



Community Voice

Getting your message out

Going Social

While traditional news media can have a wide reach, it isn't always the best option when it comes to **getting your message out**. One of its obvious limitations is that you can't control what, if anything, is said. The media may be silent on a story that you feel is important to your community, or their version of the story may not be fully accurate or include your point of view. The best way to tell your story when and how you want is to tell it yourself, which is where social media can help. And because many of your community members already turn to social media to receive and share news, you'll be meeting them where they are, rather than expecting them to come to you.

We are in the middle of a revolution—a communications revolution—that is changing radically our day-to-day lives. And whether you like those changes or not, you ignore them at your peril. If you want to inform and engage others—something that is a fundamental goal of every school board and member trustee—you should take the plunge into social media.

Social media hasn't replaced print, television or radio, but for many it equals or exceeds these traditional communication forms in its importance. People have so many options when it comes to their news sources, and many choose Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram (among others). But don't think of social media as something that you **have** to do to satisfy someone else; embrace it for the very real benefits it can bring your way! Among those benefits are reduced communication costs, the ability to reach people over a wide geographic area, and the ability to send customized messages right to people's inboxes or feeds. But more than anything else, social media allows you to tell your story, in your way, and on your schedule.

One of the great benefits of social media is its immediacy: you can communicate on a moment's notice. However, that same benefit can be a problem. Don't post in anger, and always think twice, post once. Here are a few other

tips, if you or your school board are just embarking on a social media journey.

- Ask yourself the questions “who am I, and why am I posting,” and let your answers to those questions guide you. If your primary goal is to keep in touch with your family, don't expect your constituents to show much interest in your posts, and vice versa. Some people do a very good job of creating accounts that are engaging for both their personal and professional contacts. Others maintain multiple accounts, and post different content for different audiences. And some, unfortunately, don't give this matter much thought at all, post randomly, and alienate or even lose followers.
- Social media is about two-way communications, so expect replies and feedback, some of which will be negative. You don't want to engage on every perceived slight, but you don't have to let blatant lies go unchallenged. Find the balance that works for you.
- There's a more relaxed, comfortable, and conversational tone on social media, but remember—keep it professional, and don't post anything that may come back to haunt you.
- Social media is a commitment. If you want to build both a following and credibility, communicate often. You won't build an audience through once-a-month postings.

One final note for board or divisional social media accounts: make sure the responsibility—and log-in credentials—are given to someone with the time, interest and good judgement required to make your social media venture a success. This may mean assigning the job to an individual, not a position. Find someone who wants to and would be good at going social, and help them work to **get your message out**.

This Division Dispatch series and other e-learning resources can be found at www.mbschoolboards.ca.

