

Keep Calm and Post On: Managing a Social Media Crisis

WORKBOOK

November 25, 2019

CT Recreation & Parks Association Conference

Presented by Sarah Miner, Radius Point LLC

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Session Description:

This session will focus on how to prepare your organization for a social media crisis. Most crises have a tendency to erupt on social media and can quickly get out of hand. This often results in negative sentiments about your brand or organization. Learn how creating a social media policy and guidelines will help keep your brand organized, transparent, and at the ready!

Steps to prepare for a social media crisis:

- **Step 1:** Conduct a social media audit of your organization.
- **Step 2:** What is your social media policy?
- **Step 3:** Identify what constitutes a social media crisis; Know when to act.
- **Step 4:** Create and discuss crisis scenarios.
- **Step 5:** Analyze outcomes.

Creating a Social Media Policy

What are your organization's social media values and roles?

What is your monitoring policy? Who should respond and when? Outline key roles.

How will you respond to positive, negative or neutral comments? What is your suggested response time?

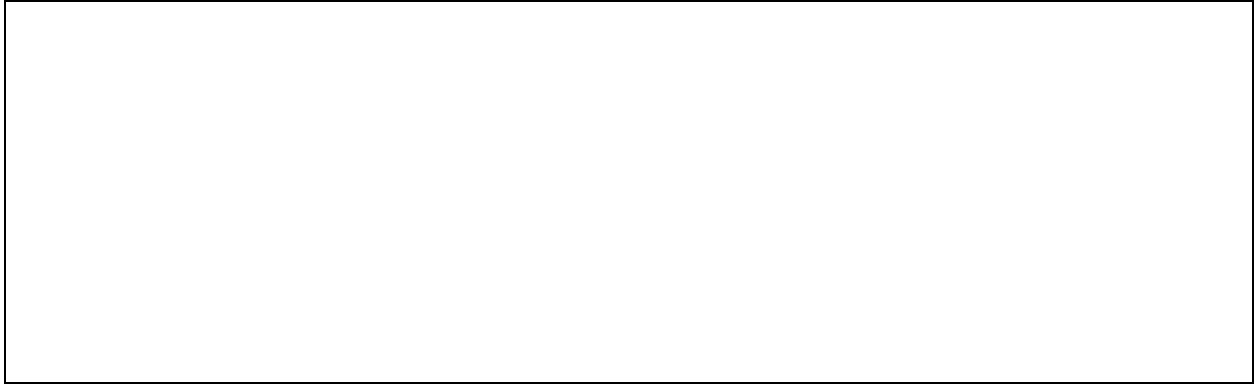
Positive:

Negative:

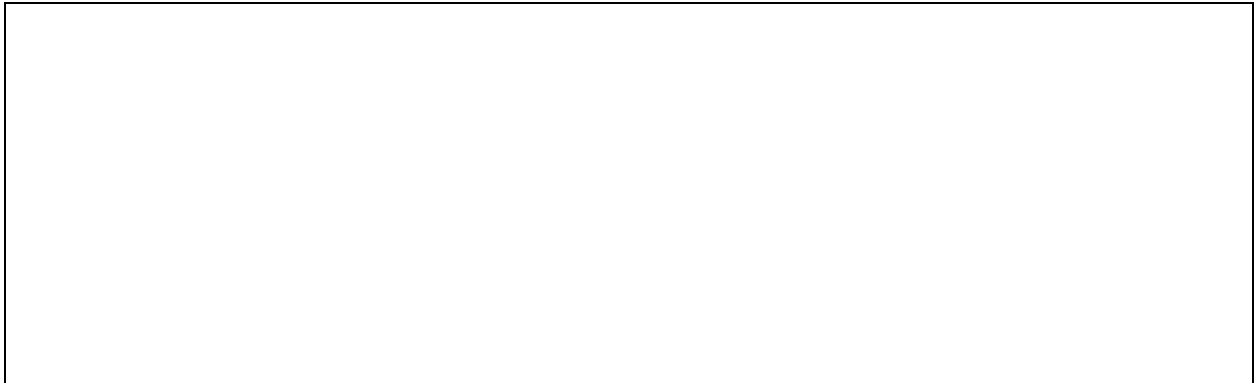
Neutral:

What are your policies on privacy, permissions and copyright?

