trainer
10:30 - Noon  Special Interest Groups: Communication Education, Church Branding, Electronic/Broadcast Media/Radio, Print Media/Journalism, Public Relations, Graphic Arts, Web/Social Media
Noon - 1:30 pm  Networking Lunch and Business Meeting/Awards Part 3
2 pm - 3:30 pm  Topical Talks: news, social media & development, legal, & PR
2 pm - 3:30 pm  Breakout Sessions
3:30 pm - 4 pm  Break: Exhibit Showcase & Refreshments
4 pm - 5:30 pm  Workshops
5:30 pm - 6 pm  Break
6 pm - 7:30 pm  Dinner
7:30 pm - 9 pm  Evening Program: Martin Doblmeier, “The Adventists 2”

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26
8 am - 9 am  Breakfast
9:15 am - 10:15 am  Sabbath School: “The Record Keeper”
10:30 am - 11:45 am  Worship Service: Chris Oberg, pastor, La Sierra University Church, Riverside, Calif.
11:45 am - 12:15 pm  SAC Group Photo
12:15 pm - 1:30 pm  Lunch
2 pm - 6 pm  Afternoon Outing: Temple Square
6:30 pm - 10 pm  Awards Banquet