Social Media Best Practice Guidelines

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1.   INTRODUCTION

The ever evolving online world has fundamentally changed (and continues to do so) the way we find, use, and share content. Social media tools in particular are revolutionising communication across the board and the education sector is no exception.

You might find these tools to be a fascinating new way of learning, interacting and engaging; but it is also important that you use social media in an informed way. There are two aspects to this. While the first is about the technical know-how of managing and administering social media tools, the latter is more about their best practice application.

We encourage all of our staff, students and associates to fully embrace social media as part of their role at Unitec. However, we would also like you to be aware of the do's that can help you maximise the benefits and don'ts that can help minimise the risks of using social media in a professional capacity.

1.1. Why follow these guidelines?

Follow these guidelines to –

- Achieve the purpose of your social media activity in the best possible manner, while staying aligned with Unitec's overall strategic direction.

- Protect your personal and professional integrity.

- Protect and enhance Unitec's reputation.

- Be aware of all possible legal implications of your actions on social media.

2.   SCOPE

2.1. Who should follow these guidelines and when?

These guidelines apply to a Unitec staff member, student, contractor, consultant or any other person engaged by Unitec to conduct business on Unitec's behalf when undertaking any of the following social media activities:

- Creating a new social media account that represents Unitec in any way (example: setting-up a new Facebook page for a department of Unitec).

- Posting content on any existing social media account that represents Unitec in any way (example: Posting tweets from the Twitter account of a student support service at Unitec).

- Sharing, liking and commenting on any social media accounts either as a representative of Unitec or giving the impression of being one (example: commenting on a blog about tertiary education as a Unitec lecturer). Please note

that social media is treated as any other form of media (TV, press, radio) and therefore falls under Unitec's Media Policy.

2.2. What other steps should be taken when using social media?

- Do the necessary planning within your Department/Directorate to be clear about the purpose, management, monitoring and review of the social media activity that you are undertaking. You should ideally use the 'Social Media Brief' for this purpose.

- Consult with the Online Community Advisor to complete the 'Social Media Brief' in case you want to start a new social media account/review an existing account.

- Consult with the Corporate Relations Director in case you want to make comments as a Unitec representative.

3.   UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA

Though 'social media' has various definitions, in essence, a social media tool provides a platform for users to create, collaborate, and share content online. These tools include (but are not limited to) social networking websites, blogs, micro-blogs, multi-media sharing, wikis and forums.

3.1. What are the commonly used social media tools?

- **Social networking websites**

  These provide a platform to stay connected with our social network. The most popular among these is **Facebook.** While they are mostly used for personal interaction, organisations can use them to communicate with their stakeholders in a more informal and engaging way. **Yammer** is another popular example for networking within the same organisation.

- **Blogs**

  It is short for weblogs. It is essentially an online diary entry where people publish 'posts' about topics they have an interest in. Most blogs allow visitors to comment on the posts. **Wordpress** is one of the most popular blogging tools. An example of a blog is - http://publicaddress.net/hardnews/ by Russell Brown.

- **Micro-blogs**

  These tools allow users to publish short message updates online. The most popular among micro-blogs is **Twitter** which allows for l40 characters per message.

- **Multi-media sharing**

  While most social networking websites, blogs and micro-blogs allow users to share multi-media content; some social media services are specifically dedicated to multi-media. These include photo-sharing tools such as Flicker and **Pinterest** and video-sharing tools such as **YouTube.**

- **Wikis**

  It is a tool that allows users to create and edit content. Wikis are mostly used for knowledge sharing. The most popular one is **Wikipedia.**

- **Forums**

  These allow users to hold online discussions within a certain group. They are often a good platform for like-minded people to share opinions and resources about common areas of interest. One such example is **Geekzone.**

3.2. Which social media tools are currently used to represent Unitec officially?

Although there are several social media tools available, Unitec doesn't officially use all of them.

Our existing official social media accounts are:

- Facebook page – www.facebook.com/UnitecNZ

- Twitter - www.twitter.com/UnitecNZ

- YouTube – www.youtube.com/UnitecNZ

- LinkedIn alumni group - http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Unitec-Alumni-1039787?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr

- LinkedIn company page - http://www.linkedin.com/company/unitec-institute-of-technology

- Google + - http://bit.ly/15k9mbd

These accounts are managed by Unitec's Marketing and Communications team. For any queries about these accounts or to provide content for them, contact the Online Community Advisor at social@unitec.ac.nz.

