



GUIDELINES

SOCIAL MEDIA

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Lismore City Council acknowledges the people of the Bundjalung Nation, traditional custodians of the land on which we work.

1. Overview

Social media is an emerging, rapidly changing part of the internet and our daily lives. These guidelines will be updated as new sites, communities, technologies, cultures and trends develop. Social media refers to online community sites including Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn, file sharing sites such as Flickr and YouTube, blogs, forums, microblogging (Twitter), and virtual communities such as Second Life. These and other 'Web 2.0 sites' are now common place for sharing, learning, connecting with others and expressing our views.

Lismore City Council recognises the use of and participation in online communities to learn, advocate, collaborate, exchange and contribute for the benefit of people individually and the community as a whole. It's important as Lismore's governing body that we stay active, aware and fully engaged with our community.

Social media is relatively new and the etiquette of participating is still evolving. The Social Media Guidelines bring together some best practice principles from education and industry sources to help staff and Councillors use these channels effectively to protect your personal and professional reputation – and that of Lismore City Council. Staff and Councillors should use the Social Media Guidelines in concert with the Social Media Policy and Council's [Code of Conduct](#).

2. Purpose

The purpose of the Social Media Guidelines is to:

- Identify some parameters around the use of digital and social media platforms.
- Provide guidance to staff and Councillors about the personal and professional use of digital and social media platforms.
- Protect the interests of Lismore City Council.

3. Scope and engagement

3.1 How is social media used?

Lismore City Council acknowledges social media has great potential as:

- A two-way mechanism to encourage feedback and comment from our community.
- A listening mechanism to improve our understanding of public attitudes towards particular topics or issues.
- A tool to share information and consult with specific communities on current or planned policies, programs or services.
- A tool to assist traditional media by broadening its reach and scope.
- A tool to share activities and events to subscribers, and reach a wider audience.
- A way of fostering debate on a topic or issue.
- An innovative way of providing essential updates to the community during a crisis or emergency.

3.2 When do the Social Media Guidelines apply?

The guidelines have been developed to assist Councillors and staff who:

- Are delegated with the authority to use or contribute to Council's official digital and social media platforms.
- Use digital and social media platforms to promote the Council's policies, programs, events or services.
- Use digital and social media platforms and have identified themselves as being an elected representative or employee of Council.

3.3 Who has authority to use digital and social media on behalf of Council?

The Mayor and General Manager, the Media and Communication Team and those delegated authority by the General Manager. The Social Media Policy and accompanying Social Media Guidelines do not inhibit the right of individual Councillors or staff to express their own views on personal digital or social media platforms at any time unless the individual has identified themselves as representing Council.

3.4 Engaging on digital and social media platforms

- Before engaging with audiences on digital and social media platforms, Council staff must attend a social media training session to be briefed in online culture, behaviour and potential risk.
- Councillors and staff must identify themselves on digital and social media platforms if communicating as a representative of Council and/or be authorised to represent Council.
- Councillors and staff operating or utilising digital and social media platforms should follow the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 and ensure their own personal privacy and security, and that of their audience, is respected and maintained.
- Transparency and representation – Councillors and staff participating on digital and social media platforms must follow the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009.

4. Dealing with offensive behaviour

Lismore City Council will not tolerate content that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breaches Council's [Code of Conduct](#) or is otherwise unlawful. Such content will be removed.

Users who breach Council's Social Media Policy may be banned from accessing Council's digital and social media platforms. Council also reserves the right to moderate content from individuals who seek to monopolise and dominate Council's digital and social media platforms for their own purposes.

5. Emergencies

In the event of emergency, publishing to digital and social media platforms will be the responsibility of the Crisis Management Team. For information on the use of digital and social media platforms during times of crisis refer to the Crisis Communication Management Plan.

6. Confidentiality

Councillors and staff must not discuss or circulate confidential materials on digital or social media platforms. Any release of confidential information that breaches Council's [Code of Conduct](#) could result in disciplinary action.

