



BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

Social Media and Online Commentary Code of Conduct

Advertising
Council
Australia

Purpose

In the past few years social media, web and online communities have become an important and integral part of the marketing communications industry. They are dynamic, fluid and increasingly powerful in their ability to capture community sentiment and shape the conversations we have with each other, about brands and beyond. With this comes a degree of ambiguity as to what constitutes ethical behaviour when participating online in a personal or commercial capacity.

As a profession, we must continue to always uphold the high ethical standards we have established as part of the Advertising Council Australia's Code of Ethics. Respect, integrity, transparency and honesty are at the heart of what we stand for and the key to our future success.

This Social Media and Online Commentary Code of Conduct aims to provide specific guidance on best practice behaviour when working and operating within social media and in online communities.

The Code provides guidelines for social media undertaken for the purpose of personal or commercial use.

The Code represents our current collective efforts to provide clear guidance in an evolving media environment. We welcome your feedback on the document to ensure we have comprehensive input from across the industry.

To comment, please send your feedback to

hello@adccouncil.org.au

Guidelines for employees (personal use)

Social media and online forums and blogs have blurred the lines between people's personal and professional time and space. It is important to understand that the impact of a person's online presence can have repercussions in both their personal and professional lives. Active social media interaction and community participation by employees in a personal capacity is encouraged as a medium of advocacy and self-expression, however, it is important that guidelines are in place to minimise the risk of online engagement harming your organisation, client or employee's reputation.

These guidelines aim to provide best practice for employees who participate in personal commentary blogging, agency blogging as well as other social media sites and applications. These guidelines should apply to all employees and contractors, regardless of whether the computers or devices are company-owned or personal.

If you require any advice or assistance in relation to these social media and online commentary guidelines send your query to Advertising Council Australia at hello@adccouncil.org.au.

GUIDELINES FOR BRANDS (PERSONAL USE)

1 Public vs Private

Despite the existence of privacy options, many items published online are publicly accessible and it can be difficult to guarantee that sites are fully private. As such always start with the assumption that anything you say can be read by anyone, anywhere, at any time and remember that the Internet has a long memory. Always exercise good judgement when posting and be aware that inappropriate conduct can negatively affect your organisation, clients and yourself. Always apply the following test: “Would my manager, client or customers be happy to see your content published?”

2 Be transparent

If you are commenting in a personal capacity about brands or campaigns you work on, you should be open and transparent about who you work for, who you represent or who you may be speaking on behalf of. Not revealing your identity could attract negative accusations that you are engaging in covert advertising, marketing or PR activity. It could also more seriously contravene Section 18 of the Australian Consumer Law which prohibits conduct that is misleading or deceptive or is likely to mislead or deceive, and/or Section 29 which prohibits false or misleading representations, including false testimonials and false claims as to association, sponsorship, approval or affiliation. Be upfront that the views being expressed are personal. For example, if you have your own blog or other public website a disclaimer is recommended such as: “The views expressed on this website/blog are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of my employer or its clients”

3 Be fair and respectful

Be authentic and respectful. When posting about your organisation, colleagues, competitors or other stakeholders, ensure content is always constructive and fair. Before posting, consider how other people might read and interpret your comment. You should only post content you would feel comfortable saying directly to another person without causing offence. If you respond to published comments that you consider unfair, always be accurate and professional.

4 Be accurate

Costs should be accurate and fact-checked and capable of substantiation. If you do make a mistake, ensure you correct it promptly. It is important to reference the earlier comment because even if the erroneous comment has been deleted, someone may have saved it as an image or other format to use as evidence. Always ensure that any criticism is backed up with solid evidence.

GUIDELINES FOR BRANDS (PERSONAL USE)

5 Be professional

Always act in a professional and constructive manner and use sound judgement before posting. Always be polite and respectful of individuals' opinions, especially when discussions become heated. Show proper consideration for other people's privacy.

