6.10.3 Social media communications

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Introduction

Council recognises the benefits of using social media as a means for marketing, promotion and disseminating time-sensitive information to the widest possible audience. It is acknowledged that certain risks are associated with social media tools. These guidelines have been developed to assist employees to administer social media in a responsible manner.

Objectives

- Extend reach of existing corporate messages online by building relationships with relevant audiences
- Provide an informal, ‘human’ voice of the organisation to promote our corporate messages
- Provide an additional, low-barrier method for audiences to interact with the Council
- to provide feedback, seek help and suggest ideas
- Monitor social media activity as it relates to Bega Valley Shire Council
- Provide coverage of events.

Definitions

In this procedure the term “social media” includes (not limited to):

- Social networking sites e.g. Facebook, Google +, Linked In
- Video and photo sharing websites e.g. Flickr, YouTube. Vimeo, Instagram, Pinterest
- Micro-blogging sites e.g. Twitter
- Weblogs, including corporate blogs, personal blogs or blogs hosted on platforms such as Wordpress, Tumblr, Ghost, Roon, Medium and Jux.
- Forums and discussion boards such as Whirlpool, Yahoo! Groups or Google Groups
- Online encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia.

Within this document the term “post” means broadcasting information in a public forum.

Guidelines

Social media guidelines for staff

**Personal Online Activities (Speaking “about” Bega Valley Shire Council)**

Be conscious about mixing your personal and business lives. There is no separation for others between your personal and your business profiles within social media. Council respects the right to personal expression for all our employees, but remember that the media, community members, customers and colleagues may have access to the online content you post. The nature of social media means that anything you post online can be shared without limitation. For this reason we ask that members of staff refrain from making public statements of a negative nature when referring to Bega Valley Shire Council.

Be responsible for your actions. Any online activity that brings damage to Council’s reputation will ultimately be your responsibility. Use common sense and take the same caution with social media as with all other forms of communication.

Follow the Bega Valley Shire Council Code of Conduct as well as all other Council Policies and Procedures when using social media. Be respectful of all individuals.

If talking about Bega Valley Shire Council only share publicly available information. Engage only in discussions where you are comfortable and knowledgeable about the topic. If you are unsure if information is publically available or is otherwise inappropriate to post, contact your Director or the Communications Coordinator before posting any such information.
Professional Online Activities (speaking “on behalf of” Bega Valley Shire Council)

Follow Bega Valley Shire Council Code of Conduct as well as all other Council Policies and Procedures. Be respectful of all individuals when using social media. All interaction should be in the spirit of our corporate values and principles whilst tailoring the message to be suitable for the online community and individual social media sites.

Approval processes exist for all publications and communication on behalf of Council. Refer to the approval process for each social media tool included in this procedure.

Be mindful of copyrights and give credit to the owners. Always make sure to give credit to the original authors of any content that you are publishing (text, images, trademarks, video etc.) from a Third party, and that Council has the copyright or written approval for using said material.

If you are communicating on behalf of Council identify yourself as a representative. You are permitted to withhold your name and position.

Monitor your relevant social media channels. Make sure that you know what is being discussed, so that you can respond appropriately if issues arise.

Know and follow record management practices. Council has regulatory and legal obligations to retain certain information as records. Ensure that all relevant information which will be interpreted as a Council position is captured and registered on Council’s records management system. Online Council statements can be held to the same legal standards as traditional media communications.

Inappropriate content on all social media tools implemented by Council includes:

- Profane language or content;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, colour, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Solicitations of commerce;
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- Information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or,
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.

It is not appropriate to use corporate email addresses to create personal accounts in sites unrelated to Bega Valley Shire Council.

Standards for social media used by council

Facebook Standards

Facebook is a global social networking site which enables users to send messages and update their profiles to share information with friends. It is free to use with a relatively low impact on resources and has the potential to deliver many benefits in support of Council’s communications objectives. For information on how Facebook works see Appendix A. For a glossary of terms see Appendix B.

Positioning and appearance of Council’s Facebook page

Bega Valley Shire Council will utilise a page format within Facebook (creating a profile for a corporation would breach Facebook’s terms of use). The page picture will include the Bega Valley Shire Council logo. Other generic logos such as ‘Your Place, Our Place, Great Place’, and, ‘Your Shire’ are also permitted when used with (not instead of) Council’s logo.
Language

The administrator will use a style appropriate for a government organisation on Facebook. This will be friendly and professional. Common social media acronyms and styles such as LOL (laugh out loud) and etc or other similar expression must not be used.

Administrators

Administrators must be approved by the Communications Coordinator.

