

CREATING YOUR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

School board trustees will get the most out of their social media efforts by creating a personalized social media strategy. Trustees who use social media with personality, purpose and a strategic plan will have a greater communications impact, advancing their work and building support for issues affecting students, school boards and communities in the process.

1. Define Your Objectives

Before launching into social media, trustees should document their objectives, which may include:

- **Solidifying your public image.** You may wish to reinforce who you are, the work you do, who you represent and what you stand for. Perhaps you don't have a high profile. Social media provides a platform for building your public image. Be sure to monitor social media platforms for mentions of yourself and your ward. Engage with reasonable critics and key influencers to address potential issues and correct factual inaccuracies.
- **Being accountable and transparent to the ward community.** Plan to provide live coverage of school board events for those who can't attend. With social media, you can provide a low-barrier method for constituent feedback and interaction.
- **Relationship Building.** Plan to extend the reach of your strategic messaging by building relationships with relevant social media users including school board stakeholders, other trustees, journalists, bloggers and the wider education community.
- **Providing leadership and credibility in the education field.** Define your areas of expertise and how your knowledge can help others. What can you share? Think about how you can offer your perspective and contribute to online conversations.
- **Accomplishing specific school board goals.** Decide what you want to achieve with your communications during a specific time period, with an emphasis on one or two priorities. For example, do you want to drum up support for an issue? Obtain public feedback on a problem?

2. Target Your Audience

Decide on the groups, organizations or specific individuals you would like to communicate with in order to achieve your objectives. Link with, follow and become friends with those who inspire you, who you admire, and who you can learn from. Remember – your name will be associated with who you follow across social media platforms, unless you choose to remain anonymous.

Who you follow or befriend is just as important as who follows you. Here are some suggestions for online audiences to connect with:

- Teachers and principals
- Individual schools
- School Boards
- Education sector union and representatives
- Fellow trustees and student trustees
- The Ministry of Education's official account and political staff
- Students
- Parents
- Community groups
- OISE and Education Researchers
- Accredited media and bloggers

3. Decide What to Share

Often, the hardest part of maintaining social media accounts is creating great content. It is quite likely that you already stumble on plenty of interesting and educational pieces to link to in your everyday life. These can include: news releases, official school board letters and statements, new board campaigns and initiatives, great videos you've come across, or sharing of your followers' content and live-tweeting at events. Here are some helpful tips for deciding what to share online:

- Share relevant research, events, awards and news from elsewhere that can position you as a trusted source and a reliable filter of high quality, relevant information. This can work towards the goal of establishing yourself as a "thought leader" in your community.
- Become a participant (not just an observer). Comment on a trending twitter hashtag or ask a question to others. Share information that will start a rich and engaging conversation.
- Define your own key messages: the information you want to get across. Before each tweet or communication, ensure your post is in line with your overall key messages as an elected member of your board.
- Stick to the following content principles. These are the qualities that will keep your content interesting:

- **Varied Content** – Cover a broad base of content types – pictures, text, audio, video – and sources to keep your followers interested.
- **Lively Content** – Don't just regurgitate press release headlines. Your posts should be written in a conversational tone.
- **Timely Content** – Posts should be about issues of immediate relevancy or upcoming events/opportunities.
- **Credible Content** – Posts can occasionally have a funny hook but there should always be a connection back to your priorities and objectives. If possible, there should be hyperlinks to related content or a call to action.
- **Inclusive Content** – In keeping with the knowledge-sharing culture of social media, you should often take the opportunity to link to relevant content from a diverse range of sources other than your own school board or personal website.

4. Promote Your Social Media Presence

Once you've decided what your objectives are, who and how you'd like to engage, and what you're going to be posting, a final piece in your social media planning process should be promotion. Your constituents need to know you're on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or Pinterest. Here are some ways to grow your audience:

- Post a prominent link on your personal website, Facebook page or blog
- Ask your friends, coworkers and other trusted connections to promote you proactively from their social media accounts
- Add a link to your social media account in your email signature
- Add the link to all newsletters, statements and news releases sent to your community and the media
- Email or call key stakeholders in your ward letting them know you're now on social media
- Create a communications calendar and commit to posting on a regular basis.
- Plan to check-in at least two to four times per week across all platforms. Many people post daily – this is a good strategy to maintain presence and visibility.
- Free tools like Hootsuite stream content from various platforms to one screen – this simplifies checking in and posting.

5. Evaluate Your Success

Like with any good strategy, evaluation and follow up are key to gauging the impact of your efforts. To measure the effectiveness of your social media initiatives, track the following:

- Number of followers, friends, likes, pins, views, etc.
- The relevance to your work of your followers/friends
- Number of web traffic click-throughs from social media posts to your website
- Feedback from followers/friends
- Number of retweets, shares, etc.
- Volume and quality of two-way communication

Third party management tools – such as Hootsuite and Crowdbooster – can help by automating the tracking of click-throughs, retweets and shares.

It is important to review your plan periodically and evaluate the effectiveness of your strategies. Ask fellow trustees and your community whether they feel that appropriate information sharing is taking place. Use this information to strengthen your plan going forward. Also be sure to act on some of the feedback you receive. Keep a log of good suggestions and take action. If you feel your online presence needs refinement, look to the approaches that are being successfully used by other individuals or groups.

Finally, don't worry if your audience doesn't grow as quickly as you thought it would. Social media audience growth takes time. It's an organic process that builds as you earn the trust of those in your field. Remember – your followers should be judged by quality, not quantity. Having 25 local leaders reading your tweets every day can be far more effective than having 2,000 random followers spread out across the globe, the majority of whom you will never meet or engage with professionally.

Social media present unprecedented opportunities for school board trustees to create a direct link to the communities they serve. Using social media effectively can help trustees advance their profiles and the work of their school boards.

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE (AND APPROPRIATE) COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

To ensure your social media communications are effective, appropriate and maintain professionalism, please keep in mind the following general suggestions:

- When posting content relevant to your work on a personal blog or social media site, it is recommended that you say the information is representative of your personal views and opinions and not necessarily the views and opinions of your board. It is best to use a disclaimer such as this: “The postings on this site are my own and don’t necessarily represent [insert board name’s] priorities, strategies or opinions.” However, a standard disclaimer does not by itself exempt you from the responsibility you hold as a trustee and public official when blogging, tweeting or publishing on any social media site.
- The lines between public and private and personal and professional are blurred in the digital world. When you represent yourself as a school board trustee, you are now connected to colleagues, stakeholders and the public education community. Respect your audience. Don’t use slurs, discriminatory remarks, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any similar conduct that would not be appropriate or acceptable in your board or workplace.
- Your board’s code of conduct must always be considered when determining whether an intended form of disclosure, particularly through social media, is appropriate. (Source: http://www.asba.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/nt_social_media_legal.pdf)
- Do not provide private, confidential or other proprietary information and never discuss sensitive matters or plans publicly.
- A hyperlink to outside sources is recommended if possible. Be sure not to plagiarize and give credit where it is due. When using a hyperlink, check to see that the content is appropriate. Always respect copyright and fair use laws.
- Be cautious and deliberate when setting up your profile, bio, avatar, etc.
- When uploading digital pictures or avatars that represent you, select an appropriate image. Do not use copyright protected images and only use your board logo if you have the authority to do so.
- Be aware that others can view the sites that you link to.

- Be aware of words used to tag or describe hyperlinks.
- Attempt to link directly to a page or resource if possible as there is no control over what appears on landing pages (home pages) in the future.