

Social Media Guidelines

Initially considered simply a way to socialize with friends, “social media” platforms such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are now established as major media channels. These sites let individuals build and utilize personal social networks among friends, family, and colleagues. Both for-profit and nonprofit organizations are using social media as well to build and support their brands, drive engagement, support products, increase sales, and more.

Used properly, these media can be an excellent way for Scouting councils to start a conversation with their target audiences by informing, connecting, and attracting them to Scouting.

There are no hard and fast rules in this new media landscape, aside from the abiding commitment of the BSA to protect children from inappropriate material and maintain the privacy of its membership.

Social media constitute a new form of digital communication providing interaction and dialogue around user-generated content. They go beyond merely pushing content to a reader. Organizations wishing to exploit social media must accept the fact that listening is just as important as speaking in these channels, and Scouters wishing to play in this space should be prepared to do so if they are to reap any value.

With that in mind, we encourage those intending to use social media on behalf of Scouting to note the following:

- **Social media has to be monitored.** A qualified staff member or volunteer should have responsibility to monitor social media channels.
- **Integrate your communications.** You have numerous choices—print, Web, e-mail, radio, TV, word of mouth, social media. Create a strategy to surround your target audience with your key message or messages.
- **Social media takes a thick skin.** Negative conversations are happening already, but now you have a voice in the conversation. Don’t delete negative comments.
- **Let your audiences talk about you.** By posting content regularly, you can tell your story and encourage conversations in the community.
- **Be prepared to respond to negative or inaccurate posts.** Councils should follow guidelines for responding to negative posts on social media sites. Some negative comments do not warrant a response, while others should be taken seriously and addressed. Factors such as the number of followers and the severity of the conversations should temper if and how to respond.
- **Direct media inquiries to the appropriate person.** Media inquiries coming through social media should be referred to the Scout executive or a designee for an official response.
- **Be Scout-like.** When disagreeing with others’ opinions, remain appropriate and polite. If you find yourself in a situation online that looks as if it’s becoming antagonistic, do not get overly defensive and do not disengage from the conversation abruptly. Ask your Scout executive or the designee for advice on how to disengage from the dialogue in a polite manner that reflects well on the BSA.
- **Build trust by being open and transparent.** Share information about your council and what the challenges and opportunities are for Scouting in your community.