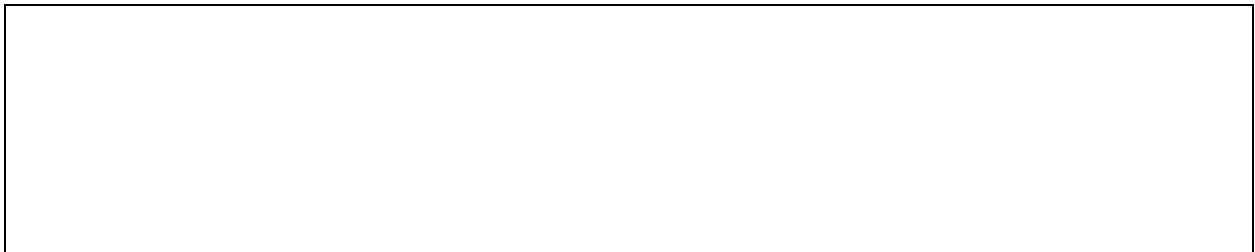
What is your public commenting policy on your social media accounts?
Where will you post it?



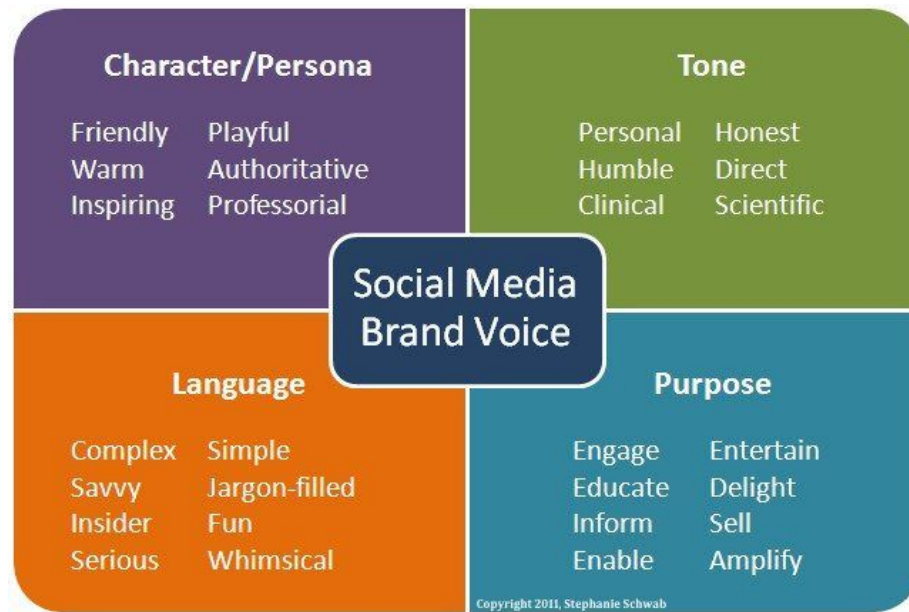
What kind of posts are you sharing? Give an example.



Where will you draw the line between personal and professional opinions?
Give an example.



Developing a Social Media Voice



Character/Persona	Tone
Language	Purpose

Social Media Crisis Scenarios

- > Threat of West Nile or EEE
- > A child drowns at a local town pool.
- > A parent attends a sporting event with a gun.
- > Animal infestation causing destruction and unsafe areas in town park.
- > A camp counselor accused of sexual misconduct.
- > A dad watching his son's basketball game has a heart attack and dies in the gymnasium.
- > Ice storm causes serious flooding in town parks.

Social Media Audit Chart:

Network	Handle	Channel Owner	Mission Statement	KPIs	Top Content	Audience Demographics
Facebook	@glastonburyparkrec	Marketing Team,	To promote the well-being of Glastonbury town residents by engaging and connecting with them on Facebook.	[eg. Engagement rate, number of followers, etc.]	[Based on your chosen KPI(s)]	[Who follows you on the specific network?]

Additional Resources:

Creating Social Media Policies for Your Parks and Rec Department

January 2, 2018, Feature, by Landon Schenck



Social media has proven to be one of the most impactful tools for local governments to engage citizens and encourage local park exploration and activity engagement. Its platforms lend themselves to the sharing of beautiful photography, location-specific postings and event-participant promotions — all of which are ideal for park and recreation departments. Like all good things, however, your social media accounts need boundaries.

