



Social Media Guidelines

OVERVIEW

Social media is one of the many communication methods used by The University of Alabama to share information, engage with our audiences and create a sense of community among our publics. This channel, unlike most others, provides the opportunity for instantaneous, two-way communication with prospective students, current students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents of prospective and current students, media and other audiences. Social media allows the University not only to share information, but also to raise awareness of our mission and values, and to build support within our local, national and international communities.

These social media guidelines include best practices and recommendations intended to provide helpful direction to UA units using social media as a tool for marketing, public relations, crisis communication and student relation purposes. If your unit wants to use social media, we encourage you to do so responsibly.

MAIN UNIVERSITY CHANNELS

The University's Division of Strategic Communications has decided to pursue only those platforms that meet criteria related to popularity among our audiences, channel success and growth rate, communication need and resource availability.

Facebook (facebook.com) | <https://www.facebook.com/universityofalabama/>

Followers: 555,795

Facebook allows people and organizations to connect through establishing an online community. As of March 2016, Facebook has more than 1 billion daily active users.

Twitter (twitter.com) | @UofAlabama | #RollTide #UA #RTR #TideResearch #TodayAtUA

Followers: 121,947

Twitter allows users to connect and discover the latest news, ideas and opinions in 140 characters or less, connecting brands and organizations to their audiences in real-time.

Instagram (instagram.com) | @UnivofAlabama | #RollTide #UA #RTR #TodayAtUA

Followers: 33,990

Instagram is a photo and video sharing mobile app with a community of more than 400 million monthly active users, with 90% of users under the age of 35.

LinkedIn (linkedin.com) | <https://www.linkedin.com/edu/university-of-alabama-17740>

Followers: 160,906

LinkedIn is the largest professional network on the web, with more than 400 million users worldwide. In 2013, LinkedIn introduced University pages.

Snapchat (snapchat.com) | @UofAlabama

Followers: 7,147

Snapchat is a mobile app with more than 100 million users. This app privately shares photos and videos between users, with the capability to also create public Snapchat stories.

YouTube (youtube.com) | <https://www.youtube.com/user/UniversityofAlabama>

YouTube is a video platform with more than 1 billion users. On average, the platform receives more than 1 billion mobile video views per day. The University of Alabama utilizes YouTube to host promotional videos about the University, featuring programs, research and faculty & staff, with a focus on external audiences.

Vimeo (vimeo.com) | <https://vimeo.com/universityofalabama>

Vimeo is a video platform with more than 35 million users. The University of Alabama utilizes Vimeo as a primary channel to host institutional videos and messaging, with a focus on content for social media and internal audiences.

** Follower counts as of 9/19/2017*

MANAGING ACCOUNTS

There are a number of social media tools and various ways to work with them to maximize your digital presence. Before creating an account for your unit, you should do the following:

- *Evaluate* your goals and objectives
- *Determine* the needs of your audience
- *Decide* if content creation and maintenance will be feasible

You should have a clear plan that establishes objectives and desired outcomes. That plan should reflect your unique personality.

Remember: every social media account needs a coordinator to manage the content and monitor engagement.

Previously established social media accounts may need to be reviewed and evaluated. Accounts that have been inactive for three or more months and/or accounts with very few followers and little engagement should be closed. The University's main social media accounts, administered by Strategic Communications, may be able to post information and updates on behalf of your unit.

SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Account-generated posts

Account coordinators should be mindful that all content posted on University-driven social media accounts is reflective of The University of Alabama. Never post content that contains profanity, hate speech, personal attacks against others or slurs.

If you mistakenly post incorrect information, admit it and move forward with a simple update, followed by the updated, correct information; your followers will be more likely to move forward if you are forthcoming and honest.

User-generated posts

If a user makes a questionable post or comment on University-driven accounts, care should be taken to respond appropriately. If needed, refer to The University of Alabama's Social Media Decision Tree. Strategic Communications recommends you do not hide or delete a comment or post just because it is negative, but

only if it contains spam/links, profanity, hate speech, attacks on others, commercial advertisements, political endorsements or unlawful activity. Account coordinators should try to resolve the problem by responding as soon as possible when appropriate to do so.

