

Social Media Guideline

GOV-CORP 008

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Department responsible for implementation	Executive Services
Department responsible for guideline	Executive Services
Publication of guideline	A copy of the <i>Social Media Guideline</i> be placed on Council's website and copies be made available for inspection at the Customer Service Centre
Related Documents	Social Media Policy

1. Purpose and Background:

Social media is an important tool used in a range of ways by the Council. Its use, implications and outcomes can reflect on Councillors, employees, the Huon Valley Council brand (reputation), and local government generally.

This guideline seeks to guide the use of the Council's official social media accounts as well as personal use of social media by employees and Councillors where there is potential for social media posts to impact upon the Council's reputation.

2. Guidelines

Why use social media?

Social media is an instant communication tool and provides Huon Valley Council with an opportunity to communicate directly with its followers. By using social media well, the Council can improve its reputation in the community, hear about potential issues early and reduce the amount of inquiries to its Customer Service Centre.

The primary aim of Huon Valley Council's social media presence is to promote Council initiatives and events, support community events and to celebrate what's great about living in the Huon Valley.

Facebook and Twitter

At the time of writing, the Council's social media presence is confined to Facebook and Twitter, although there is potential for YouTube in the future. Facebook and Twitter are both very different platforms and therefore it is not always appropriate to post exactly the same information to both platforms.

Facebook is a social networking site where users add "friends" and follow organisations they are interested in. It is a site suitable for sharing photos and longer text. Users can like, share and comment on posts.

Twitter is a micro blogging site where users are limited to 140 characters in each post. Photos and links can be tweeted. Users can re-Tweet a Tweet to their own followers, favourite or reply to a Tweet. Twitter is used by people who want to keep up to date with current happenings, news, events and ideas.

Social media and the corporate brand

While it is important that the branding used in the Council's social media profiles is consistent with the overall corporate brand, there should be flexibility to use a more informal, friendly brand for social media. The Council logo is used as the profile picture on Facebook and avatar on Twitter but the language and content is more friendly and conversational than the corporate website and corporate documents.

Storytelling versus self-promotion

Successful social media accounts focus on storytelling, rather than blatant self promotion. Social media users do not want their feeds filled with what would otherwise be advertisements. This type of promotion will not work so it is important to focus on stories and

value adding in order to promote the work of the Council is a more successful, albeit more subtle, manner.

Social media has the advantage of providing an accessible, friendly channel of communication, and is able to show the human side of organisations that is often not a part of a corporate brand. Posts that are popular include behind the scenes glimpses of what it's like to work at the Council or what it's like to stage an event, quirky information (an example of this is the popular Facebook post about the most popular dog breeds and names in the Huon Valley), and information that can help or interests people.

While the Council's social media profiles will be used to promote events and initiatives, some thought should be given to how the information is presented. Rather than posting an advertisement or flyer for a talk about kidney disease, provide some practical tips or statistics to add value to the post. A photo of the relevant employees preparing for particular events is also more interesting than what would otherwise be a newspaper advertisement.

Follow up posts showing photos from Council events reinforces the role Council plays in promoting the Huon Valley and the various programs run by Council employees and lets people who could not make it see how the event went. This can be done in 3 stages.

1. Promote upcoming events and ask people to come along (using countdowns; on next week; on this week; happening tomorrow etc.).
2. Take photos during the event and interview necessary guests for a follow up story/media release.
3. Post follow up with pictures and thank participants for coming.

Building a positive online community

A positive community of followers means more voices to tell the Council's stories and support at times when a negative comment or post has been published by someone else. The focus of social media should be on storytelling, not advertising. It is important to think about what sorts of posts our audience would want to share with *their* audience (through re-tweets on Twitter or by sharing on Facebook). At times when our followers are sharing our stories through their own posts/Tweets in a positive way, they should be shared and Tweeted by the official Council profiles.

In order to build a community, some interaction is needed with followers. Social media is not a one-way communication channel. Interaction can be in the form of quizzes or competitions (e.g. posting an old photograph and asking people where it was taken and in what year), asking people to contribute photographs on a particular theme, or asking questions.

In social media, you win with engagement. Engagement is a higher level of emotional connection. It starts with conversation. The more you are engaged in conversations that will increase the collective capacity of the participants, higher your own return in this investment. Every conversation is important.