Every public- and private-sector entity that uses social media needs to have internal policies in

place to ensure proper, safe and legal use of the social platforms that are becoming the new normal for how citizens learn, communicate and share. Not only do social media policies ensure consistency and use of best practices, but they will also keep your staff from inadvertently violating the public's trust or disappointing followers. Establishing and following social media policies will allow your park and rec department to maintain social media accounts your citizens perceive as valuable and choose to engage with — helping you meet your communication and promotion goals.

Social Media Legal Considerations

All individuals who manage a social media account need to have a basic understanding of some legal considerations that surround these platforms to help protect your park and rec department from an inadvertent violation. (Note: this information is not intended to serve as legal guidance; always consult your legal department for proper counseling and advice.) Make sure everyone in your park and rec department with access to post to your social media accounts understands the following three basic principles:

Photographs found online are typically copyrighted. Most likely, your parks and rec department will share photos you take of your parks, trails, local scenery and public events. Understand, however, that even though an endless supply of photos is only a Google Image search away, they are the property of the individual who took the picture and cannot be shared by a public- or private-sector entity without permission. This requirement pertains to pictures that are as seemingly innocuous as those that depict sporting equipment, technology devices or holiday imagery.

You'll want to secure permission to share photos of citizens. Consult your legal department regarding policies your park and rec department should follow when it comes to sharing pictures of citizens. You may take gorgeous photos of a group of kids participating in your community's youth art class, but without the written permission of the parents, you may not want to post them on social media. Photos of citizens participating in outdoor public events or in which the face of the individual is obscured or unclear may not be subject to the same legal restrictions, but wherever minors are concerned, err on the side of caution and seek legal guidance.

Any contests or promotions must follow the platform's terms of service. Some social media platforms outline specific guidelines in their terms of service as to how to operate contests and promotions that use their platforms. Refer to them to familiarize yourself with such terms before building and executing a social media contest.

Creating Social Media Policies that Protect Your Citizens and Your Park and Rec Department

With an understanding of the three aforementioned legal considerations, ensure your park and rec department's social media guidelines address the following scenarios and policies:

Outline goals for your social media accounts, and determine the types of content you want to share. Don't underestimate the importance of establishing goals for your park and rec department's social media use. Whether you are trying to promote activities, increase awareness about available public resources or educate citizens on the importance of advocacy, your goals should directly impact

the types of content and messages you share.

For example, if your main priority is to promote park and rec activities, you may want to restrict posts to only messages focused around events and decide, as a rule, that your department will not share news or editorial content. Having such policies ensures a consistent experience for followers, and will encourage those citizens who care about your goals to connect with your park and rec department on social media.

Determine which employees may post to your social media accounts. It's best to restrict access to your social media accounts to a single individual, or a small number of staff members who work closely together to ensure consistently coordinated messages. The more people who have access to your profiles, the more chances there are for duplicative posts, conflicting posts or posts that seem inconsistent in their messaging and tone.

For example, if one staff member shares a news story about a campfire that got out of control in one of your local parks, and an hour later, another staff member posts a photo of camping citizens roasting marshmallows, your social media followers may feel your park and rec department is sending inconsistent messages. Such perceptions may damage your ability to gain followers, likes, shares, retweets and regrams.

Identify when you will need a citizen's permission to share his or her photo. If you're responsible for photographing local events, it may be logistically difficult to obtain written permission to share photos of every single citizen you photograph. As a proactive step to getting the approvals you need, consider including language in your event registration materials that allows individuals to consent to have their picture, or a picture of their child, used in social media. An example of such language might state:

I grant [Community Name], its representatives and employees the right to take photographs of me and my property in connection with the community activity for which I am registering to participate. I authorize [Community Name], to copyright, use, and publish the same in print and/or electronically. I agree that [Community Name] may use such photographs of me with or without my name and for any lawful purpose, including publicity, illustration, advertising, social media, and Web content.

Your legal department can guide you further.

Remember that even more important than deciding when you need permission is making sure you have it. It can be tempting to quickly snap a beautiful photo of kids at a local event and post it right away to social media, but imagine how parents may feel if they, unexpectedly, came across a picture on social media that revealed their child's current location.

Ensure all messaging is consistent with your community's brand voice. Your community is unique, and it has a brand all its own. Remember, however, that your city, county or town has one brand and one voice, regardless of how many departments have individual social media accounts.. Citizens who follow your park and rec social media accounts likely also follow your primary community social accounts, which is why the language and voice used in your department-specific accounts should align with those of your primary accounts. Your communications department can help you understand essential considerations, like tone, style, municipal terminology and other community-specific communication considerations, that will ensure a consistent citizen interaction experience.

