



# Sample Social Media Guidelines

## Background

For the purposes of these sample guidelines, social media is being defined as any online publication and commentary outside of website and e-newsletters. This includes blogs, wikis, and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, YouTube, etc. Publication and commentary on social media carry similar obligations to any other kind of organization publication or commentary.

These sample guidelines are based on best practices. As you are setting the rules for your social media accounts and the teams behind them, you may want to include some of these suggested guidelines. These sample guidelines should be customized to meet your unique strategies and needs.

## Digital Team

Enter your digital team members' names and roles. You may also want to consider including cell phone numbers for each member of the team so that you can be in contact outside of office hours if the need arises. Here are two examples:

- *John Smith, Content Manager (202–123–4567):* creates content for key activities like social media messages, email marketing, and website content. This job can also be broken down by platform, if you have multiple team members.
- *Judy Smith, Social Media Analyst (202–345–6789):* compiles and reports any social media insights, reporting or social analytics; provides insights on how you're performing and suggestions on how to improve from there.

## Social Media Accounts

Enter your organization's social media accounts (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, etc.), the profile name/URL for each account, and the name of the team member responsible for managing each account.

Here's an important note about managing multiple team users: some social media platforms will have one specific login/password (such as Twitter and Instagram) while others (Facebook and LinkedIn) allow for personal accounts to be connected under approved roles for the page by the account's existing admins. Why is this important to consider? This means you will have to share login/password information for your official Twitter and Instagram accounts with your team if you want them to upload content. However, on Facebook and LinkedIn, your organization's account can be accessed through your team's personal social media accounts, leaving your master login/password known to only a select few.



**Tip:** Social media publishing tools can help manage multiple user accounts with different access levels. For example, TweetDeck and Hootsuite allow you to have multiple team members access an official account without having to share the login/passwords. If you have money in your budget, consider getting a subscription to a corporate password manager, such as LastPass or 1Password, to help keep your information secure. It's also important to never have just one person know the master password for your accounts. Find a few key individuals who can safely and securely know the passwords for your accounts.

## Sample Guideline on Opening New Social Media Accounts

Profiles on social media platforms should be connected to and complement your overall web presence and support of your communication and marketing strategies.

## Sample Guideline on Adjusting Profile Settings and Passwords

Only members of the digital team listed on the previous page can adjust social media account settings and change passwords. Login details and passwords should not be shared with other team members without the written permission of one of the digital team members.

**Tip:** For social media platforms that require authorized users, it is important to periodically remove individuals from the list when they no longer need access. Have a plan for youth and family members who one day may no longer be involved with your organization—you could have them manage social media profiles, which some family-run organizations and youth-run organizations do. Additionally, for platforms where team members all share one password, it is important to change that password when any member leaves the organization.

## Sample Guideline on Disclaimers

It is a good idea to include a disclaimer on your online properties that indicates that your material is not in any way a substitute for obtaining professional help. You also may want to provide additional resources for individuals who may be in crisis or need assistance. Examples include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org) or 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or the SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline via phone at 1-800-985-5990 or by texting TalkWithUs to 66746.

**Tip:** If your teams are actively and directly engaging with audiences on social media, prepare canned messages for your teams to use/post as needed for various crisis situations.

## Sample Guideline on Privacy Issues

Social media encourages candid dialogue, but that candor should not imply permission to publish confidential information such as personal details about local youth or any information that might compromise someone's physical, social, or emotional well-being. The protection and safety of youth are paramount. To avoid revealing children's identities, consider using an avatar image online—and never reveal a child's full name. Be respectful of children and youth at all times.

## Sample Guideline on Protecting User Privacy

Privacy settings on social media platforms should be set to allow anyone to see profile information similar to what would be on your website. Other privacy settings that might allow others to post information or see personal information should be set to limit access. Never post information that you would not want the public to see.

## Sample Guideline on Copyright Laws

SAMHSA makes many resources—including those from the Caring for Every Child’s Mental Health Campaign—copyright free, which enables the public to use, publish, and distribute these resources as needed.

Other online materials may be covered by copyright, and it is important that you determine whether or not the material you plan to use has been copyrighted, which would preclude using it without permission. This includes videos, print materials, and photos—particularly when used on social media platforms such as Pinterest. Do not quote more than short excerpts of someone else’s work, and always attribute such work to the original author/source. It is a good general practice to link to others’ work rather than reproduce it.

## Sample Guideline on Developing Messages and Content

To boost interest and engagement on social media, messages should be relevant, short, and simple. The best way to be interesting, stay out of trouble, and have fun is to write about what you know. There is a good chance that you will be corrected by an expert if you write about topics you are not knowledgeable about.

