

Report CCR-CS-16-15

To: Chair Pringle and Members of the Corporate Services Committee
From: Robert Hatten, Communications Officer
Meeting Date: May 26, 2015
Subject: Social Media Policy
Status: Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CS56-15; Endorsed by County Council June 2, 2015 per Resolution CC78-15;

Recommendation(s)

WHEREAS social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become a valuable tool and an anticipated method for municipalities to share and communicate with the public;

AND WHEREAS Grey County currently operates more than 10 social media accounts over a variety of platforms;

AND WHEREAS a social media policy is needed to strengthen corporate communication and provide guidance to staff managing these platforms on the County's behalf to protect the County's public image;

AND WHEREAS a social media policy will help to empower and encourage staff's personal use of social media and establish criteria for responsible use;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Report CCR-CS-16-15 regarding a social media policy be received;

AND THAT Policy A-GEN-007 being the Social Media Policy be endorsed.

Background

Social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are a popular way for individuals, groups and organizations to connect and share. Facebook now has 50 million pages worldwide and 1.28 billion active users; Instagram is home to over 20 billion photos, and Twitter has an audience of 255 million active users who collectively send over 500 million messages each day. Social media has been established as a permanent communication vehicle and it is important to participate in the conversation or risk being overlooked by residents and visitors alike.

Many municipalities across Ontario, including Grey County, have already started joining the conversation by creating social media accounts on various platforms. Currently Grey County operates four Facebook pages and seven Twitter accounts for various County functions such as Grey Roots Museum & Archives, Tourism, Paramedic Services and more. The County also manages videos on YouTube channels and shares photos on the Instagram and Flickr platforms.

Joining the conversation on social media was a start, but it is important to have a policy in place to help guide what information is shared on County accounts and pages. Information posted online is both public and permanent making it very important to operate accounts professionally at all times. Improper use of social media can be damaging to the County's reputation and it's important to take steps to mitigate that risk.

The Social Media Policy was created to provide guidance to employees who manage the social media accounts on behalf of the County. It was drafted through consultation with industry best practices as well as common policies used by other Ontario municipalities. The purpose of the policy isn't to limit what employees post on social media, rather it establishes best practices and boundaries to empower employees and provides direction on how to leverage these websites. The policy also contains "posting guidelines" to help authors create engaging posts that will be successful.

Grey County operates a variety of social media channels and it isn't realistic for one employee to create and moderate content for every account. Because many County channels are set up by function, social media moderators have been established in these departments to run accounts. The Social Media Policy will help ensure all content on Grey County social media accounts has a consistent tone and voice making it easier for the public to identify with the Grey County brand.

The Social Media Policy also addresses the personal use of social media by all employees. Social media is a public forum and what an employee says or does on their personal accounts can potentially reflect back on the organization – which can be positive or negative. By including guidelines for personal use employees will better understand how they can interact with Grey County's corporate accounts. Many employees are proud to work for the County and they want to share news and successes, however they are unsure if they are permitted to do so. The policy will help employees understand what is appropriate.

Conversely, the policy will also identify what the County considers to be inappropriate use of social media by employees which includes actions like sharing personal or private information, speaking on behalf of the County without approval. The policy also speaks to respectful use of social media and is consistent with other Human Resources policies such as the Respectful Workplace Policy.

According to a 2014 survey by Redbrick Communications approximately 28% have a policy in place however the percentage is growing. It is important that Grey County joins this trend to remain competitive with neighbouring municipalities.

Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology Considerations

At this time there are no additional financial or technological considerations.

Training on this policy will be incorporated into departmental staff meetings and corporate orientation and will require minimal staff time.

Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

5.4 Adopt leading practices to strengthen the effectiveness of the county's website in providing information and supporting the county's operation and strategic initiatives.

6.2 Continue to explore ways to improve communications and collaboration within and between County departments and service areas.