Comment Management

- It is preferable that only organisational comments are posted on the wall. The option of fans posting their own comments on the wall is current switched off. This is to keep conversations on track. Community members are free to send us private Facebook mail or comment on posts made by Council. All comments must abide by Council’s Facebook guidelines currently available in the ‘about’ section (see Appendix C).
- Comments on wall posts can be restricted if they are found to breach our comments guidelines. If a comment is inappropriate the administrator can choose to immediately remove the comment or request that comments remain appropriate before its removal.
- Comments should be addressed as soon as possible with a maximum timeframe of forty eight hours for return comments.
- The recommended frequency of posts is a minimum of three posts per week, and a maximum of five posts per working day.
- Comments must relate to current or future Council events or opportunities.
- Comments are to be registered on Council’s record management system (TRIM).
- Comments or private Facebook mail requiring an action are to be forwarded through customer service where a CRM will be issued to the appropriate person/s.

Sources of Content and Approval

Content for the page will comprise a mixture of existing communications re-purposed for Facebook, and content produced exclusively for Facebook.

- Published Media releases - the headlines of media releases. Depending on subject matter and length these may be paraphrased to lighten/humanise the tone.
- Approval required – Nil. Published media releases will be previously approved by the Communications Coordinator.
- Marketing messages – these may include information about events Council is staging or attending. Approval required- Nil. Verify event details with event coordinator.
- Videos and photos – alerting Council’s Facebook friends to new content through images is a key component of our Communications Strategy. Approval required if image is owned by another party. Further approvals are to be sought if the image contains minors (in which parental/guardian consent must be given), or if the image shown people of any age on private property.
- Blog posts – headlines from any blogs run by Council should be mentioned on Facebook if relevant. Approval required – Nil. Blog posts will have prior approval.
- Leveraging website updates - new or updated sections on www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au, new publications, or web site user surveys and online interactive consultations where we are inviting participation. Approval required – Nil. Content previously approved by the Communications Coordinator of Group Manager responsible for the content.
- Crisis communications – in the event of a major incident where Council needs to provide up to the minute advice and guidance, Facebook would be used in addition to the corporate web site.
- Approval required- appropriate emergency and media agencies will provide relevant information.
• Leadership – highlighting relevant research, events and awards. Approval required- Verify details with Group Manager of relevant department.

• Asking and answering questions – occasionally, Council may be able to ask questions of Council's Facebook fans for immediate customer insight or to conduct a quick poll on behalf of the Communications and Engagement staff. Approval required- The page administrator must exercise sound judgement and common sense to ensure that poll contents are in no way guiding or misleading.

Campaign-specific or branch specific

While the Council should aim to avoid diluting the corporate social media profile, it may occasionally be more appropriate for a particular campaign or policy area to have its own social media page.

Council should consider separate mediums when:

• The subject matter is niche or specialist (i.e. of limited interest to the bulk of our followers; or with a specific target audience such as youth)

• They are in support of a specific blog by the Mayor or General Manager.

When additional accounts are used Council will need to ensure they refer to each other and re-post any content of relevance to the different profiles.

Promotion

The page will be promoted by:

• A link from Council’s web site home page, news page, and events page

• A link from Council's other social media outlets where appropriate (YouTube, Flickr, Twitter)

Call to action posts asking key people on Facebook to share our posts must be made sparingly. Overuse of this strategy will quickly turn off users.

Further promotional opportunities may include:

• An Intranet story and/or article, including a request that staff become "fans" of the page (this is dependent on rollout of Facebook to all staff)

• Adding the link in all media releases

• An email to key stakeholders, Councillors and Managers.
Appendix A

How Facebook operates

- An account is created which comprises your username, password and a banner image plus profile image.
- The Facebook account can be established as a profile, page or group.
- A profile is for people who join Facebook on an individual basis.
- A page is designed for institutions, companies or businesses. A page can be established as an official page which allows institutions, businesses and other entities to create their official space within Facebook in order to communicate with their fans or a community page which are intended to support a cause or a movement. This is what Council uses.
- A group is created by a user and the people that join the group may have different roles: administrator, voting members and members. Groups can be public, private or secret, and are used to create networks of people interested on a specific topic.
- The administrator of a Facebook page updates posts, which can be read by all friends/fans. Videos and photos from Council events can be posted onto the Council page and the administrator can invite people to share this content.
- The Council newsfeed (the information you see when you use Facebook) is made up of Council updates and replies to those updates. Fans will see their own streams, which display the updates of the users they are following. Therefore what you see is not the same as what other users will see unless they visit your page.
- Facebook users can interact with each other through private messages and posts.
- A message composed and sent by the administrator or fan can only be seen by the sender and recipients, similar to an email.
- A post is a message on the Council’s public wall, Council would update the status by posting a message on its wall. This message can be seen by anyone who looks at the Council page.
- Council Facebook posts can also be integrated with other social media profiles – for example a Facebook can be simultaneously posted on your Twitter stream and vice versa.
- Facebook is fast and targeted, has constant updates, is accessible, allows subscribers to choose what they want to know and is a go-to place for users to manage their events calendar. It’s the global place for sharing personal and corporate information.
Appendix B

Facebook glossary of terms

- **Ads**
  An advertisement. Users can create Facebook Ads to market their products and ideas. Ads are not free.

