University-Sponsored Social Media Guidelines

The University of Vermont encourages the use of social media by our university community as a way to enhance our local, national and global reputation and our connection with current and future students, parents, alumni, donors, and other key constituencies. When used responsibly, social media accounts provide an effective way to promote the university and to share information and perspective across a broad range of topics. The following guidelines are intended to safeguard the university by setting forth expectations and best practices for the use of social media on behalf of the university by faculty, staff, students, and recognized groups and organizations thereof, or their designees.

Thinking about establishing a social media account? Three questions you need to ask yourself:

1. **Do I have content to support the account?** Effective social media relies on stories and ideas with a unique perspective, as well as high-quality visual assets.
2. **Am I comfortable with the conversational part of social media?** Not only will you need to share content, you'll also need to be prepared to address responses to that content, including answering questions in a public setting.
3. **Do I have the time to do this well?** Social media management requires daily, even hourly, attention, with some work happening outside of the regular work day.

If you're wrestling with whether or not an account is right for you, please contact Riley Lantz, riley.lantz@uvm.edu.

Once you've decided you have the means and the need for a social media presence, here are some tips and best practices that are important in this process.

Establish a Strategy

The first thing you need to do is develop an overarching strategy for your account. This strategy should be based on your answers to the following questions, and applies to all of your social efforts:

1. Who do I want to reach?
2. What are my goals?

The answers to those questions should inform what network(s) you use, what kinds of content you post, and what type of action you want followers to take. (For example:

if you want to reach alumni, and your goals are to reconnect them to the university and reform a sense of community, eventually leading to gifts to the university, your content should reflect and encourage that type of engagement.)

Broadly, here is a description of what the main social media platforms are best for:

- **Facebook** is the most widely adopted social media network across all demographics, and is a great platform to engage with people who already have a connection to UVM, which may include anyone from prospective students and families all the way to alumni. Useful for having conversations with fans, and encouraging conversation amongst fans. Two options are available for brands on Facebook: a page or a group. A page can be used to cultivate a public presence on Facebook and is mainly fed by the brand. A group, however, is fed by content from members, and can be public or private.
- **Twitter** is the place where the hashtag was born. Many Twitter users turn to the network as a news source, which offers the potential to reach many followers who may not have a direct connection to UVM, but may be searching for updates on a specific topic or trend. Twitter users also have strong expectations for customer service and timely responses to questions.
- **Instagram** has an audience that is somewhere between Twitter and Facebook. While it's a place for users to cultivate their own photo album and follow people or brands they already have a connection to, there are also many users who search for specific topics or hashtags on Instagram. Instagram is a good channel to reach prospective and current students, and younger alumni (40 and under).
- **Snapchat** offers brands the chance to form a one-on-one connection with users. It's not a place to facilitate conversations with or between fans, but is a good place to push messages directly to followers. Heavy adoption with younger audiences (age 30 and under) makes Snapchat a good channel for reaching prospective and current students. Due to the nature of Snapchat and the effort that's required to maintain the channel, and to avoid splitting our audience, schools, offices, and colleges are encouraged to contribute to the university's main Snapchat account, rather than creating separate accounts. Please contact Riley Lantz at riley.lantz@uvm.edu if interested.

Once you determine which network(s) you'd like to create an account on, visit the UVM social media directory to see what accounts already exist to avoid duplication of efforts, and uncover opportunities for collaboration. Each school, college, and office has specialized messages that make sense for unique groups. Determining what your unique content niche is, and what your goals are, will ensure we're not diluting or duplicating efforts by trying to reach the same audience, or accomplish the same goal.

Creating an account

First, get written approval from a unit head or, in the case of a recognized student group or organization, faculty/staff advisor to create a university-sponsored social media account for your unit. Approvers should be at the Dean, Director, Chair or Department Head level for departmental accounts. Approvers should document what accounts have been set up for their units and who the account administrators are. Approvers are also encouraged to understand the purposes of the account and know how to access account content. Approvers should understand that they may share accountability should the account cause reputational harm or include content that doesn't conform to University policy.

If a social media account already exists for your unit, and you no longer have access, make every effort to regain access. This may include contacting the social media network, account creators, and/or those with prior access.

Social media pages and accounts should be set up through a generic department, organization, or office uvm.edu email address and user ID, when possible. The password for the account should meet or exceed the complexity requirements for UVM Net-ID passwords. Do not use your UVM Net-ID password as your account password.

Share administrative access to the account with at least one other UVM representative. Redundancy is important, but keep in mind this also opens you up to increased risk. As a general guideline, share access with 2-5 UVM representatives who are also fully informed by these guidelines. Administrators are required to change the password and password-reset questions for each social media account when anyone with access to the account leaves UVM or changes jobs.

When naming your account, review the UVM social media directory to ensure your account name will be unique and distinguishable from other university-affiliated accounts. Your name should be easily searchable and identifiable. Avoid insider acronyms or nicknames that may make it hard for users to find your account.