The speed of being able to publish your thoughts is both a great feature and a great downfall of social media. The time to edit or reflect must be self-imposed. If in doubt about a post, either let it sit and look at it again before publishing it, or ask someone else to look at it first.

Remember that quality matters. Use a spell checker before sending out messages. If you’re not design-oriented, ask someone with this background for advice on how to improve the visuals in your content. Be mindful of message length. For example, Twitter has a character limit of 280 and new allowances for retweeting, tagging photos, and direct replies that don’t count against the character count. On Instagram, it is a common practice to use up to 10 hashtags to maximize discoverability. Facebook has very generous character limits, but once your post is more than approximately 450 characters, your message will be truncated with a “see more” option. LinkedIn is similar to Facebook in that once you have surpassed approximately 200 characters, your message will be truncated. Remember that social media users do not expect to read a lot of content in posts; keep your content short and engaging.

## Sample Guideline on Managing Personal and Professional Social Media Accounts

Do not use the same internet browsers for both professional and personal social media engagement. Mixing professional and personal social media accounts or tools on similar management systems (such as TweetDeck or Hootsuite), devices (smartphone), and web browsers increases the possibility of messages being accidentally sent through the wrong account. For example, use Google Chrome for your organization’s accounts and Firefox for your personal accounts. You can also use different social media management systems to keep personal and professional activities separate. For example, use Hootsuite for your organization’s social media engagement and TweetDeck for your personal social media engagement. Signing into professional accounts on “Private mode” or “Incognito” works as well.

## Sample Guideline on Community Management and Monitoring Messages

Keeping an eye on the social media conversation is an important part of successful social media engagement and protecting your organization’s brand in the social media universe. Because social media is always on, it is important to implement processes and tools so that you can monitor the conversation and direct messages and responses from your followers during the week, evening, and weekends. You

are expected to monitor messages and responses from followers throughout the week and sporadically over the weekend. Consider using an affordable online tool such as TweetReach or Meltwater. More expensive options include NUVI, Radian6, and Sysomos. You have the ability to hide comments on certain platforms where the comment or post is still visible to whoever posted it (so they don't feel censored), but the comment doesn't show up for anyone else who views the content. You can also turn on permissions to review posts before they show up publicly.

### **Sample Guideline on Correcting Errors**

Mistakes happen. If you make a significant error, be upfront about your mistake and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so. If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as their copyrighted material or a defamatory comment about them), deal with it quickly—better to remove it immediately to lessen the possibility of a legal action.

### **Sample Guideline on Responding to Comments and Replies**

You should ensure that your comments reflect the policies of your jurisdiction as well as the system of care values of being youth-guided, family-driven, and linguistically and culturally competent. Comments should be thoughtful and should not disparage any person or entity. That includes avoiding ethnic slurs, insults, or curses, as well as comments that disparage political or religious beliefs. When confronted with a negative public or private post, proceed with respect and caution. Provide factual information when possible and appropriate. Use your best judgment when responding to followers' comments, questions, and replies to social media messages and posts. If you have any doubt, check with your supervisor or communication officer for review and/or approval of your proposed response. If the comment or message is antagonistic or argumentative, it may be best not to respond, unless that would be hurtful to your brand.

### **Sample Guideline on Sharing Links**

Retweeting, linking, and "liking" on various social media platforms implies endorsement. Use your best judgment when interacting with organizations and individuals online. When linking to other content, be sure to check the links to ensure not only that they are working but also that the content being linked to is appropriate.

### **Sample Guideline on Creating and Leveraging Hashtags**

Include relevant hashtags in Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram messages when appropriate, utilizing the hashtag as part of the content of the message whenever possible to save characters. Develop your own list of frequently used hashtags. You can also add visual media to your posts to grab attention from your audiences. Examples of potential hashtags include:

- #HeroesofHope
- #mentalhealthmatters
- #SAMHSA
- #mentalhealth
- #hope4mh

If you are planning to use a hashtag that is not currently on your frequently used list, make sure to search that hashtag on the social media platform, as well as consult Twazzup.com to see how the hashtag is being used and confirm that it will enter the message into relevant conversations.

## Sample Guideline on Tracking and Reporting Engagement

Evaluation is the best way to ensure growth and increased visibility for your content. Work with your digital media team to determine and establish benchmarks prior to your engagement, then use recommended methods of tracking to evaluate engagement and report findings to the team. Use the social media network's own analytics tools, like Hootsuite, or check to see if you're getting comments, likes, or retweets regularly.