4. GUIDELINES

4.1. Know your channel

Make sure you fully understand the social media channel that you are using in regards to its terms and conditions; features; privacy controls; account settings and best practice use. This will help you discover the possibilities and avoid common mistakes. For example, it's important to know that you can't run competitions on Facebook without using a third-party application such as ShortStack, or you risk getting your page banned (among other possible legal issues).

- Facebook Pages Help Centre

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- Twitter Basics

4.2. Relate to your audience

The most important part about having a social media channel is keeping your audience engaged with it. You can do this by posting regular content that adds value and is relevant. Make an effort to understand your audience, so that you share content that interests them.

- Whittaker's Facebook page

4.3. Be consistent

Consistency is critical in the online sphere. The brand image you project through social media should be consistent across all social messages, activities and channels and in line with the institute's strategic vision. Maintain a social media calendar to ensure a regular, consistent approach.

4.4. Keep it simple & conversational

The attention span in the online world is very short, so keep your message to-the-point. Avoid long & complicated sentences and stay away from jargon. Remember that social media is all about being 'social', so use a conversational style of communication rather than promotional. Spamming your audience with an overload of marketing content will only displease them.

4.5. Be creative

Infotainment, i.e. information mixed with entertainment, usually gets a good response and people tend to share such content impulsively. Use multimedia content (photos, videos) and creative give-aways/competition ideas to keep the interest alive.

- Air New Zealand's Hobbit Safety Video Launched on YouTube

4.6. Assign responsibility and accountability

It is important to make it clear as to 'who does what' for your social media channel. Answer questions such as who will post the content; who will take the photos/videos; who will reply to queries; who will track the channel analytics; who will report on success/issues; and who will approve the content and moderate comments.

It is also common practice to have a team of administrators (as long as they are consistent in their approach and coordinate their updates) and acknowledge them on the channel.

- See Vodafone's Twitter Example

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4.7. Follow honesty & disclosure

Don't fall into the trap of posting content that is false, misleading or pretentious. Being personable and genuinely caring for your social media audience can lead to increased engagement with your channel and improve your reputation.

Using social media to create a false impression of spontaneous grassroots support for an organisation/cause when, in fact, the comments are made in a paid capacity (whether as employees or otherwise) is known as 'astroturfing'. An example of astroturfing would be employees pretending to be consumers and posting positive reviews/testimonials for a product.

It's best to disclose your identity and interest (or the conflict thereof) rather than risk legal breaches and reputational damage.

- Refer to: [Advertising Standards Authority Guidance Notes on Social Media](#)

4.8. Respect others and abide by laws

Don't post anything that might offend or bring any individual, community or organisation (including Unitec) into disrepute. This includes (but is not limited to) any offensive content/comment about gender, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability as well as posting content that compromises another person/organisation's privacy or is in contempt of any of their lawful rights (copyright, intellectual property, trademarks, patents et al).

Such posts could result in disciplinary action by Unitec and even legal prosecution.

4.9. Listen and respond

Social media is a two-way street, so be receptive to comments – good & bad. Pay attention to the conversations about you, participate in relevant discussions and appreciate feedback.

- [Kellogg's creates special cereal box after reading a celebrity tweet](#)

4.10. Own and correct errors

It is best to accept any errors and correct them in a tactful and timely manner. You will lose the trust of your audience if you evade the issue or blame it on others.

4.11. If things go wrong, seek advice

Some situations on social media can negatively impact on your reputation and that of Unitec. The most common causes of that might be:

- Posting inappropriate content to the official social media account, either as an earnest mistake or intentionally.

- Ignoring, deleting or inadequately responding to negative feedback.

- Technical glitches such as hacked accounts etc.

Tactful handling of such a situation can avoid any possible issue from becoming a crisis.

Don't:

- Take the situation personally and respond emotionally.

- Take an action in panic without adequate consultation.

Do:

- Check all the facts related to the situation.

- Assess the level of risk involved.

- Contact Unitec's Corporate Relations Director Darren Horsman on 021 917 336 or dhorsman@unitec.ac.nz to notify the corporate communications team of the situation and seek advice regarding response.