7. Records Management

Lismore City Council intends to use social media in the way it uses the phone; to engage in conversations with the community. It is recognised that members of the public may use these platforms to request actions of Council. If we receive a message through a social medium that clearly needs to be recorded and acted on, the most effective way to make sure that it is captured is to use the feedback form on the Lismore City Council website. Further, just as some phone calls require that records be created and kept in another format (CRM, email, memo etc.) some content that appears on our social media platforms may require that records be created and kept in another format. Due to the visual nature of much social media this could include screen shots of that content. As the contents of social media platforms are not in our possession, we will not attempt to back up our social media pages and feeds except in the case of an emergency or crisis or as a result of direction received from another government agency to do so in a particular instance. Councillors' social media accounts are governed by the State Records Act.

8. Day-to-day operation of social media accounts

Lismore City Council has a Social Media Team to provide day-to-day operation of its social media platforms – the corporate Facebook page and Twitter account. Guidelines for operation are below.

Note: The Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts of Council's Business Units (e.g. Goonellabah Sports & Aquatic Centre) are maintained by the individual Business Units' staff.

Posts for Council's social media platforms are to be placed in the shared Social Media Calendar for monitoring by the Media and Communication Team. Social Media Team members are trained in how to use the calendar and provided with further training about language, tone and appropriate use of social media before they become active members.

Posts are 'owned' by the staff member who creates them. The staff member is required to answer all questions relating to the post to ensure continuity of tone and eliminate any confusion over workflow. This has the added benefit of given staff a sense of ownership over the material they create, encouraging them to continue developing new ideas and being creative about what to post. As content is the main driver of a robust social media platform with active engagement, staff 'owning' their content is an important aspect of the Social Media Team's philosophy. Should an issue regarding any post arise, the 'owner' should go to the Media and Communication Team for advice.

The Social Media Calendar is checked regularly by the Media and Communication Team to ensure social media content is appropriate and adheres to the adopted language and tone specified in the Communication Style Guide.

Operational matters and service requests on Council's social media platforms are responded to by members of the Social Media Team who work within the Customer Contact Centre. This provides citizens with a service equal to that of our telephone system, where their query can be easily attended to by Customer Contact Centre staff or a CRM logged for more complicated matters.

The Media and Communication Team is responsible for monitoring social media posts, messages and Social Media Team responses to ensure there is a consistent 'voice' that Council's audience trusts and can relate to. Should a sensitive matter arise or a question is asked that is strategic or political in nature, the Media and Communication Team will respond in an appropriate manner.

The key to an effective and functioning Social Media Team is to ensure regular, ongoing meetings to encourage content creation and engagement by team members. The Social Media Team should also stay in regular communication, especially when there is uncertainty regarding how to respond to a particular post, message or question. It is recognised that it is far better to discuss these matters internally and work out an appropriate course of action than to respond in haste and provide citizens with incorrect information or become defensive in a social media setting. This is often the cause of creating a bigger problem and should be avoided wherever possible. The Social Media Guidelines provide full and comprehensive advice on how best to interact on social media platforms.

Any staff member who wants to join or leave the Social Media Team at any time should speak to their supervisor before discussing their involvement with the Media and Communication Team.

9. Digital and social media use guidelines

The guidelines are split into two sections:

- General digital and social media use guidelines for Councillors and staff.

- When you are asked to represent Lismore City Council online.

9.5 General digital and social media use guidelines

Social media is about people not technology, so remember that your conduct reflects not only on you but also on Council. Social media is becoming an increasingly important and constant component of our work and personal lives, even more so with mobile devices. Please be mindful of this when posting or responding online. Think about not only what you will post, but also the tone you will post in and the audience who will be reading it. Online content can be found and viewed anytime, anywhere – forever!

Lismore City Council understands and respects that you may have any number of personal profiles, avatars, blogs and Twitter accounts, for example. Under no circumstances would we wish to interfere with your private business. However, please bear in mind how you represent Lismore City Council in your private time – digital and social media is blurring the lines between the personal and professional aspects of many people’s lives, and anything posted can have an impact on both. Please bear this in mind when posting.