Establish policies regarding direct citizen communications. Social media provides both one-to-many, and one-to-one communications, which means it's a direct channel for citizens to reach you to ask questions, share feedback and make suggestions. In this way, social media is an excellent tool for increasing citizen engagement. However, if mismanaged, it can quickly lead to citizen disappointment on a public platform.

Make sure you and your staff determine who is responsible for responding to direct messages and comments, and in what time frame. Facebook pages include an indicator of your page's response rate and response time. If a citizen sees your page administrators don't respond consistently, or in a timely manner, he or she will be less likely to attempt to engage with you via your social account in the future.

Establish a policy for responding to negative feedback. One of the most challenging aspects of managing a social media account for any entity can be responding to public criticism. Having a platform that allows direct, public access to citizens means your park and rec department is opening itself up to both public praise and criticism. It will, undoubtedly, be disappointing to see a social media comment from someone complaining about an aspect of a recent event, but as your municipality knows, governing requires listening, accepting feedback and using it to make improvements moving forward. Your park and rec department shouldn't fear criticism. More importantly, you can't ignore it, delete it or block the commenter. It will do more good for your department's reputation for your followers to see you have responded to a concern than to ignore it.

Establish department policies for who will respond to negative messages or comments, how quickly, and with what type of response. You may want to consider a standard response such as:

Thank you for your feedback. We value the input of our citizens and are sorry that you felt [insert concern here]. Please know that we will consider this feedback when planning future [event type].

If a comment is hypercritical or includes personal information, such as an

accusation of something a representative of your community or a citizen may have said or done, encourage the commenter to discuss further outside of the social media channel. There is no need for such correspondence to be public. Consider a message such as, “We are sorry to hear that (events) occurred and would like to discuss with you further. Please call our department at (contact information), or message us privately and tell us how we may reach you.”

Establish policies for when you should delete negative comments. While your park and rec department should respond to negative comments, there are times when it is acceptable to delete them. Your department will want to outline clear guidelines to help staff identify these instances. You should consider removing social media posts that could be deemed as offensive, inappropriate, libel or slander. Your legal counsel can guide you further. It would also be acceptable for your park and rec department to delete spam comments. These may be fake accounts posting sales or promotional messages with links to products or services unrelated to your community. In the worst cases, the links may be malicious and transmit viruses or malware to anyone who clicks them.

Conclusion

Managing your park and rec department’s social media accounts should be a fun and creative part of your day, not a burden or stress point. With proper guidelines and staff training, you can take advantage of all the benefits that social media offers for connecting to citizens, with minimal risk of privacy, copyright and legal concerns.

Landon Schenck is the General Manager of CivicRec.

[Name of Organization]

Crisis Communication Plan Template

I. Overview

Include the definition of crisis communications for your organization and what it entails.

II. Purpose

Include the purpose of crisis communications, such as what types of events would elicit crisis communication responses and what role the plan plays in crisis communications.

III. Objectives

Include the goals for the crisis communication plan, such as efficient responses to emergencies, thorough informing of stakeholders, and restoration of normal business functions.

IV. Procedures

Include people involved in the crisis communications team and general guidelines, such as whether or not a member needs the support of the entire team in order to activate the plan.

V. Response

Include general response strategies, such as technologies used for crisis communications, key audiences to be notified, and appointed spokespersons.

VI. Crisis Scenarios

Include a list of all possible crises that might impact your organization and any necessary addendums for each crisis, such as checklists of response steps, important telephone numbers, and specifications to help define the crisis.

VII. Sample Statements and Communications

Include a list of templates for direct responses to each type of crisis that cover a variety of platforms, such as email, letters, and social media posts.

<<<SAMPLE>>>

Town of Reading, MA Social Media Policy

Purpose The following policy pertains to official (“Town”) and non-official (“Personal”) use of social media services and tools. The Town permits the use of social media sites as a means to disseminate information from the Town to the members of the public. Consequently, the Town has both an expectation and a responsibility regarding the integrity and presentation of information posted on its social media sites and the content that is attributed to the Town, its Departments and its officials.

