

Social Media Guidelines

for Media Professionals &
Journalists in the Caribbean

Foreword

Sally-Ann Wilson | CEO, Public Media Alliance

Social media is an integral part of the output for any 21st-century media house, it can't be ignored and it can no longer be an afterthought. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, are platforms where many citizens seek information and news. To survive and thrive, established media companies need to embrace social media platforms as an intrinsic part of their daily editorial, production & commissioning processes.

Media houses must ensure that the use of social media by their staff is professionalised according to their own company rules and practices. Although it is still a new and sometimes unfamiliar medium for many experienced journalists and senior media executives, the use of social media is evolving rapidly. As a media house, you should maintain a professional and effective presence across key social media platforms.

Most mainstream and public media companies have built their reputations and audiences by providing news and information that is credible and trusted. Used effectively, social media provides a valuable opportunity for media houses to further develop their established brands and reach. Social media is central to improving audience engagement and enhancing brand recognition. Used effectively it can even lead to new revenue streams. But getting it wrong can be extremely damaging to reputations and costly in financial terms. Audiences are increasingly sophisticated in their social media use and media houses need to not only 'Keep Up' but also 'Keep Ahead' of this trend. The Public Media Alliance [formerly the CBA], has an established tradition of producing editorial guidelines for broadcast journalists.

Many of the basic rules still apply to social media but new media technologies also require some new rules and guidance. With funding from the UNESCO Caribbean Cluster Office and RJRGleaner Communications Group and support from the CBU, the PMA has worked with media professionals in the Caribbean to develop new guidelines for social media use. Our thanks also to Manx Radio in the Isle of Man, who provided their guidelines as a basis for initial discussion and debate.

Social media use and language will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction as will the laws that apply to its misuse. Adopting a clear set of agreed and published guidelines will aid in the protection of media professionals, media companies and social media users.

Remember these platforms are just the tools. It's down to you, the media professional, as to how they are used in connection with your brand.

These guidelines are aspirational, they are not rigid, simply a suggestion for a set of 'House Rules' that demonstrate to professionals and users that you are aware of the implications of social media use.

These guidelines will be published as a soft copy. To be effective they will need to be updated on a regular basis to reflect the fast-evolving media landscape. Please don't hesitate to contact the Public Media Alliance with any comments or ideas.

Sally-Ann Wilson, CEO



The Basics

Social media platforms are simply new media technologies that enable professionals, as well as the public, to communicate and interact. With new social media platforms continuing to emerge and develop, a key decision is to agree **which platforms will work best** for your media house, region and purposes. The second step is to ensure that ALL staff understand the basic rules for common platforms.

House Rules

Ensure that your company has distinctly branded social media pages. State your **House Rules** clearly and in a prominent position to protect media professionals and users as well as your brand.

You should:

- Adhere to established good media practice.
- Make your House Rules clear to all contributors by displaying them prominently on all sites.
- Ensure that your social media team is adequately trained, staffed and resourced.
- All new staff should receive a full induction regarding social media use.
- Use cross posting to expand your reach e.g. Hootsuite, Buffer and Later.
- Ensure good standards of verification. Use a tool such as the European Journalism Centre's [EJC] Verification Handbook.
- Social media posts always require 'two pairs of eyes'.
- Understand when it is essential to obtain legal support and advice.
- Explain clearly how analytics will be collected and used by your organisation.
- Ensure that all staff understand the House Rules regarding public and private social media accounts.
- Check on the data protection rules of your jurisdiction: State your data protection policy in a prominent position on your website.
- Update your social media policy and guidelines on a regular basis and inform all staff.
- Ensure that social media content is not damaging to your brand.
- Verification is essential but you should also state clearly that a retweet/share is not an endorsement.
- Have a clear warning that offensive material and abuse by trolls/ferals will be taken down immediately.
- Establish private feedback channels to explain moderation decisions.

Keep up journalistic standards

You work for an established media organisation. Some social media platforms have been described as ‘The Wild West’ frontier of communication where ‘anything goes’ but social media posts linked to your brand do not have to be like that! You’ve built your organisation’s reputation and audience loyalty, so hang on to it.