Be transparent

Be honest about your identity through your real or user name. If you are engaging, sharing or contributing on behalf of Lismore City Council, say so (see section 8.2: ‘When you are asked to represent Lismore City Council online’). If you post directly about Council in your personal time, please identify your association with Council as a Councillor or staff member and include a disclaimer on your site or post that you are sharing your personal views and opinions, not as a representative of Council. For example: ‘Views expressed on this blog are purely those of John Smith.’ Don’t hide your identity for the purpose of promoting Council.

Protect your privacy

Whilst it’s important to be transparent about who you are, be mindful not to divulge additional personal information that may potentially compromise your privacy or professional confidentiality. Use separate email addresses for personal digital and social media and generally apply as much common sense as possible to protect against scammers and identity thieves. Further information in relation to privacy is available from the [government](#).

Be accurate

Have all the facts before you post to avoid communicating misleading or incorrect information about you or Council. Cite and link to your sources whenever possible; it’s a good gesture that also builds links and findability. If you make an error, be the first to correct it – quickly and visibly. Don’t be scared to apologise and admit fault. This will earn you respect in your online communities.

Be respectful

Play nice. You are more likely to have a positive outcome when posting if you are constructive and respectful. It’s okay to discuss a bad experience or disagree with a statement, concept or person so long as you do it in a considered and constructive manner. You’re not obliged to agree with posts, so long as you maintain respect. Don’t use inflammatory, racist or offensive language, and never upload offensive or explicit written, audio or video content. Don’t be a mole (fake personality or someone trying to falsely promote themselves or their company) or a troll (someone posting inflammatory remarks to provoke) – you’ll be banned or ostracised from communities. It’s also wise not to be reactive – if you feel angry or passionate about a subject, be sensible and delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed.

Be responsible

Be careful what you post! Many employers are now reviewing online postings and activity before extending offers of employment, so don't compromise yourself by posting abusive, copyrighted, defamatory, libellous, obscene or even illegal content that may come back to haunt you. Be ethical, considerate and responsible – you are personally responsible for content you publish and comments you make. Be mindful and ensure you never insult anyone online on the grounds of race, circumstances, sex etc. which may be contrary to Council's [Code of Conduct](#).

Always think before you post

There's no such thing as a "private" social media site. Search engines will show posts years after the publication date. More critically, the web is viral and virtually instantaneous – comments can be forwarded worldwide in seconds. Archival systems save information even if you delete a post. If you've posted something you wish you hadn't it's already too late to change it. Thinking clearly about consequences before you post anything is essential in our online world.

Maintain personal and organisational confidentiality

Do not post confidential personal or commercial information about Council, Councillors or fellow employees. Posting confidential, personal or commercial information may breach legal obligations and/or Council policy and procedures. Use good ethical judgement and follow Council's [policies](#).

If situations involving individuals are discussed on a digital or social media platform, be sure that they cannot be identified. As a guideline, don't post anything that you would not repeat in person, in public, to the parties in question.

Respect Lismore City Council time and resources

Please remember Lismore City Council computers and your work time are to be used for Council-related business, so use them within reason. It's appropriate to post at work if your comments are directly related to accomplishing work goals such as seeking sources for information or working with others to resolve a problem. Conduct your personal business only in the specified time allocated.

9.6 When asked to represent Lismore City Council online

Lismore City Council has Media and Communication staff and Customer Contact Centre staff authorised to post content about Council online. Please contact them for assistance and advice if you have questions or queries not contained in these guidelines.

Please be considerate, transparent and understand that as a Council employee you are representing your employer and Council's reputation. We appreciate your engagement in and positive use of digital and social media platforms on behalf of Council – it's critical that as employees and as an organisation we stay relevant and connected.

As well as the general use guidelines (see section 9.1) you should also consider the following when representing Lismore City Council.