Definitions “Social media sites” means content created by individuals using publishing technologies through and on the internet. The types of content and examples of services to which this policy applies include, but are not limited to:

- Media Sharing - Examples: YouTube, Flickr, iTunes
- Blogging/Microblogging - Examples: WordPress, Blogger, Twitter
- Social Networking - Examples: Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Ning
- Document and Data Sharing Repositories - Examples: Scribd, SlideShare, Socrata
- Social Bookmarking - Delicious, Digg, Reddit

• Widgets - Examples: Google Maps, AddThis, Facebook "Like" “Town social media sites” means social media sites and content which the Town establishes and maintains, with the exception of content from advertisements or hyperlinks provided by the social media site’s owners, vendors, or partners. Town social media sites do not replace the Town’s required notices and standard methods of communication. “Posts” or “postings” means the content, information, articles, pictures, videos or any other form of communication posted on a Town social media site.

Guidelines

1. The establishment of Town social media sites is subject to approval by the Department Head, the Town Manager or his/her designee.
2. The Town reserves the right to edit the content of or terminate any Town social media site at any time without notice.
3. The content of Town social media sites shall only pertain to Town-sponsored or Town-endorsed programs, services, and events. Content includes, but is not limited to, information, photographs, videos, and hyperlinks.

4. All Town social media sites shall adhere to applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and policies. This includes, but is not limited to laws pertaining to Copyright and Fair Use.
5. Any content maintained on a Town social media site that is related to Town business, including a list of subscribers, posted communication, and communication submitted for posting, may be considered a public record.
6. Employees representing the Town on Town social media sites shall conduct themselves at all times as a professional representative of the Town and in accordance with all Town policies. These policies include but are not limited to the Town's Ethics Policy and the Discrimination and Harassment Prevention policy.
7. Postings must contain information that is freely available to the public and not be proprietary or confidential as defined by any Town policy or state or federal law.
8. Any employee authorized to post items on any of the Town's social media sites shall review, be familiar with, and comply with the social media site's use policies and terms and conditions.
9. Any employee authorized to post items on any of the Town's social media sites shall not express his or her own personal views or concerns through such postings. Postings shall only reflect the views of the Town.
10. Town social media sites should use authorized Town contact information for account set-up, monitoring and access. The use of personal email accounts or phone numbers by any Town employee is not allowed for the purpose of setting-up, monitoring, or accessing a Town social media site.
11. Absent prior authorization, postings to Town social media sites shall NOT contain any of the following:
 - Comments in support of, or opposition to, political campaigns, candidates or ballot measures;
 - Profane language or content;
 - Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, military services, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, as well as any other category protected by federal, state, or local laws;
 - Sexual content or links to sexual content;
 - Solicitations of commerce;
 - Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
 - Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or

- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.

Non-official/personal use Town employees who use social media and social networking services and tools for strictly personal use outside of the workplace do not require approval to do so. However, the Town recognizes that these types of tools can sometimes blur the line between professional and personal interactions. Therefore, employees are reminded that as representatives of the Town of Reading the above rules and guidelines must be taken into consideration when participating in these services at any time, particularly when identifying themselves as employees of the Town or when context might lead to that conclusion. Employees should use discretion and common sense when employing social media to help prevent inadvertently compromising professional, legal, or ethical standards. Employees should refrain from using social media services and tools for personal use while on work time or when using Town provided equipment, unless it is work-related as authorized by the Department Head. Employees should have no expectation of privacy when using social media sites at the workplace, or when using Town computers, systems or other technology. The Town reserves the right to access, view and act upon any information on its computers, systems or other technology without notice. In a publicly accessible forum, Town employees may not disclose any Town-related information that is not already considered public information. This rule applies even in circumstances where password or other privacy controls are implemented. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action. This policy does not, however, prevent Town employees from discussing the terms or conditions of their employment, unfair labor practices, or otherwise exercising their rights to collective bargaining.

Non-Compliance Non-compliance with this policy may result in any or all of the following:

- Limitation or revocation of individual or unit rights to use or participate in Town-related social media;
- Removal of posts or social media accounts; and/or
- Corrective or disciplinary actions and sanctions, as defined in the Town Personnel Policies

Policy Changes

The Town reserves the right to change, modify, or amend all or part of this policy at any time.

Adopted by the Town Manager 2-19-13

View the original document here:

https://www.readingma.gov/sites/readingma/files/u217/social_media_policy.pdf