You should:

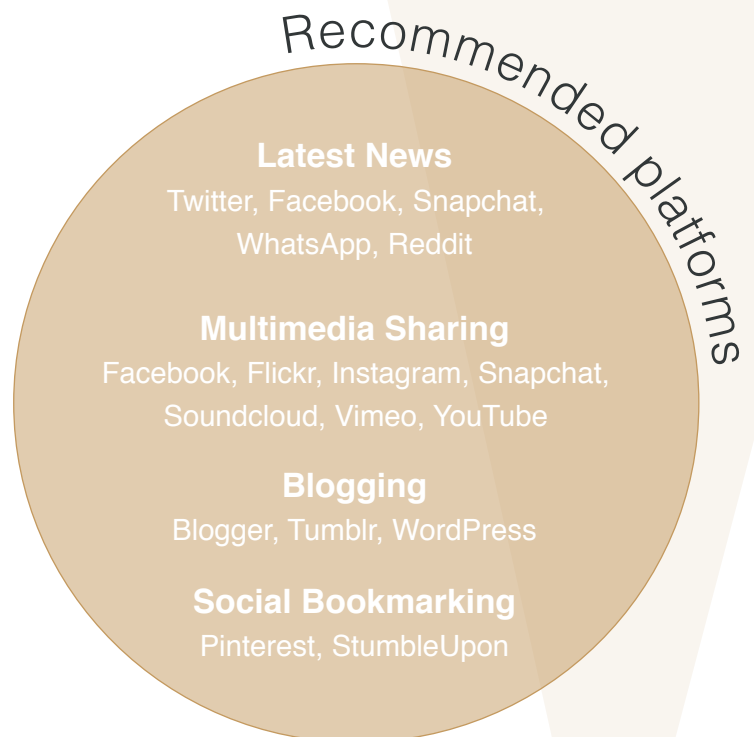
- Lift the phone. Make sure that stories from social media are followed up.
- Ensure that facts are checked and stories, pictures and videos verified with secondary sources.
- Don’t infringe copyright. Laws still apply even on social media.
- Be aware of how you use language on social media, it may cause offence.
- Take care when handling sensitive stories and content, be aware of the human behind the story.
- Build user trust - being the best is ultimately better than being the first.

Public Engagement

Social media platforms are a great way of engaging the public with your content and brand.

In some organisations, the main block to effective use of social media is a lack of understanding from senior managers and professionals. Any media professional who has worked in the industry for 10, 20, or even 30-plus years will have seen many, many, changes in technology and practice. Some may be reluctant or weary of adopting new media technologies! Demonstrate the potential benefits of social media to ALL staff. Audiences now expect a social media element to content.

Social media about your output will start organically so why don’t you take ownership of it in-house and contribute to the conversation?



In-House Training

In-House workshops are a great way of informing everyone about the latest developments and trends of social media use. The PMA has regular updates and journalistic tools on its website[<https://publicmediaalliance.org/>].

Encourage your colleagues to:

- Value your company's social media spaces - it increases your reach.
- Consider what public engagement looks and sounds like for your brand.
- Be clear that you are media professionals and not in the business of producing 'click bait'.
- Encourage creativity in social media posts and stories.
- Remember that there is no watershed on social media so media houses need to ensure social media content is acceptable for children and vulnerable people.
- Add audience opportunities via social media.



Contributors to the Social Media Guidelines

Useful Tutorials:

- **Facebook Blueprint:** 96 free courses in Instagram and Facebook use <https://www.facebook.com/blueprint/courses/explore>
- **DIY Genius:** 10 excellent courses, from marketing tools to analytics <https://www.diygenius.com/10-free-online-courses-in-social-media-and-inbound-marketing/>
- **Ethical Social Media:** Online course from the University of Sydney <https://www.coursera.org/learn/ethical-social-media>

More can be found via the Public Media Alliance website.

Top Tip: Warn and Remove: Use private messaging to explain why content has been removed.

Hosting

Hosting is about welcoming contributors and users to your brand. It needs to be inviting. Create a place where people want to hang out and engage with you. You may have one main social media stream for the brand and other streams specifically related to individual channels, programmes or events.

Moderation

Successful social media needs to be moderated. Moderating a social media space ensures that the space is safe and inviting for users. The social media space associated with your company is YOUR space to share with audiences and users. It acts like the front reception of your organisation; it should be welcoming and inviting. You wouldn't allow anyone to run in off the street and shout during your news bulletin, so moderate your social media sites in the same way.

Make the rules of engagement clear to all those who want to interact with your company via social media.

