

Vanderbilt University Guidelines for Getting Started in Social Media

1. Secure the approval of your department head or manager.

If you wish to create a social media page or profile for your department, secure the approval of your senior manager.

VUMC employees must submit their proposal to VUMC Marketing, School of Medicine and / or the School of Nursing communication departments.

2. Define your goals.

Before jumping in to social media for your department, program or office, spend time determining what you want to accomplish. Understanding this will help you choose the appropriate tool or tools, create relevant content and understand what is the best way to reach your target audience.

3. Identify a coordinator.

Determine who will be the primary person responsible for updating and monitoring your site. Ensure they have the time to check in on the site at least once a day. This does not need to take up a significant amount of time, but successful social media sites are updated frequently, enable easy engagement with viewers and adjust in response to timely events and problems. Assign and train a backup for this person.

4. Create a strategy.

The more work you do on the front end, the more likely you are to create a successful social media presence. Define what you hope to accomplish, with whom you wish to engage, and what content you wish to share first, and then begin exploring social media tools. Use the worksheet found in Appendix A to create your social media strategy.

5. Listen.

All social media platforms have their own standards, styles and expectations. By becoming a consumer of social media well before you become a producer, you will learn how these communities work, what content is of most interest, what other organizations are talking about your topic, etc. Spending a good amount of time on this step will help you better plan what unique contribution your voice can have.

6. Choose your tool.

After listening, you may find the short, 140-character bursts of Twitter are a good fit for your goals. Or you may have photos, videos and a well-developed community that would be best shared via a Facebook fan page. Do not try to do it all at once – choose a tool that best meets your goals and focus on building a strong presence.

7. Name yourself.

Create a profile name that clearly and concisely identifies your program and its Vanderbilt

affiliation. Do not identify yourself simply as “Vanderbilt,” as that implies you are speaking for the entire institution.

8. Experiment.

Build out your blog, Twitter stream, Flickr profile, Facebook page or whatever you choose and spend time populating it for several weeks, sharing it with a small group who can provide comments. Have the site up and running well before you plan to launch it so you can become comfortable with maintaining it.

9. Launch.

You’re ready to communicate! Use traditional means, such as email lists and notices on your Web site, to notify your potential audiences that you have a social media presence. Also, notify others with social media presences and similar interests that your site is live – one of the best ways to do this is by linking to these sites from yours and mentioning them in your posts. Include easy-to-find links to your social media presence on your Web site.

10. Adjust.

Once your site is up and running, you will find some content is popular, some is ignored, and some is just plain cumbersome. All social media tools come with easy-to-use tracking tools, so you can see which posts are viewed and shared most, which generate comments, etc. Be prepared to re-align your strategy in response to who is viewing your site and how they are doing so.