Be open

Be honest about your identity, and speak in the first person. Be transparent about being a Council employee and why you are posting – simply be who you are. If you are posting content for publicity or promotional purposes, make sure you are authorised to do so with the Media and Communication Team. Social communities don't like the hard sell and will usually spy a mole very

quickly, which could have a serious detrimental impact on the reputation of Council.

Be appropriate

Consider the context in which you're representing Council. Choose your tone appropriately – don't be officious when engaging with young students or on a casual platform, and likewise be professional and businesslike where the situation requires. Social media means just that – it's about communicating with people so always post smartly. Don't patronise or be smug. Treat your audience with intelligence. Respect and empathise with them.

Use a disclaimer and get it right

Whenever you post ensure you make it clear this is the content you are authorised to post or the information you have to hand. Check with Media and Communication staff or your Program Manager when publishing content on Council's behalf. Never make assumptions or post information you have not checked thoroughly through the appropriate channels. Accuracy is paramount.

Be connected

Wherever possible connect with other Council content, sites or postings. Always reference the source. Cross-reference with Council's other sites or pages (such as the Northern Rivers Waste website, and the Lismore and Nimbin Tourism and Come to the Heart Facebook pages). This reduces duplication and helps educate your audience about the different services Council provides and the different ways information is delivered.

Be committed

Successfully engaging on digital and social media is not a one-off activity – to engage with and build a network or following you need to be committed to regularly posting fresh content. Colleagues or followers will quickly move on to find new value unless you post on a regular basis, which varies depending on the platform from monthly, weekly, daily to even hourly with status updates, and the expectations of your audience. Dead-end content (content which does not encourage interaction with your audience or provide specific information) may have a detrimental effect on your online profile. People will switch off. Keep in mind what your audience wants and how to provide it.

Ensure continuity

Social networks, groups, communities, blogs and forums need continuity to be effective. Unlike advertising or print media, digital and social media is not a release and forget platform. It requires two-way interaction, open dialogue and continuous fresh content. Ensure you not only have a plan for when to begin engaging but also when to handover to other colleagues or areas, and when and how to leave a community, thread or group. Don't leave a community untended as it may indicate a lack of commitment to the other users or members and reflect badly on Council.

Be active and add value

If you participate in a social network, join a Facebook group, use Twitter or comment on someone's blog or forum, make sure you are contributing valuable insights. By publishing as a Council staff member, you represent Council's brand and reputation, so be innovative and insightful whenever you can. Ask yourself if your posts will be of interest to readers. Self-promoting behaviour is viewed negatively and can lead to you being banned from websites or groups. For authenticity and credibility, monitor your comments, delete spam and abusive posts, and build your networks and communities in a way that complements your online profile.

Reference your work

Always provide links or references when posting content. Don't breach copyright laws. In particular, ensure any music, graphics or information content contained within audio and video files has permissions to be published.

Think about your customers

If responding to blog posts, comments or Tweets, as a communicator remember you're also a customer service officer. How will your interaction reflect on Council? Consider your own online exchanges and purchases, and act as you yourself would expect to be spoken to by a company. Be personable, relaxed and friendly, as appropriate to the digital or social media platform you're communicating on.

10. Summary

Social media presents an invaluable way for Lismore City Council to engage with the community, provide timely information and have a more 'human' relationship with our citizens. Social media is the way of the future in communications and it's important for Council to use it effectively.

It is however a platform fraught with risk. You need to be prepared and well trained in how to behave in the digital and social media space. Don't just stumble into social media blindly – if you're unsure about how to do something, ask trained Council staff. It is better to ask first and take a little more time than post first and have to deal with the consequences.

Unlike all other forms of communication, social media is instantaneous and users must be accountable at all times to their audience. No other communication channel demands the same level of transparency. So be clear about what you are trying to promote, say or deliver before you begin.

Used wisely, social media will enhance Council's reputation, allow for greater community input and streamline services. Follow these guidelines and you should enjoy a positive social media experience.