6 Be smart

Respect other people's intellectual property including trade marked names and slogans and copyrighted material. It's best practice to assume that all content online is protected by copyright. Make sure you have permission to post copyright items, properly attribute the work to the copyright owner where required, and never use someone else's work as if it were your own. If you are unsure as to who might own an item of content, it's better to err on the side of caution and not post the content. In addition to the laws pertaining to copyright and IP, respect all laws and regulations in relation to privacy (Privacy Act 1988), spam (Spam Act 2003), and other applicable laws relevant to your client's industry or products/services (e.g. financial disclosures) when publishing on social media.

7 Be aware of confidentiality

Only reference information that is publicly available. Do not disclose any information that is confidential or proprietary to your organisation, its clients or any third party that has confidentially disclosed information to you. Examples of confidential information would include brand performance, business forecasts, strategic plans, trade secrets or any legal information. Do not cite, post or reference clients, partners or suppliers without approval from the relevant manager in your organisation.

8 Be careful

Do not use your organisation's, client's or a third party's logos, trade marks or materials on your website/blog or in a post unless it has been cleared for public use or been otherwise approved by the relevant manager in your organisation.

Guidelines for brands (commercial use)

Brands are increasingly using social media to engage directly in interactive communication with customers. Social media provides the tools to have targeted conversations with customers who can directly drive advocacy and word of mouth on brands. However, this valuable two-way dialogue still carries the same risks as any traditional form of communication in the public arena. These guidelines, therefore, aim to provide advice and guidance on how to responsibly manage this increasingly important platform.

These guidelines should apply to any people undertaking social media initiatives in a commercial capacity including, but not limited to, employees, contractors and third party representatives. These guidelines should apply to communications made on all computers or devices, whether company-owned or personal.

GUIDELINES FOR BRANDS (COMMERCIAL USE)

1 Start with a plan – crisis management

When planning a social media initiative on behalf of a brand, a crisis management plan, including an escalation path, must be in place before commencement. This is a critical step given the possibility of negative publicity and subsequent damage to brand reputation if not handled in a planned and professional manner.

2 Be transparent

As for personal use, if you are commenting or posting in a commercial capacity about brands or campaigns you work on, always be open and transparent about who you work for, who you represent or who you may be speaking on behalf of. When engaging directly in conversation with customers in relation to a brand ensure that you demonstrate full transparency in relation to your interest in the brand. Do not make false representations about yourself, the client or the brand. Making false representations could contravene Sections 18 and 29 of the Australian Consumer Law. Always remember to be honest about who you are and who you work for.

3 Be accurate

Posts should be accurate and fact-checked and capable of substantiation. If you do make a mistake, ensure you correct it promptly. It is important to reference the earlier comment because even if the erroneous comment has been deleted, someone may have saved it as an image or other format to use as evidence.

4 Be professional

Always act in a professional and constructive manner and use sound judgement before posting. Always be polite and respectful of individuals' opinions, especially when discussions become heated. Show proper consideration for other people's privacy.

5 Be fair and respectful

Always be respectful of all individuals and communities you interact with in social media. Consider carefully how customers might perceive you as the representative/ambassador of your brand. Be careful in posting comments or content that may damage you or the brand's reputation. Areas to be mindful of are the use of exaggeration, colourful language, derogatory remarks or characterisations. Do not post content that is obscene, defamatory, threatening or discriminatory to an individual, brand or entity. Do not post comments that you would not say directly to another person and consider how other people might react before you post. If you respond to comments (whether negative or positive) from customers always be accurate and professional. Refer to section 3. Accuracy and 4. Professionalism.

GUIDELINES FOR BRANDS (COMMERCIAL USE)

6 Be responsible

Always abide by the terms of use of the social media platform with which you interact and seek to adhere to the cultural and behavioural norms on the particular platform. Act with integrity; staff resources should not be used to manipulate competition or social outcomes.

7 Be smart

Respect other people's intellectual property including trade marked names and slogans and copyrighted material. It's best practice to assume that all content online is protected by copyright. Make sure you have permission to post copyright items, properly attribute the work to the copyright owner where required, and never use someone else's work as if it were your own. If you are unsure as to who might own an item of content, it's better to err on the side of caution and not post the content. In addition to the laws pertaining to copyright and IP, respect all laws and regulations in relation to privacy (Privacy Act 1988), spam (Spam Act 2003), and other applicable laws relevant to your client's industry or products/services (e.g. financial disclosures) when publishing on social media.

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