Moderation is not about censoring views or correcting spelling and grammar (unless it detracts from the meaning), however you do need to ensure that:

- **Content and comments posted on your social media networks are appropriate and not damaging to your brand.**
- **Your Social media networks are not spammed with off-topic comments, inappropriate links and other unsuitable content.**

Unsuitable content:

- Pornographic and sexually explicit content.
- Links to downloads that could compromise your network or content in the above categories.
- Gratuitous violence.
- Items likely to offend [see below re 'offence'] most people.
- Any content promoting hate sites or groups.
- Sites that encourage unlawful activity.
- Content that breaches or infringes copyright.

Moderators should not engage publicly in a debate with visitors who post complaints about the station's output or members of staff. Direct them to the formal complaints channels for the station. If they have sent a direct private message of complaint via the social media channel, refer to a manager for a response in the usual company manner.

Top Tip: Use analytics data and online polls to demonstrate the reach and potential of social media to colleagues.

Content should not be published or should be removed where:

- It may provoke, attack or offend others. 'Offence' may vary from territory to territory and what is acceptable should be agreed at company level as editorial policy.
- It breaks, or condones breaking, the law.
- It contains language that may offend, including swear words.
- It is racist, sexist, homophobic, sexually explicit, abusive or otherwise unacceptable.
- It is clear that the person publishing the comment or content is impersonating somebody else.
- Great care must be taken with anonymous content that cannot be attributed and/or verified.

Audience feedback

Social media provides an opportunity to invite and create audience feedback. E.g. adding 'Retweet' [RT] to invite feedback. Replies are also good for feedback too!

Respect the culture

Social networks and communities have their own cultures, etiquettes and terms of service, so try to make yourself aware of these before you begin contributing – this way you'll be sure to build audience engagement.

Response times:

Immediacy is key with social media. You will need to set up an immediate automated response, for private messages where the platform permits. This should be followed by a guaranteed full response within 24/48 hours.

For comments and public enquiries prompt moderation is essential. Where possible an immediate response is preferable.

Commercial aspects

Used effectively and strategically social media can extend reach and provide commercial benefit. You can achieve this by:

- Liaise with marketing, production and commissioning teams to ensure all aspects of social media are considered and integrated.
- Use social media to promote offers and integrate into content.
- Consider product placement via social media [but not in news posts].

Personal vs Private

Many staff at your organisation may have a public profile. It is therefore unwise to think that a staff member can post in a private capacity without the public believing that the post represents the organisation. You should be extremely cautious about what you post because seemingly innocuous comments can be taken out of context, become amplified and cause reputational damage to the organisation. If you have any questions about whether you can publish information, a point of view, media or any other content check with the management team first.



Contributors developing the guidelines in Barbados

Don't become the news: One of the most controversial and difficult areas created by the increased use of social media is when personal and professional lives become blurred. Value your profession. Be unbiased and keep some news and views private. Consider who your real friends are and use the same skills to identify social media friends!

Decide how much you want to reveal: Be aware that information published on the web is almost impossible to remove and can be distributed even from within private networks. You should assume that all of your social media involvement is visible to everyone including your managers, colleagues and audience.

Guiding Principles

- Job descriptions and contracts for all employees **must** include clearly stated rules regarding the company's policies on social media.
- **All staff** including contract and talent must receive appropriate training – everyone should be provided with the rules and those rules must be clear.
- The risks regarding errors in social media must be outlined to all staff.
- All employees must be required to sign an agreement saying that they understand and will abide by social media rules.
- Endorsements: Don't promote or discuss products or companies through social media in exchange for cash. If you have been sent a product to review, make sure that you disclose this.

Top Tip: Always act professionally in your personal space.

Managing your personal accounts

- Media workers and journalists can set up personal social media accounts, which they manage themselves.
- Individuals may acknowledge their connection to their place of employment on their personal page but must indicate that it is a personal page and that the views they express there are their personal ones.
- Show no bias.
- Personal interests should not be promoted on company/show social media pages.
- The use of social media for personal purposes is permitted within working hours, however you must follow the guidelines in this document and use your best judgement with regards to how much time you spend online and what type of information you post.

Company Pages

Media companies should set up branded social media with specific pages for major shows. These pages should be set up using email addresses linked to the company, as opposed to personal, email accounts.

