Vanderbilt University Best Practices for a Successful Social Media Presence

Be respectful.

Anything you post in your role as a Vanderbilt employee reflects on the institution. Be professional and respectful at all times on your social media site. Do not engage in arguments or extensive debates with naysayers on your site.

Be transparent.

Make it clear that you are blogging / tweeting / Facebooking, etc. in your role as a staff member for Vanderbilt. One of the great benefits of social media is that the individuals maintaining social media sites personalize large and complex institutions such as Vanderbilt. Use your own "voice." Do not ghostwrite posts for supervisors.

Listen.

Being a consumer of social media is essential to your ability to be a successful producer of social media content. "Listen" to online conversations on your preferred tools – be they blogs, Twitter, Facebook or anything else – to maintain a clear and current understanding of what is relevant and of interest to the community.

Be active.

Social media presences require diligent care and feeding. If you do not have the time or resources to check in on these sites at least a few minutes each day, and to post fresh content several times a week, reconsider jumping in to social media at this time. Your site is only as interesting as your last post – if that post is several months old, visitors will consider it mothballed.

Be timely.

One of the great benefits of social media is the ability to share information almost instantly with a global audience. This timeliness is also one of the expectations of that audience. Be prepared to move quickly in response to new developments, announcements, or emergencies with relevant information on your site. A short amount of accurate information delivered at the time of need can sometimes be more valuable than a full report delivered well after the issue has passed.

Remember, everything you do online can and will live forever.

Think before you post, remembering that anything you share within social media, even within a closed network, is not private. It can and will be shared, stored and spread globally. Don't post anything online you wouldn't feel comfortable seeing on the front page of the newspaper, or on the CNN Web site.

Comment.

As a consumer as well as a producer of social media, offer comments on interesting posts and share the good work of others using your sites. Social media is not (only) about sharing your news and success, it's about sharing information that is of interest to your readers and viewers. When commenting as part of your job, be sure to indicate who you are and your affiliation with Vanderbilt. If you see a post that you think requires or would benefit from an official Vanderbilt response, please contact the News Service (university) at (615) 322-2706 or News and Communications (Medical Center) at (615) 322-4747.

Accept and monitor comments.

A social media site without comments isn't very social. Be prepared to accept and respond to comments. To protect your site, moderate all comments before posting. Understand that not all comments will be positive, and respond to negative comments professionally and by providing any additional information that may help resolve the issue. Post a disclaimer on your site stating you reserve the right to remove inappropriate comments. Remove those comments containing vulgar language, those that attack any one group or individual and those that are obviously spam.

Separate personal from professional.

Balancing your professional and personal social media presences can be tricky, particularly if you are an avid user in both arenas. Content that is appropriate and of interest to your personal friends is most likely not appropriate or of interest to your department's "friends." Keep these two presences as separate as possible by keeping content about your non-work life on your personal page.

Be a valued community member.

Don't just talk about your program or department – share the best information you find from trusted sources outside of Vanderbilt. This will increase the value of your site and also will ensure you are a valued member of the community and are not just tooting your own horn.

Don't cyberslack.

Endless amounts of time can be spent, and wasted, on social media sites. Limit the amount of time you spend attending to your department's social media presence to what is needed to post content, evaluate traffic data, review related sites, and monitor comments. Limit your personal use of these sites while at work as directed by your department's guidelines.