In addition to posting content that matters to people, social media is also about listening – to what type of content followers want, their praise and their complaints.

The essence of successful social media posts is relevance. By posting pictures and stories that inform and entertain followers, Council is engaging and acting as a conduit for positive stories from the Valley. It is also an opportunity to post stories that are not carried by the local media. This is evident during weather events and disasters (see **Social media and disaster management** below) when people require local updates relevant to their area.

The goal of any Council post is to be shared by as wide an audience as possible. Council employees should (when appropriate) share Council Facebook and Twitter posts.

Showing Council employees 'in action' carrying out their normal tasks helps demystify the work of local government and helps promote the work of Council in the community.

Social media and customer service

While the Huon Valley Council's social media profiles direct people to report any issues to hvc@huonvalley.tas.gov.au some customer service inquiries are being made through social media and this number is likely to increase as more people use social media and the Council gains more followers on both Facebook and Twitter.

It is important to respond to inquiries as soon as possible. If an answer cannot be given immediately, the inquiry should be acknowledged and the person inquiring should be told that a response will be provided as soon as possible.

Responding to negative feedback

There are a number of ways to deal with negative feedback, depending on the nature of the feedback. Most of all it is important to respond and to refrain from being defensive. How an organisation responds to negative feedback can be more important to other followers than the feedback itself. Acknowledging Council mistakes and offering timely solutions or answers is imperative to maintaining healthy social media relationships. Replying honestly works in every case (even negative) – as long as members of the public feel informed, they will continue to support the Council.

All feedback should be publicly acknowledged but in some cases it may be necessary to take the conversation offline after the initial acknowledgement has been made. If the response to the matter is something that might be of interest or useful to other people, however, the conversation is best left where it began, (ie online rather than offline).

Deleting posts or comments is not social media best practice and should be avoided unless there are legal or other serious reasons to do so. If a post is deleted, the person who published the post should be contacted and told why it was deleted. In the case of a post being deleted because it contained offensive language, for example, the person who published the post should be invited to re-post without the offensive language. It is also good practice to let other followers know when and why a post was deleted.

Social media and disaster management

Social media plays an important role in disaster management and it is at these times that the Council can expect to significantly increase its followers if it provides up-to-date and important information to followers.

Any advice that may need to be publicised should be shared from other government agencies. For example, in a bushfire situation, the Council should be sharing advice from the Tasmania Fire Service and Tasmania Police. In cases where the Council is running information sessions or community refuge centres, this information should be published on its social media profiles.

Twitter is the most useful emergency communication tool but Facebook can be used to direct followers to the Twitter feed. The Council's Twitter feed is also accessible from the Council website.

In order for the Council to have a successful social media presence during times of emergency, it is imperative that the Communications & Media Unit is kept up to date with any emergency warnings and information. Council officers on the ground should also supply the Communications & Media Unit with photos where appropriate (e.g. pictures of the Huon River in flood).

People who use social media, especially Twitter, are looking for the latest information so the sooner information and pictures can be published, the better.

The central Council Twitter and Facebook profiles should be the only Council profiles sharing updates in an emergency. Other profiles can point to the central account. If there are localised impacts on services that have their own profile (e.g. the Port Huon Sports & Aquatic Centre) then the local information can be shared but followers should be pointed back to the central profile for more comprehensive information.

Multiple social media profiles

There are cases where separate social media profiles are set up for aspects of the Council that are seen as a separate brand by the public. Any new profiles must be approved by the Communications & Media Unit and the General Manager. It is essential that profiles are adequately resourced and that the administrators post regularly. Additional profiles should also keep a narrow focus as the central profile is the profile that will be used for whole-of-Council and emergency situations.

Administrators of additional social media profiles should meet regularly with the Senior Communications & Media Advisor to make sure they are getting the most out of their social media presence.

Any profiles that are established that are not performing will be encouraged to improve or be shut down.

Reporting

The Communications & Media Unit will provide regular statistics to the Council in its quarterly unit report. Social media statistics will also be provided to the Executive Management Team on a monthly basis.

Review of the Council's social media presence

The Council's social media presence should be reviewed annually to ensure it is keeping up with social media best practice and continuing to increase its followers.

3. Inter-related documents

Social Media Policy –GOV –Corp 008