Managing your company accounts

- Passwords should be given to at least two individuals, one being a supervisor or manager (Passwords must not reside with one person).
- Passwords **MUST** be changed when there are staff changes.
- For security reasons, **DO NOT** use the same passwords for all social media accounts.
- There needs to be clear rules of engagement so individuals managing company accounts do not end up in arguments online.
- Editorial – there needs to be at least two sets of eyes for all content that is posted through these pages
- Private interests must not be promoted cross-platform.
- Media companies should aim to set up branded social media accounts for their major personalities e.g. anchors and show hosts.
- State clearly that ‘liking’, ‘retweeting’ and “favouriting” is not an endorsement by the company or individual employee.

Copyright: Respect online copyright

Be aware of the content you post and who owns the copyright. Do not grab images from the internet and post them on social media pages without checking copyright. Some rights-free images are available online via Pixabay and other stock photo sites.

Mistakes do happen

Be prepared. Agree a company strategy and stick to it. Never take down a post, just apologise and/or amend it. Public corrections are a powerful way of reinforcing accountability and trust. Be clear about what was incorrect and provide the correct information.



Collaboration from across the Caribbean was essential to producing this guide

Emergency Situations

One key role of public and established media houses is to respond to emergencies. Your brand is built on being a trusted and credible source of information for the public during times of crisis.

Emergencies arise in a variety of forms; natural disasters, riots, terrorism, pandemics, jail breaks etc. The social media response will need to be adapted accordingly on a 'case by case' basis.

It is essential for media houses to develop an **Emergency Communications Strategy** -this should include a clear social media strategy.

Emergency Communications Strategies should have three clear phases: Pre, During and Post.

Emergency Communication Strategy

Pre-emergency:

- Be prepared - consider, discuss and agree actions for a variety of scenarios.
- Keep updated a list of contact details for emergency bodies including relevant twitter handles etc.
- Ensure staff contact details are updated.
- Develop and share templates, graphics and training within the Caribbean.

During:

- Establish clear lines of communication
- Set up and publicise a hashtag # for emergencies protocol
- Go to popular sites and push where the people are. Push everywhere!
- Blackout: In case of network loss or overload link up with radio teams for output/ updates.
- Switching networks must be agreed by senior managers at company level.
- Update regularly.
- Avoid panic.
- User Generated Content [UGC] must be reviewed before posting-three pairs of eyes should review content/social media during an emergency.
- Remember - It is better to be right than first.
- Respect the human being behind the story.
- Monitor and consider staff working hours.
- Give clear warnings about sensitive content.

Post-emergency:

- Verify it, share it, credit it. The main rules for using UGC.
- Request specific permission for the use of disaster related content.
- Do not post images of a graphic nature - blood is not unique.
- Be creative with images to tell the story. You do not need to show disturbing scenes unnecessarily.
- Ensure next of kin do not hear of death or injuries via your social media feeds.
- Cover should be provided for staff because of the additional workload at critical times.

Top Tip: Emergency guidelines will need to vary depending on the type of emergency

Elections

It is important that staff involved in news roles remain wholly impartial. Nothing should appear on personal or professional social networks that undermines the organisations integrity and impartiality. For example, political views should not be posted in any online profiles. In addition, employees should not advocate a particular position in relation to issues of public controversy or debate.

Staff

Social media staff are now a core part of the team for any successful media house. They are not just the young people in the corner playing around on Twitter and Facebook! As central elements of the business plan and team they need adequate training and resourcing including technical training.

Training

Social media is evolving and changing fast. Training should be updated on a quarterly basis to reflect the rapid changes taking place in the social media world. Social media staff tend to be younger- that means they are often viewed by companies as cheaper! Professionalise your social media by professionalising the way the company employs and supports social media journalists.

Post-disaster and trauma coverage - social media staff may need counselling-they may have viewed and been impacted by graphic material unsuitable for posting.

Working Hours

Social media works 24/7 and response times need to reflect that. This means that media houses will need to consider working hours for social media journalists and ensure that these are realistic. Many social media journalists tend to be younger and are at greater risk of exploitation in terms of working hours and conditions.

Resources

A laptop and phone are essential kit for social media journalists. These items should be provided by the company. Use of personal equipment blurs the lines between personal and professional.

Acknowledgements

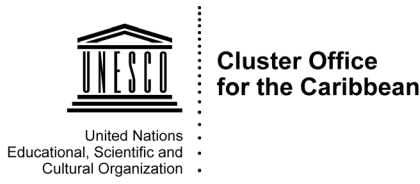
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