

Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices

UT Institute of Agriculture

Definition: Social networking is the use of a website to connect with people who share personal or professional interests. Social media are websites or other online means of communication, such as smartphones apps, that are used by large groups of people to share information and to develop social and professional contacts.

(Source: <http://dictionary.reference.com/>)

Social media in the past several years has exploded. It has become an important technology for effectively communicating information with the world in real time. It is a vehicle by which UTIA can engage in conversations with its diverse audiences -- internally and externally -- such as students, faculty, staff, alumni, researchers, partners, stakeholders, clients, parents, 4-Her's, news and media outlets, and more.

There is always "something" happening! With the ease of using mobile apps, anyone can share news and information at anytime, anywhere with anyone. The purpose of this document is to help those in the UTIA community who are interested in using social media to effectively share news and humanize research, outreach and educational successes and extend information that can better lives, businesses and communities.

The goal of this document is to describe the proper use of social media as not only a news outlet, but also as a marketing and networking tool. The document is divided into two parts. The "Social Media Guidelines" are required elements that constitute policies and procedures that apply to ALL social media accounts representing UTIA. The "Social Media Best Practices" portion of the document refers to proven recommendations for using the best etiquette and in the most complimentary manner for the Institute.

These guidelines and best practices were created by the Web Advisory Committee (WAC). The committee is composed of members from all areas of UTIA, including associate deans and personnel from the units, departments, information technology services and marketing and communications.

There are many social media products from which to choose, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, LinkedIn, and Flickr to name some of the most popular. The University of Tennessee officially has approved the use of Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest and Dropbox. This does not mean you are restricted to using just these accounts. However, it is highly advised before you register for an account that is not officially endorsed by UT, you carefully read the general terms and conditions of the account before you accept the account agreement.

Social Media Guidelines

- Social media (SM) accounts associated with a department, county, center or program represent not only that entity, but also they represent the Institute of Agriculture, UT Extension, AgResearch, the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, the College of Veterinary Medicine and the University as a whole.
- If you establish a new social media account for a UTIA program/website, etc., you must have your county/regional director/supervisor's approval or your department head's approval. Contact the Department of Marketing and Communications or Information Technology Services if you have any questions or concerns about risk management.
- All social media accounts must be registered with UTIA Marketing and Communications. Contact [Doug Edlund](#) to register your site and your site's password. UTIA Marketing and Communications will compile and maintain a publicly available list of UTIA social media accounts (minus the passwords).
- New social media accounts for departments, counties, programs, centers, etc. should follow an established UTIA naming convention as set forth by UTIA Marketing and Communications. An account that is associated with an individual specialist, agent or faculty member representing UTIA should also follow a specific naming convention (Contact UTIA Marketing & Communications at 865-974-7141 for the approved naming convention).
- All social media accounts should be accessible by multiple UTIA personnel. This can be done in several different ways such as multiple managers in Facebook or providing multiple personnel the login information (email address/username and password) for Twitter or other social media channels. If an account administrator (owner) leaves the department/center/unit/Institute a transfer of the account to a new administrator/owner is not required.
- If an account administrator (owner) leaves the department/center/unit/Institute it is highly recommended that they are removed as manager (Facebook) and passwords associated with all social media accounts to which they had access be changed immediately.
- Focus on your area of expertise. If you do not feel confident with a subject, be honest about your lack of knowledge in that specific area and contact the appropriate content expert.
- Contact your supervisor, department head, or director when a discussion may involve sensitive subject(s).
- Be aware of your responsibility. You may be held responsible for what you post on your site and on the sites of others. Anything that is posted may be interpreted as an official statement from

UTIA.

- Protect all moderate/sensitive institutional information. Please refer to [the security website](#) for a definition on moderate sensitive information.
- Do not pre-release official news and/or announcements from the Institute via social media, blogs, etc. News and announcements may be considered under embargo until released by UTIA, (e.g., when a news release appears on the UTIA website.) Any questions regarding news items, announcements and the timing of their release should be referred to UTIA Marketing and Communications at 865-974-7141.
- UTIA associated social media posts should **NEVER** contain private opinions or beliefs. Remember nothing is “private” in social media. Anything you post can be seen by unintended audiences and have unintended consequences.
 - Posts are in “real time.” Once you post it, it cannot be retracted and will exist somewhere forever.
 - Proofread before you post. If you have concerns with the content you are about to post, do not post it. Err on the side of being conservative. Remember, **if you post it, you are responsible for it**...so be sure you are completely comfortable with the information you are posting.
- Do not upload, post, transmit, share, store or otherwise make publicly available on a social media account any private information of any third party, including addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, etc.
- Comply with trademark, copyright, fair use, financial disclosure, University policies, and Tennessee privacy laws.
- Give proper credit to work from another source. Never post copyrighted photos, music, text or video content without obtaining written permission from the copyright owner.
- Use your posts to market the Institute/department/county/program’s websites.

Social Media Best Practices

Considerations before You Get Started

- Issues to consider before applying for a social media account:
 - Evaluate the time commitment needed to keep content current on a regular basis. Inactive or dead accounts, can cause a negative reaction towards the Institute.
 - Determine the scope of your account and what you want to accomplish.
 - Determine your audience and how best you can serve them.
 - Determine who will monitor the account for appropriateness and accuracy.
 - Set goals for ways to engage and grow your audience and be prepared to meet them.

- Appoint a primary and secondary administrator of a social media account.

Content Considerations

- Always use good judgment, basic etiquette and professionalism in your posts. Remember, content can go anywhere once it's posted.
- Write in a conversational style.
 - Strive for a genuine yet professional communication style.
 - Avoid slang, profanity, regional colloquialisms, or "market-speak."
- Engage your followers.
 - Listen and ask questions.
 - Show people you are listening by responding promptly.
 - Gain insight into your followers and engage them.
- Address your posts to the audience you are trying to reach.
- Always check your spelling and grammar before you post.
- Be mindful who you follow on any social media channel. Ask yourself if by following this individual/entities will it seem that you are promoting/condoning something that can be detrimental to the Institution, unit, department, or program.
- Be cautious of posting any personally identifiable information that can be used to locate another person offline.
- Be aware of the surroundings before you take a photo of a person(s) to be posted on a social media account. For example, ensure the person(s) in your Twitter photo posts cannot be easily identified with the surrounding background or scenery which may pose a security threat to that person(s).

This document was prepared by the UTIA Web Advisory Committee

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