



Best Practices

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1. Determine if social media is right for your communication needs.

- *What are your top organizational goals?* Your goal(s) might include recruiting more students, increasing alumni involvement, connecting current students to one another, sharing research findings, or showcasing the work and activities of your unit.
- *How do you envision social media complementing these goals (if at all)?* Keep in mind that social media functions less as an independent entity and more as an aid to support and forward larger communication strategies. Understanding your top organizational goals will help determine which platforms are best to utilize.
- *Who is your primary audience? Who engages with you the most?* Who do you want to reach through social media? Your primary audience might include incoming freshmen and their parents, graduate students, alumni, faculty and researchers at other institutions, potential funders, fieldwork partners, and more.
- *Which social media platform(s) do you think will help achieve your goals? Why?* Where is your audience on social media? What are they interested in? What characteristics do they share? There's no one-size-fits-all solution in regard to social media. While younger students tend to frequent platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn groups are a great space to connect graduating students with alumni, professors, and potential employers. Facebook groups serve as a good platform to connect current students with each other, while Facebook pages and Twitter can reach prospective students or the media. The variety of platforms available is constantly evolving, and different social media platforms serve different groups of people.
- *Describe your organization's voice or "personality."* How will you communicate this on social media? On our institutional-level social media platforms, for instance, our university's voice is engaging, informative, and personable.
- *What type of content will you share? Where will you find it?* Are your students or faculty members frequently published or quoted in the media? Does your department have a visual element? The content shared on social media should be diverse—not just events, or only news, or solely inspirational quotes and commentary—but a mixture that caters to your audience's interests. Also the type of content you will share will help determine which platforms are best suited for your organization and its goals.
- *Could your activities on social media bring any negative attention to University of Mobile? How would you respond to negativity?* It's important to remember that criticism can be common on social media. We recommend closely monitoring social media platforms, and notifying the Office of Marketing & Public Relations immediately of any potential issues.
- *Who will manage the platform(s), produce content, engage with followers, and measure results?* Keep in mind that social media does not sleep. You should be prepared to commit at least 5-10 hours per week to social media, depending on the platform(s). During this time, you will need to schedule and generate posts regularly, monitor conversations, and be responsive to people engaging with you through comments and messages. While you can schedule content, much of social media is also in real time. Do you have the flexibility to occasionally post to social media live from events?
- *What plans do you have to grow an initial social media fan base?* Will you recruit social media ambassadors to spread the word, or will you send emails making your audience aware of your accounts? Whatever the method, it's important to have a plan for launching your social media presence.

2. Research.

Below is a list of some of the current platforms commonly used in higher education.

Facebook

- A *Facebook page* enables organizations to share their stories and connect with people. People who like your page can get your updates in their Facebook Newsfeeds. Recommended for departments and large programs.
 - Be visual: We encourage original, high-definition photographs in all posts and albums.
 - Be brief: Facebook recommends 90 characters or less per post.
 - Be consistent: Facebook recommends 1-2 posts per day and 5-10 posts per week.
- A *Facebook group* is for group communication and for people to share their common interests and express opinions. When you create a group, you can choose to make it publicly available for anyone to join, require administrative approval for members to join, or keep it private and invitation only. Members of the group will see the group updates in their Facebook Newsfeeds. Recommended for programs, classes, student groups, organizations, and incoming students.
 - Most engagement in groups happens organically! Encourage engagement by posing questions, polling the group, and sharing photos and relevant information.

Twitter helps organizations share ideas, news, and information instantly (and in 140 characters or less). Recommended for department and large programs.

- Be conversational: Use relevant hashtags, and pose and answer questions.
- Be interesting: Share and retweet relevant/timely content and information. Use high-quality photos when possible.
- Be consistent: We recommend 3-5 tweets/retweets per day and 20-30 tweets per week.
- Create lists of relevant accounts to keep up with students, faculty, and other UM entities.

Instagram is a way to share your organization's activities and happenings with your followers through a series of pictures and/or short videos. Instagram also has a feature called "Stories" which are photos or 15 second videos that disappear after 24 hours. Recommended for department and programs with a heavy visual component.

- Be visual: Your photos and videos should give a beautiful behind-the-scenes glimpse of your organization.
- Be consistent: 5-7 posts per week, for instance.
- Be engaging: Use hashtags, as well as the "like" and comment features for other related content. Use a more personal tone.

LinkedIn groups provide a place for professionals in the same industry or with similar interests to share content, find answers, post and view jobs, make business contacts, and establish themselves as industry experts. Recommended for department and program alumni groups.

- Like Facebook groups, LinkedIn groups also tend to create organic engagement. Nevertheless, start and forward group discussions to help connect group members to each other.

1. Be mindful of your audience and the larger community.

- Pledge to pay close attention. If you choose to facilitate a social media account, we also ask that you closely monitor your account activity regularly, be responsive, choose your words wisely, and be respectful of what your followers deem appropriate.
- Respond to all questions and comments in a timely manner.
- Take caution when engaging in potentially controversial content.
- Challenge yourself by seeking knowledge about your diverse audience, as well as forms of oppression and privilege.

- University of Mobile is a Christ-Centered university, and every post should illustrate and uphold our dedication to “Higher Education for a Higher Purpose.”
3. Look over Social Media Style Guide & the overall Brand Standards (found at umobile.edu/marketing) thoroughly.
 4. Schedule a consultation.

In order to maintain a well-curated brand online, we must be diligent and intentional. You may not create social pages for any university department or program without consent from the Office of Marketing & Public Relations.

If you currently administrate a social media account or if you would like to, email Rivers Brunson at rbrunson@umobile.edu to schedule an appointment, where you will work together to ensure the best course of action for your communication needs and create an effective strategy.