



# Creating Social Media Guidelines and Policies for Credit Unions

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As credit unions explore the opportunities for sharing their messages through social media, careful thought must be given to what rules, policies, and guidelines will govern its institutional use.

The term “social media” describes any media that is based on conversation and interactions between people using Web-based technologies. Social media can be used to communicate, collaborate, provide reviews and opinions, and share multimedia. Examples of social media applications include Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, wikis, Twitter, Flickr, Skype, and YouTube.

## Things to Remember

- Assume all social media communication is permanent and retrievable
- Any guidelines and policies created are living documents that need revisiting and change frequently as new questions and issues arise.

## Crafting Organizational Guidelines

The following is a compilation of recommended components of a comprehensive social media policy. It should be used as an outline to help your credit union create a customized policy that takes its culture and goals into account.

### *Introduction and Purpose of Social Media*

As one Ohio credit union marketer put it, “Social media, at its heart, is about building a ‘tribe’ or community of supporters, who are free to speak openly and honestly about your credit union via this forum.” Briefly outline your credit union’s purpose and goals for the social media initiative.

### *Core Values*

Address what core credit union values will be communicated through the social media channels.

### *Appropriate Use of Social Media*

Clarify the appropriate social media applications that will be used and the appropriate information that will be shared. Some experts recommend creating a social media code of ethics for users to follow.

## *Use Guidelines*

### **Authority to Post**

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Given the democratic nature of social media, experts encourage allowing any interested parties of your credit union’s community – the executive suite, communications and marketing, legal, human resources, customer service, etc. – to be “official” or “de facto” company spokespeople.

After deciding who will comprise your credit union’s social network community, next consider and outline the following issues:

- Who is to speak “officially” about your organization, and about which topics?
- Who are the people who can promptly grant permission to discuss new products and industry trends, and what can you share?
- What’s the process for responding to legitimate (and illegitimate) online criticisms of your company or its products? What can you do to prevent (or survive) a Twitterstorm or any social media crisis?
- How can employees “authentically engage in the conversation” as individuals without speaking for the company?
- What direction or advice should you offer about people’s conduct on personal pages after (and, sometimes, during) business hours?
- What oversight or proofing process will your credit union have regarding postings?

### ***Language and Behavior***

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A few simple, universal rules for social media postings everyone should follow:

- Be professional, but don’t leave out personality.
- Don’t sell. Use social media as an opportunity to generate leads and point out opportunities.
- Be nice. Don’t bash competitors on your or their social media applications.

Depending on your credit union’s membership and social media network, these can be expanded to form your specific guidelines on this subject.

One rule of thumb generally acknowledged about social media: If you wouldn’t want it displayed on a billboard alongside a busy highway, don’t post it.

### ***Accountability***

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Everyone participating in your credit union’s social network community is responsible for what they post/write.

Your credit union will want to consider what, if any, social media conduct will negatively affect someone’s employment status.

### ***Personal Social Media Use by Employees***

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When users identify themselves as employees of a particular company, their online comments can be interpreted as on-the-record (if not official) information. Less formally, when their followers and friends include clients, co-workers, and competitors, their words and behavior can reflect on their employer. As a result, some organizations have implemented policies that restrict or prohibit employees from referring to or discussing their employer.

Another issue to consider is whether staff members are allowed to link their personal social media profiles to the credit union’s – i.e. “Fan” the credit union’s Facebook page.

Carefully evaluate the culture and policies of your credit union in order to craft a fitting rule regarding employees’ reference to the organization in social media.

### ***Responding to Negativity***

One of the greatest worries among organizations interested in using social media to broaden consumer awareness and build relationships is negative postings. There are two ways this issue can arise – one without your credit union even having a social media presence:

- Posts on your social media applications
- Posts on others' social media applications

The key to dealing with both scenarios is responding proactively, timely, and honestly to any negative comments or complaints, mistakes, or errors. Consider it an opportunity to participate in what would have been a one-sided discussion. You can make your side of the story known (while remembering to be open and honest, not defensive). Many see positive results from their responses to negative comments.

Deleting negative comments is highly discouraged, likely to be noticed, and creates an impression of "something to hide."

To learn how to monitor references to your credit union on others' social media channels, see the "Monitoring" section below.

### ***Regulations & Disclosures***

The same advertising disclosures and regulations apply in the social media sphere. When social media is used to advertise the credit union's products and services, the proper laws, regulations, and disclosures must be followed. Apply your credit union's advertising policies to its social media efforts.

To review what advertising regulations your credit union must comply with, visit InfoSight, the Ohio Credit Union League's 24/7 online compliance manual of state and federal regulatory issues. Access InfoSight at <http://oh.leagueinfosight.com>.

### ***Legal Issues***

Include rules for observing copyrights and trademarks, respecting the institutions' confidential information, zero tolerance for personal attacks, providing adequate disclaimers, stating your legal rights as the application's owner (all rights reserved), and clearly stating that any comments are the sole responsibility of the commenter (hold harmless).

### ***Security***

Extend your credit union's IT security considerations and rules to its social media applications and content. Include plans for protecting data from being compromised, employee and confidential information from being mined, and non-compliant information about products and services from being published. For further guidance on social media from a technology/security perspective, read the CUNA Technology Council's "Social Media From a Technology Point of View" white paper, which is available to any member of CUNA's six professional councils or for purchase by non-members. Download the paper at [www.cunatechnologycouncil.com](http://www.cunatechnologycouncil.com).

### ***Monitoring***

For your credit union's social media initiative to succeed, it must be a regular priority of someone on staff – both to post and monitor. The fast-paced environment of social media requires frequent, relevant posts and quick responses. Include a regular schedule or minimum standards of involvement in your policies/guidelines.

In addition to monitoring what's posted on your credit union's social media channels, references to your credit union on others' social media sites needs to be checked regularly. Suggested monitoring tools/methods:

- Google Alerts for your credit union's name
- Periodically search your credit union's name using Google, Technorati, YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, and Summize.com (to search Twitter tweets)

## Additional Resources for Building Policies

SocialMediaGovernance.com provides tools and resources for social media and social application investments, including the policies of more than 100 organizations.

<http://socialmediagovernance.com/policies.php>

IBM's social media guidelines are accompanied by a 12-point executive summary.

<http://www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html>

The Social Media Task Force, Reed Smith LLP, extensive guide to the steps companies can take to minimize the risks associated with the revolution in the use of social media.

<http://www.ohiocreditunions.org/omn/SocialMedia-RisksAndRewards.pdf>

The site compiles and shares the social media policies of 113 companies.

<http://prebynski.com/2009/12/social-media-policies-113-organizations/>

## Resources

"Social Media Guidelines & Policies," a CUNA Marketing Business Development white paper, by Jim Jerving, January 2010

"Rules of Engagement: Developing Effective Social Media Guidelines for Your Company and Employees" white paper by Cision

"Dealing With the Ugly: CUs Need Active Approach to Negative Feedback," by Myriam DiGiovanni. Credit Union Times, Sept. 2, 2009

CUNAverse.com, "Does Your Credit Union Have a Social Media Policy," April 2010

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