Basic Social Media Etiquette
What you need to know and do when you use social media

Be yourself

Creating your identity. When setting up your accounts in Facebook, Twitter, and other social media spaces, refer to the Texas A&M AgriLife Social Media Guidelines for tips on creating the identity behind your effort (username, screen name, etc.) Because we are part of a public institution, we strongly recommend that you do not obscure your identity using a fictitious, “character”-like name. Use the privacy settings offered by the social media site to protect your information, but don’t hide behind a false identity. The guidelines are available at AgriLife.org/us/social.

Choosing your photo. When using the Texas A&M AgriLife social media icons that allow for inclusion of a photo, use a good, professional photo of yourself. Using a photo helps to make the human connection. A good, closeup photo of your face is a good choice, without any distracting background elements. Save your photo in .png or .jpg format. Tips and tricks for combining your photo with existing icons are available at AgriLife.org/us/social.

Using separate accounts. Set up separate accounts for your professional activities and for your personal and family interactions. Facebook allows only one account per e-mail address, so you can set up a personal address for free with Google’s Gmail (http://google.com/gmail) to create a second, personal Facebook account.

Signing posts. When you are working with colleagues to jointly administer a page, sign your posts, even with just your first name, to add the human touch!

Participating as a peer. Most social media environments are communities of equals, not classrooms with instructors. An important element of your credibility will be your ability to communicate authentically and respectfully as a member of the community. And Extension’s credibility in the social media world, just as in the real world, depends upon your credibility.

Be the brand

Protecting the brand. If you list your employer in your profile, anything you post can be linked to the agency or university.

If you “friend” colleagues or clients in Facebook or have them among your followers for Twitter, etc., your account is no longer a private or personal account. Anything you post not only influences how you are perceived by others, but it also reflects on the agency and the university. For example, if your Facebook profile photo shows you dunking your Aggie ring at the Chicken, and you post a comment on Extension’s Facebook page, that photo will show up on the agency’s page. Or, if you post a
status update or tweet that contains a complaint about monthly reports, a political comment, or a even a derogatory opinion of another university’s football team, that information can reflect poorly on you and on Extension.

**Displaying the brand.** Use the official agency graphic identifiers, backgrounds, etc., for your professional pages. These have been developed by AgriLife Communications and are available at AgriLife.org/us/social.

**Speaking for the agency.** When you are using social media for professional purposes, *be sure that your posts are valuable* to your friends, readers, or followers. Make the information as complete and accurate as possible within the medium, just as you would in a face-to-face presentation.

*Do not engage in arguments or vent frustrations* when you are using social media professionally. Communicate respectfully and positively with your contacts.

*Keep your posts friendly and engaging,* just like your face-to-face interactions. This is your opportunity to put a human face on our agency in the social media space, so don’t use overly technical or bureaucratic-sounding language.

If a member of the media contacts you because of something you posted, *respond promptly and courteously.* Many media professionals are monitoring social media for leads on stories, and this could be a great way for you to build relationships and visibility in the mass media, too. If you need guidance on handling a media request, contact AgriLife Communications.

**Engaging, not promoting.** According to research done in summer 2009, 70 percent of Facebook users who are “fans” of a company or organization *don’t* believe that they have given that organization permission to send them marketing messages. So don’t just push out promotional messages to your friends and fans; instead, engage them with questions, dialogue, invitations to comment, and useful information.

**Respecting copyright and intellectual property, as well as confidential or proprietary information.** Do not share information, images, etc., that are copyrighted by another organization or are the intellectual property of anyone other than yourself. If you are not sure whether the information you want to share belongs to someone else or if it is confidential, *don’t post it.*

**Respecting privacy and safety.** Do not post photos and identifying information about other adults, unless you have their written consent (if needed, download the official release form at AgriLife.org/us/social). And *never* share identifying information about children (information that would enable a stranger to find them) on public pages or posts to public pages.

**Being vigilant and responsible.** Extension employees who serve as account administrators for social media efforts must ensure proper branding and frequent maintenance and currency of the information posted, as well as monitor comments and posts by others (including external visitors) for professionalism. *It is strongly advised that, unless dedicated time is established to carefully monitor commenting, the feature be disabled.*

**Boosting Extension’s presence.** Participate in social media in ways that add to Extension’s popularity, credibility, and ratings. Here are some specific strategies:
Become a fan of Extension pages in Facebook.
♦ List Extension’s pages in your Favorites.
♦ Follow Extension’s Twitter feed.
♦ Subscribe to Extension blogs or RSS feeds.
♦ Give ratings and comments to Extension videos in YouTube.
♦ “Like” or comment on status updates in Facebook.
♦ Post your own images and videos and comments on Extension pages.
♦ Re-Tweet Extension posts in Twitter.
♦ Add Extension videos and recordings to your playlists.
♦ Participate in Facebook discussions.

If a fan page in Facebook already exists for an Extension program or an account is already established for a program in another social medium, interact with your clients and participants on those existing pages instead of creating a new one. It will add to the activity on those accounts, boosting visibility for your work as well as for the program and Extension overall! If you are extremely active on that account, contact the administrator about becoming a co-administrator.

Check Extension’s social media registry to find out what already exists at AgriLife.org/us/social.

**Be there**

**Keeping it constant.** For professional uses of social media, you need to participate frequently, but meaningfully. If you’re short on content, post a question that prompts others to participate and share information. But if you really don’t have anything to say, don’t post.

**Keeping it interesting.** Vary your posts to keep followers interested. Post newsy updates, share links to other web-based resources, include photos or video, ask questions, or request input or feedback. Post information that relates to issues current in other media, such as news or weather reports.

**Keeping them engaged.** When someone posts a question, answer it promptly and publicly, where others can see it. They may have the same question, and visibly interacting with visitors builds your credibility.

**Coping with negativity.** If anyone posts something profane or inappropriate to your page, delete it without comment. Don’t re-post or re-Tweet it, even to point out its errors! Doing so just spreads the negativity further, and may even make it seem to have originated with you.

If someone repeatedly posts inappropriate content, block that person using the features available in that medium.

For specific guidance on dealing with difficult social media visitors, refer to the excellent resource from the U.S. Air Force. Find the link at AgriLife.org/us/social

**Constructing your content.** Write content specifically for the forum where you’ll be posting it. Don’t just copy and paste from other sources. One social media expert recommends beginning a Facebook post with a question that elicits a quick,
easy answer from your friends or fans. Then, follow, within the same post or in a comment on it, with the information you want to share.

When you share a web link, write a brief description of it in your post, along with the link. This way, you are telling your followers why you’ve chosen it for them, why you believe it’s relevant to them, not just launching them off into cyberspace.

As a user of social media, pay attention to messages that generate good responses and lively discussions on the pages and accounts you like to visit. Use those posts as a model for constructing your own.

**Staying plugged-in.** Participate in other people’s social media efforts that are relevant to your work. Write on their Facebook walls; comment on their blogs; post to discussion forums; follow their Twitter feeds. Include a link back to you (if it doesn’t happen automatically, as it does in Facebook and Twitter). All these interactions will build visibility and credibility for you.

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