- Take the conversation offline, where required (have a dedicated email account for social media where you can direct people to).

Examples of organisations that have successfully managed a social media issue:

- Twitter - Red Cross

- YouTube - Domino's Pizza

- Facebook - ASB

4.12. Monitor and evaluate

Monitoring your social media accounts gives you insights to better understand your audience and what interests them; identifies issues so you can do what is required to prevent them from becoming an online crisis; assists in evaluating your activity to see what works and what doesn't; helps you focus on your objectives and assess whether you are on track to achieve them.

It is advised that the person managing the social media account must use a relevant monitoring tool and maintain regular reports of the social media activity.

There are some free online tools that you should use for this purpose, such as:

- Facebook Page Insights

- Google Analytics

- Tweet Reach

- Topsy

If you need any assistance with monitoring your social media presence, contact the Online Community Advisor on social@unitec.ac.nz.

4.13. Keep your professional and personal lives separate

You should always be mindful whenever you are posting content/comments as a Unitec employee as you are representing the institute in a professional capacity. Check all the facts, judge your tone, and don't let personal bias impact on your message.

Even if you are posting in a personal capacity, remember that the post could be linked back to your employment relationship with Unitec. When you refer to your association with Unitec on social media, you must add a disclosure such as *'the views expressed are my own and in no way reflect those of my employer - Unitec Institute of Technology'*.

Be aware of your association with Unitec at all times and don't post anything that could in any way harm your reputation or that of the institute.

For further information refer to Unitec's Media Policy which defines rules around who is allowed to speak on Unitec's behalf and/or represent Unitec.

- The dangers of using social media in an employment context, *Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment*

4.14. Be mindful that your conduct is governed by Unitec policies

Since you are acting in the capacity of a Unitec staff member, student, contractor, consultant or any other person engaged by Unitec to conduct business on Unitec's behalf when undertaking any social media; you are also governed by Unitec's other policies, procedures and guidelines.

Some specific ones are:

Media Policy: It outlines the procedure for acting as a spokesperson on behalf of Unitec, responding to queries and making comments.

Privacy of Information Policy: It details the principles of the Privacy Act 1993 that apply when managing personal information including student and staff information, research and survey reports.

Copyright Procedures for Staff: It details what you can and cannot do based on the Copyright Act and the licence agreements Unitec has with rights organisations and commercial vendors.

Electronic Devices and Systems Policy: It describes the responsibility of the person using Unitec's electronic devices to minimise the risk in the information technology environment.

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Code of Conduct: This details the obligations of ethical conduct that the Unitec staff are expected to meet.

Note: Disciplinary action might be taken if your social media activity breaches any of Unitec's policies, procedures or guidelines. **Click here** for the complete list.

4.15 Don't forget your day job

Unless otherwise stated in your job description, don't let social media impact on your productivity to perform your primary responsibilities.

Note: Managers can request a report on their team member's social media usage at work from Information Management Services (IMS).

4.16 Termination/handover of social media accounts

Please notify Unitec's Online Community Advisor on social@unitec.ac.nz if:

1. You want to terminate an existing social media account that represents Unitec in any way.

2. You are currently managing a Unitec social media account and your employment with Unitec is coming to an end.

3. You are no longer able and/or keen to manage a Unitec social media account that you are currently responsible for.

4. You want to completely handover the management of a social media account to a member in your team.

5. KEY NEW ZEALAND LAWS AND REGULATIONS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

[1]   Advertising Standards Authority Guidance Notes on Social Media

[2]   Intellectual Property, Copyrights, Patents and Trademarks

[3]   Defamation Act 1992

[4]   Privacy Act 1993

[5]   Human Rights Act 1993

6. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

[1]   Guidelines by *NZ Department of Internal Affairs*

[2]   Guidelines by *NZ Marketing Association*

[3]   The Engaged Web in New Zealand 2012 *by Intergen*

[4]   Profession by *NZ Nurses Organisation*

[5]   Online by *NZ Privacy Commission*

7. KEY CONTACTS

Corporate Relations Director – Darren Horsman, dhorsman@unitec.ac.nz, 021 917 336

Corporate Communications Manager – Julz Britnell, jbritnell@unitec.ac.nz, 021 305 607

Online Community Advisor – Deepti Bhargava, dbhargava@unitec.ac.nz, 021 1651 991

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