

Social Media Guide for Business Leaders

Tips and advice about social media use are abundant these days, as the use of social media tools becomes increasingly important and widespread across organizations from large to small.

Your business may or may not have a formal social media presence, but if you're a typical adult, chances are, you have a personal account on at least one of several popular social media sites.

Perhaps you use LinkedIn to connect with colleagues, peers, and other professionals.

Maybe you have jumped on the Facebook bandwagon in hopes to reunite with friends, family, or former classmates or colleagues.

Whatever your level of social media activity, as a business leader, it's important to consider how you will use social media sites, because your activity will set the standard for others in your organization.

So, consider these three issues of social media involvement for professionals to make sure you are leading with integrity in the social space.

- ▶ **How will you use social media?**
- ▶ **What sites should you use?**
- ▶ **Who will you connect with online?**

How Will You Use Social Media?

Depending on your role within an organization, you may or may not have a formal presence in social media tied to marketing, public relations, or customer service. But, depending on the type of site you're using, you may want to consider having a more relaxed presence on some sites and a more professional presence on others.

Your profile, content, and relationships say a lot about you to the outside world. Will your social media use be personal, professional, or both?



Business or Personal?

What you put into status updates, posts, pictures, comments, and other content on social media sites reflects who you are as a person and as a professional. So, think about your wording, meaning, and what image you project before you hit submit. With many social media sites, your content is available publicly. This means peers, subordinates, higher-ups, customers, and competitors could potentially access your updates. Here are some issues to consider.

- ▶ **Tone** – Before you complain, nag, or gripe online, consider how your tone will appear to the outside world and within the walls of your organization.
- ▶ **Professionalism** – Whether or not you use social media as part of your job, chances are, your professional life will collide with your social media presence at some point. Because of this, make sure you maintain an acceptable level of professionalism when using social media.
- ▶ **Personality** – Though you want to keep things professional, in social media, authenticity is valuable. That's why it's important to think about how you convey your personality through sharing bits of information about your personal life, habits, pets, or musical preferences.
- ▶ **Endorsements** – Simple updates recommending products, colleagues, and ideas can spread a long way. Make sure you've really used, read, or connected with an idea before sharing it, or a well-intentioned plug could end up coming back to bite you.
- ▶ **Disclosure** – The Federal Trade Commission has provided regulations regarding disclosure and transparency of sponsored content on social media sites. Make sure you know what's within your legal obligation to disclose in social media.
- ▶ **Professional Liability** – You may have an exciting product launch coming up at work, or are bringing on a new team member. Chances are, you want to share the big news with the world. But, consider whether or not you'll have any professional liability by sharing too much, or sharing too early.
- ▶ **Safety** – If you're involved in local groups or organizations, you'll likely have an opportunity to connect in person with people you meet online. Keep your personal safety in mind when posting maps to locations you visit, names of favored local spots, etc. to make sure when you do meet with people from the web, it's on your terms.
- ▶ **Corporate Policies** – Does your business have a social media policy? Make sure you're up to speed with company policies on social media use during office hours, or consider consulting with an expert to help create one if there isn't one already in place.



Which Sites Should I Use?

There are countless social media sites available for a wide variety of interests, goals, and groups. The larger the community, the more opportunities you'll have to build your network. But, bigger isn't always better when it comes to community.

You may find a targeted group that better fits your needs and personality. When it comes to some of the most popular sites, here's a quick rundown:



LinkedIn – Specifically designed with professional networking in mind, LinkedIn has grown from being a digital résumé with interactive tools into a robust professional networking site with groups, communication tools, and more.

When using LinkedIn, be cognizant that professional contacts, potential hires, and current employees may view your page and its content to learn more about you and your experience. Keep your profile up-to-date and consistent with your résumé.



Twitter – By far the social network gaining the most media attention these days, Twitter is a mashup of every imaginable type of social media user. The site has been touted by celebrities, used by journalists, and is quickly gaining popularity among businesses across the globe.

With Twitter, your self-defined network will set the tone for the content and usability of the site, so you can customize your experience. But, since Twitter offers few user customization tools, it's best to assume that both personal- and professional-use guidelines will apply.



Facebook – Growing by leaps and bounds, Facebook began as a place for college students to network personally, share photos, and keep in touch. Recently, the fastest-growing demographic on the site has been in the 35-54 age group, and now college students comprise only 40% of the site's membership.

The site offers in-depth user privacy and content sharing controls. Use Facebook as a place to focus on personal relationships, and use privacy controls to ensure that others, like professional contacts, see only the content you want to share with them.

Who Should I Connect With?

When it comes to using social media, one of the most important elements is the relationships you will build, maintain, or develop. Carefully consider the following guidelines for who and how to connect:

- ▶ **Friends** – If you're using a site mainly for professional use, friends are fair game, but don't rely solely on your personal network for professional use. You don't want to bore or alienate close connections with content that doesn't appeal to them.
- ▶ **Old Acquaintances** – Sites like Facebook are a good place to connect with old acquaintances personally, but consider using privacy controls if you want to limit the information they can view about you. For former colleagues, use a site like LinkedIn to keep the connection professional.
- ▶ **Colleagues** – With current professional peers, use LinkedIn or a site such as Twitter, if your content explores your profession, industry, field, or network. On more relationship-based sites like Facebook, limit connections to colleagues you'd consider as friends in your personal life, or enable privacy controls to limit the information they can view.
- ▶ **Employees** – Should you friend an employee? Should you deny or accept a friend request from someone who works with you? On more relaxed site like Facebook, wait to see if employees seek to connect with you first. If they do, create a group just for this type of user so you can accept a friend request, yet ensure they don't get too mixed up in your personal relationships.
- ▶ **Job Seekers** – If you have a formal recruiting role, social networking sites can be a great way to connect with quality candidates. But beware: being too aggressive on turf that people consider to be personal space can be a turn off. Instead, seek to connect with job seekers on places devoted to professional networking, like LinkedIn, BrightFuse, or BrazenCareerist.



As a business leader, when it comes to social media, it's important to consider your personal and professional goals in social media involvement. Determine the different types of relationships you want to build, content you want to share, and goals you want to achieve. This will help you determine which sites you should use and who to connect with.

Keep in mind that social media moves quickly. It's easy to get distracted by all the ideas and opportunities available to you online today. So, use these guidelines to start building a social media presence that works for you.

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