UVM social media avatars are available for download on the Creative Style Guide.

Your bio is a good place to state your affiliation with the University of Vermont. On Twitter, include @uvmvermont, the University's official handle, in your bio.

Follow other UVM accounts on each network, including the official university accounts. See the directory of some of the most active UVM social accounts.

Tips on Using Your New Account

Social media presents a host of opportunities for brands. Here are some tips to keep in mind to maximize your success:

- Think of social media as a form of two-way communication, not just one way. Use it as an opportunity to have conversations and engage with followers.
- Listening is often as important as talking. Actively monitor your account, and respond to questions in a timely manner. Most platforms require regular moderation.
- While moderation is sometimes necessary, transparency is key. Users on social media expect brands to be authentic, honest, and human. Try not to over-moderate conversation (as a general rule of thumb, UVM only removes or hides comments on our social channels that are threatening, harassing, or profanity-laden (a differing opinion is not enough to warrant removal).
- In case of a crisis (i.e., fire, assault, threatening behavior, etc.), let the main UVM accounts handle first response. In crisis situations, your job is to amplify the messages of the main accounts. If you're not sure how to respond to a situation, contact University Communications.
- Resist the urge to post the same content across channels (e.g. automatic posting from Instagram to Twitter), as this presents a frustrating user experience and will encourage followers to tune out your messages, or even unfollow you. Post content natively, and tailor your images, messages, and call-to-action to each channel.
- Be sure you have the rights to any images or videos you're posting on your channel. If you don't own the content, be sure to get explicit, written permission to share.
- Follow the terms of service on each platform; Don't risk termination of your account by violating the rules of the network.
- Check twice, post once. Test all hyperlinks before posting, and proofread your posts.
- You are representing an entity that's affiliated with higher education. While personality and voice are good, avoid using too casual "tech speak" ("r" instead of "are, "u" instead of "you").
- Do your best to confirm the accuracy of the content you post, including citing sources when possible.

Safeguarding Your Accounts

Annually or when a user no longer should have access (termination, transfer), account owners should change passwords and security questions.

Passwords should be as complex as the university's NetID requirements: at least 8 characters long, contain at least two types of characters (lowercase, uppercase, numbers, or symbols), and not be based on dictionary words.

If dual authentication is available on a platform, account owners are encouraged to make use of this feature.

Inappropriate Content

The university at all times reserves the right to require removal of content for legitimate institutional reasons, in its sole discretion. For example, the university will not tolerate content that is inaccurately attributed to the university or otherwise in violation of university policy; content that infringes on proprietary or confidential information; content that is illegal, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, abusive, or otherwise injurious or objectionable.

Policy Considerations:

UVM has a number of policies that could apply to content posted to social media; the following are recommended practices to stay in compliance.

- Do not post content supporting or endorsing political candidates (Political Activity http://www.uvm.edu/policies/general_html/political_activity.pdf)

- Do not use the account to promote activity that you or relatives could personally benefit from (Conflict of Interest and Commitment http://www.uvm.edu/policies/general_html/conflictinterest.pdf)

- Do not use University trademarks, logos, symbols outside of the scope of established university policy (University Name, Symbols, Letterhead and other Proprietary Indicia of Affiliation Policy http://www.uvm.edu/policies/general_html/letterhead.pdf)

- Do not post any private or protected personal information (Information Security Policy http://www.uvm.edu/policies/cit/infosecurity.pdf; Computer, Communication, and Network Technology Acceptable Use Policy http://www.uvm.edu/policies/cit/compuse.pdf)

Related University Policies

Policies Awards, Prizes, and Winnings Procedure
http://www.uvm.edu/policies/acct/prizes.pdf

Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards
http://www.uvm.edu/policies/general_html/businessconduct.pdf

Code of Students Rights and Responsibilities Policy
http://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/studentcode.pdf

Conflict of Interest and Commitment
http://www.uvm.edu/policies/general_html/conflictinterest.pdf

Computer, Communication, and Network Technology Acceptable Use Policy
http://www.uvm.edu/policies/cit/compuse.pdf

Group and Organization Recognition Policy
http://www.uvm.edu/policies/general_html/grouprecognition.pdf

Information Security Policy http://www.uvm.edu/policies/cit/infosecurity.pdf

University Name, Symbols, Letterhead and other Proprietary Indicia of Affiliation
Policy http://www.uvm.edu/policies/general_html/letterhead.pdf

Political Activity http://www.uvm.edu/policies/general_html/political_activity.pdf

Personal Use

These guidelines do not govern personal ownership of social media accounts by
faculty, staff, students or others. Individuals and groups within the university
community are reminded that violations of law or policy conducted through social
media accounts, or evidence of violations posted on social media accounts of which
the university is made aware, may be subject to disciplinary and/or legal action,
regardless of whether a personal or university sponsored account is used.