University News/Announcements

Strategic Communications recommends that major University announcements not be leaked through social media. This includes situations where the University is waiting to officially release information to the public and/or members of the press. Use caution before posting “breaking news” to your University-driven social media accounts or speculating on big announcements that do not have details included in official University correspondence.

Attribution

Copyright and fair-use laws should be followed; do not plagiarize. Attribute sources by linking to the website where the original content was generated, noting the author or, in the case of Twitter, including “RT,” which stands for retweet, or “MT,” which stands for modified tweet.

Privacy

In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 and student privacy policies, personal information of University of Alabama students should never be disclosed. Care should also be taken not to compromise the privacy of faculty and staff.

Compliance

The University of Alabama is committed and obligated to the principle of institutional control in operating the athletics program in a manner that is consistent with the letter and spirit of NCAA, SEC and University rules and regulations. All interactions between The University of Alabama and student-athletes or prospective student-athletes are governed by the aforementioned rules and regulations.

The NCAA has determined that an institutional department other than athletics (such as admissions, schools/colleges, etc.) may send electronic correspondence that is not private (such as a public post/repost, tweet/retweet, like/favorite) at any time, provided the institution’s athletics department is not involved in any way and the correspondence is not created for an athletics recruiting purpose. For further questions, email compliance@ia.ua.edu.

THE UNIVERSITY BRAND

Visual identity

Social media account coordinators should follow The University of Alabama’s graphic standards manual to ensure the University maintains a strong, unified visual identity online. This includes logos and/or text for avatars, thumbnails and other photos. Images for backgrounds, avatars and covers should be in good taste and representative of the University.

Official University Accounts

University-driven social media accounts should be easily identifiable as an official channel of the University. Including this identification in the “About” section, using the University logo when applicable, and including links to the University’s websites will help convey this image. When appropriate, the University’s User-Generated Content Disclaimer can be referenced, along with the UA Social Media Etiquette Guidelines.

The Division of Strategic Communications has developed a Social Media Directory – a central directory of official University of Alabama social media pages. This directory is for internal and external use, to assist in

collaboration among University units and to direct our audiences to University-affiliated social media accounts. To add or edit a listing, go to <https://www.ua.edu/social/>.

BEST PRACTICES

Listen, assess, adjust

A strength of social media is that you receive feedback from your audience, providing insight on how to improve your approach. Listen to that feedback, and use it to make adjustments as necessary.

Publish content via social on a regular basis

While it's not necessary to publish every day, your audience should see that someone is consistently engaging and attending the information on the social channel. Provide accurate information, keeping in mind that content should always be relevant to your audience.

Be prepared to respond to questions or feedback shared through your social channel

When you answer in a public setting, many people may read that answer. If the information you are providing is sensitive or valid only for the individual being addressed, you may need to make that clear in your response or provide them with a more direct way to contact you (email or phone). Take each negative situation case-by-case, referring to the UA Social Media Decision Tree or Etiquette Guidelines as needed.

Assume everything you share is public

The privacy policies of third party websites are outside of UA's control and subject to change. In addition, you are interacting with other people whose notions of privacy may differ from yours - possibly resulting in something you thought was a private communication becoming public.

Recognize that social media is not about control

You can only control what you say through your social channels - but you cannot control how people interpret your message, how they will react, or what they will communicate to others through these channels about your organization. Focus on telling your story honestly and providing accurate, timely information that is relevant to your audience.

Ask for input from your audience

If you need your audience's opinion on a particular topic, sometimes it's appropriate to just ask. Writing a post in the form of a question can be a simple and effective way to do this. It's important to remember - you don't control the answers, so be prepared for both positive and negative responses.

Hiding a Facebook comment vs. deleting it

Facebook gives page administrators the ability to hide or delete a comment. When hiding a comment, the user can still see their comment on the page, as can their friends. If you delete a comment, it is gone from the page. Strategic Communications utilizes both features, on a case-by-case basis.

Tracking

Take advantage of free metrics and tracking capabilities that are available - this will help you to become more educated on your audience's interests and how they are responding to your content. Facebook has built-in metrics that page administrators can access, and Twitter provides metrics for the past 28 days at any given time. Other helpful tracking sites include bitly.com and hootsuite.com.

**For assistance with tracking metrics or other questions, please contact Social Media Specialists Olivia Ann Hodges at olivia.ann.hodges@ua.edu or Mallori Hudgins at mallori.hudgins@ua.edu