- **Application**
  Users can add applications to their profiles, pages, and groups. There are thousands of applications to choose from. Some are built by Facebook. Most are built by external developers. These come with security issues and should in most instances be avoided.

- **Event**
  A calendar-based resource that users can add to their profiles, pages and groups that lets them share news about upcoming affairs or social gatherings.

- **Fan**
  A person who has joined a page because they like what that page represents.

- **Friend Finder**
  A Facebook utility that helps users find present and former friends, family, co-workers, schoolmates, and other acquaintances.

- **Highlights**
  Featured photos, events, notes and more that you don’t want to miss. Stories are chosen based on what your friends have interacted with.

- **Inbox**
  The Facebook mail application.

- **Insights**
  Facebook's answer to web page analysis. For each Facebook page, Insights tracks the number of page views, unique views, total interactions, wall posts, discussion topics, fans, new fans, removed fans, reviews, photo views, audio plays, and video plays.

- **Like**
  A feature that appears as a link next to something you see on Facebook that allows users to let others know they appreciate that something, whether it be a video, a comment or something else.

- **Limited Profile**
  A profile that allows only restricted access.

- **Member**
  A person who has joined and participates with a group.

- **Mobile**
  Facebook Mobile offers multiple Facebook features for your phone.

- **News Feed**
  News Feeds highlight what’s happening in your social circles on Facebook. News Feeds are posted to profiles for all to see.

- **Notifications**
  Like Mini Feeds, notifications are news feeds from friends, sent automatically as they engage in activity on their profile.

- **Page**
  A page is not a profile. It may look like one, but it's not. The features and capabilities are different. It is a Facebook site intended for and created by organisations, artists, musical groups, celebrities, businesses, brands and similar entities (not individuals). Only the official representative of an organisation or business can create and make changes to a page.

- **Photos**
  A Facebook application that lets users upload albums of photos, tag friends, and comment on photos.
• Profile
   A profile is not a page. The features and capabilities are different. It is a Facebook site intended for and created by people who want to share information about themselves and socialize with others. A profile displays a user's personal information and their interactions with friends. Each registered user may have only one profile.

• RSS Really Simple Syndication Status
   An auto updating feature which allows users to inform their friends of their current whereabouts, actions, or thoughts.

• Stream
   The stream shows your posts from your friends in real-time. This keeps you up to date on everything that's happening. You can control who appears here.

• Tabs
   Tabs mark the different sections of a profile, such as information, photos, Likes, events and apps.

• Tag Marking
   A photo or video with text that identifies the image or the person in the image.

• Updates
   News feeds sent to you from pages that you have joined.

• Video
   A Facebook application that lets users share videos on Facebook. Users can add their videos with the service by uploading video, adding video through Facebook Mobile, and using a web cam recording feature. Additionally, users can ‘tag’ their friends in videos they add much like the way users can tag their friends in photos.

• Wall
   A featured section inside a Facebook profile. It’s a space on every user’s profile page that allows friends and users themselves to post messages for all to see.
Appendix C

Bega Valley Shire Council Comments Guidelines (as shown in our ‘information’ tab)

Our Facebook page is a place for constructive discussion about local issues. Positive and negative comments form the basis of gauging public sentiment in regards to Council performance and services. But like all online and offline public forums, there is a level of moderation needed to ensure fairness to other users and those who are featured on our page.

There will be occasions when we need to remove comments and block users as a result of leaving inappropriate responses to posts and comments. Please read the following guidelines so we can all engage in fair, open and vibrant conversation.

1. Please be polite. Personal attacks and words that defame or degrade any person, group or organisation will not be tolerated. The use of coarse language is not welcome.
2. Please stay on topic. Random comments that do not relate to individual posts are a distraction and discourage others from engaging in relevant conversation. Comments that purposely attempt to derail a comments thread will be deleted.
3. Please do not repeat comments in multiple threads. This will be seen as an attempt to derail the conversation and treated as spam.
4. Links made for commercial purposes and personal gain will be treated as spam and removed.
5. Comments that question these guidelines or moderation of our page will be removed. We will send you a private message via Facebook asking you to contact us directly if you have any questions about moderation.
6. Trolling and using a fake online identity to praise, defend or create the illusion of support for one’s self, allies or company (sockpuppetry) are not acceptable. People found to be doing either will be blocked from commenting on our page.
7. The administrators of this page reserve the right to remove any material if the above guidelines are not met.
8. Please also bear in mind Facebook’s own Community Standards policy.
9. Council will manage its Facebook page, including responding to comments and the removal of unsuitable material, during normal business operating hours only.

And finally, try not to worry. Providing you are entering into any discussion in the spirit of being fair and polite to all people involved, you will remain a welcome member of our growing online community.