

Social Media Policy template

An outline of the use of social media within the sporting sector

Social media offers the opportunity for people to gather in online communities of shared interest and create, share or access content.

Regardless of whether or not you have chosen to be an active user of social media, there is no denying that the use of social media is now mainstream and that the world is becoming a much smaller place as a result.

Sporting organisations have been steadily growing their social media presence over the years and are using it for a variety of purposes, including communicating with the various stakeholders and marketing.

Individuals within sport, including athletes, coaches, officials, spectators or others, are using social media for personal use. Sometimes these individuals will use social media to communicate information related to sport and/or express their opinions related to their experiences with sport.

In addition to this, some of these individuals will provide the “voice” for their sporting organisation as an administrator of the “official” social media presence for their sporting organisation.

The public nature of social media leaves little room for errors when using this technology. As a result, the news is littered with simple social media errors that could have been easily avoided with an understanding of social media policy.

Over the years there have been numerous high profile incidents where social media has been used by members of sporting communities to facilitate anti-social, inappropriate, abusive, racist, threatening and even illegal behaviour and activities. These types of

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activities have caused distress to individuals and groups of members and some have even resulted in long-term damage to the reputation of either the sport and/or the individuals involved.

In addition to this, there have been many incidences that, while they have not been high profile, have caused similar issues. This highlights the need for the development of robust social media policies within sporting organisations to reduce the likelihood, frequency and severity of these incidences.

Issues that arise from the use of social media

The rapid rise in the use of social media has created a need to find more effective ways to manage its use in an ethical and socially responsible manner.

A single piece of content posted to the highly accessible and scalable publishing platforms that are social media, has the potential to go "viral" in a matter of minutes.

This can be great for spreading valuable messages and positive stories that benefit you and your organisation. Favourable content that is able to leverage the viral nature of social media can assist your organisation in attracting and retaining members, as well as providing a better experience for all involved.

If used effectively, social media can assist your organisation in developing deeper engagement within its community, resulting in more connected and enriched relationships. There's no question that social media is a great tool for sport in all sorts of ways.

However, the use of social media can also be detrimental to you and/or your organisation if unfavourable messages or stories are communicated. It only takes a slip of the keyboard or a momentary lack of common sense and that one small mistake can escalate quickly into a full-blown social media crisis.

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Unfortunately, social media is sometimes used by individuals as a platform for communicating messages of discrimination, defamation, harassment and bullying. This can be further amplified due to the viral nature of social media. These activities can bring both individuals and organisations into disrepute.

Member protection, child protection, confidentiality and copyright breaches can also occur via social media. This often occurs as a result of a lack of understanding by the individuals posting the offending content.

However, ignorance is no excuse.

In an attempt to avoid these issues and incidents your organisation can provide guidelines and rules, under a social media policy, around acceptable and appropriate social media use, as well as educating your stakeholders to increase understanding of what the social media policy entails.

A good social media policy will help reduce the number of issues and incidents that arise via social media that could harm you and/or your organisation. It will also help you deal with issues should they occur.

Why develop a social media policy?

Social media is a powerful force that sporting organisations can harness to increase membership, inspire loyalty, communicate a key message, create awareness and so much more.

If a sporting organisation wants to succeed in this arena it needs a solid internal governance policy that sets the rules of engagement and offers social media training, integration, strategy and understanding.

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A good first step is to ensure that individuals understand that the rules count just as much online as in the 'real' world – so if they break a rule online, then it's as serious as if it occurred on the sporting field, during a committee meeting or elsewhere.

Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary.

There are laws and regulations—for example, defamation, and copyright infringement—which apply online just as they do anywhere else. These shouldn't need restating, but reminding people they exist never does any harm.

Here's a few recommendations for creating and implementing a social media policy specific to your sporting organisation

Use the *Play by the Rules* template as a guide. Consider all parts of the template and how it applies to your organisation. Remember, it's **your** policy and the template is meant to offer help, not give you a solution or a quick fix. You will need to adapt the template to your own needs.

Involve all key stakeholders when further refining and implementing your social media policy. This will ensure that relevant persons are aware of their rights and responsibilities, as well as increasing buy-in from your stakeholders.

You should also assign a person to be responsible for clarifying any issues or concerns around your policy. It does not have to be a social media expert – just someone who is very familiar with the policy and its implications.

In order to encourage compliance with your social media policy, it is important to ensure that all of your key stakeholders are appropriately trained and informed in some way. This could mean information sessions, workshops, updates in newsletters, brochures, posters, fact

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sheets and/or a mixture of all of these. As a minimum, your policy needs to be communicated to all applicable stakeholders.

Check your other policies too, particularly your complaint handling procedures. This will help you understand how your organisation should respond in the event of a breach of the policy.

Here's a few other things to think about:

- How quickly you will respond? If you want to respond to online content as soon as possible after a breach has occurred, make sure you have a team monitoring the space or have an alert system in place.
- When will you respond online and when won't you? Are you responding to every negative tweet? This can be challenging if your organisation is receiving a lot of negative sentiment, but it can be done. When do you take the issue offline with a phone call or email?
- How and when will an issue be escalated? Who needs to be informed at what stages?

Document all these processes so that all people involved are on the same page.

Given the rate in which social media platforms are expanding, your policy will need to be reviewed regularly (maximum 3 years) to help ensure it remains relevant and applicable.

Additional resources and references

The following resources were reviewed in compiling the DRAFT Social Media Policy Template and Review

- adidas Group Social Media Guidelines: <http://blog.adidas-group.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/adidas-Group-Social-Media-Guidelines1.pdf>
- Basketball Tasmania Social Media Guidelines And Policy

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- Cycling ACT Social Media Policy Statement'Intel Social Media Guidelines: <http://www.intel.com/content/www/us/en/legal/intel-social-media-guidelines.html>
- CAMS Social Media Policy
- Fox Sport Pulse Social Media Template
- Gymnastics Tasmania Social Media and Communication Policy
- Kurrawa Surf Life Saving Club Social Media Policy: <http://kurrawasurf.com.au/surfclub/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Social-Media-Policy.pdf>
- Policy Tool for Social Media: <http://socialmedia.policytool.net/>
- Social Firefighting: Nicole Matejic, #BusinessAddicts The Podcast: <http://businessaddicts.com/30>
- Social Media Rules of Engagement – Why Your Online Narrative Is The Best Weapon During A Crisis: <http://www.socialmediarulesofengagement.com/>
- Social Media Tips - Sharing lessons learned to help your business grow, Kodak: http://www.kodak.com/US/images/en/corp/aboutKodak/onlineToday/Kodak_SocialMediaTips_Aug14.pdf
- Softball Victoria Social Media Policy
- State Government of Victoria Department of Justice & Regulation: <http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/utility/social+media/social+media+policy>
- Surf Life Saving Australia Policy – Use of Social Media #6.20, October 2009
- Susan McLean, Cybersafety Policy Template For Sport And Active Recreation Organisations
- Teltra's 3 R's of Social Media Engagement: <http://exchange.telstra.com.au/3rs/>
- Triathlon Australia Social Media Policy, August 2013

Additional social media references not reviewed individually, but worthy of noting for as a future reference when revising this template:

- Social Media Governance: <http://socialmediagovernance.com/policies/>

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