Attachments

Draft - Social Media Policy

Respectfully submitted by,

Robert Hatten
Communications Officer

Director Sign Off: *Heather Morrison*

Social Media Policy

Approved by:

Date Approved:

Last Revision Date:

Replaces:

Scheduled for Review by:

Policy Number:

Section:

Sub Section:

References and Related Documents

[I-K-10.00 Computer and Internet Use](#)

[Discrimination and Harassment](#)

[Standards of Conduct Policy](#)

[Behaviour Standards](#)

Forms

[Form - Employee Pledge of Confidentiality](#)

[Employee Use of Computers \(new format\)](#)

[Employee Use of Internet and Electronic Mail \(new format\)](#)

Policy Statement

The Corporation of the County of Grey (the County) recognizes social media as an effective communication tool for sharing information and engaging the public about important news and activities. Social media accounts owned by the County will be managed professionally and consistently according to Grey County's mission, vision and values.

Purpose

This policy establishes guidelines for both professional and personal use of social media by Grey County employees to protect the County's reputation and empower employees' personal use of social media.

Scope

The Social Media Policy applies to all employees of Grey County using social media on behalf of the County or personally.

Definitions

Social media – Includes any website or online community which allows dialogue between individuals or groups in public view. Some examples of social media are: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, blogs, forums, etc.

Social media account – an established page or profile on a social media platform.

Content – Any information (text, photo, video etc.) added to an online location.

User – An individual or organization participating in or “using” social media.

Moderator – An employee responsible for posting and filtering content and comments on a social media channel. The moderator speaks on behalf of Grey County and each moderator will have a backup with the same responsibilities. Moderating includes allowing or rejecting comments based on this policy, standards and laws.

Social media platforms

Facebook – Facebook is a social network that allows individuals or organizations to create profiles and connect with other users. Users can write posts or share information (such as pictures or videos) on their own “wall” (profile) or another user’s wall. Depending on privacy settings, postings may be visible to everyone.

Twitter – Twitter allows users to create micro-blogs which are no longer than 140 characters. These postings are known as “tweets”. Twitter users can “follow” other users to receive notification any time something new is tweeted. Users also have the ability to “retweet” and share the posting with all of their own followers. Users can also use a hashtag (the # symbol) with a word or a phrase which acts like a metadata tag. These hashtags can be searched and grouped to create common trends. Twitter posts are publicly available to anyone.

YouTube – YouTube is a video sharing social network. Users can create a profile to upload, share and comment on videos. All videos are publicly available and can be viewed without a YouTube account. Videos can also be embedded onto websites and various other social media platforms.

LinkedIn – LinkedIn is a social networking website for professionals. Like Facebook, users create a profile about themselves with a heavy emphasis on their career and work experience. LinkedIn users are able to connect with other users and organizations. The network has a variety of functions such as helping users connect with potential employers/employees, stay in touch with colleagues, and share a variety of business information.

Instagram – A social media platform owned by Facebook with a focus on sharing pictures. Similar to other platforms, a profile is created and users can post content, follow other users, and comment on content.

Flickr – Another popular photo-sharing and hosting service.

Other Social Media – New social media websites are launched regularly with varying success. This policy applies to all online communities where users can participate in a public conversation or easily create publicly viewable content.

Procedure

Social media management responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Communications Officer to ensure social media accounts owned by Grey County are managed professionally. Accounts should be actively updated, contain meaningful content, support the County's goals and objectives, engage the community in open conversation, and be free of inappropriate or offensive content.

Because the County is multifaceted, social media moderators may be assigned to manage specific social media accounts or pages independently (such as Grey Roots Paramedic Services and Tourism). Each moderator will be responsible for meeting the guidelines outlined in this policy and following other county policies.

In some situations, such as with summer students, an employee may be designated as a temporary moderator. All temporary moderators will receive training from the primary moderator of the account or the Communications Officer after all necessary corporate policies and agreements have been signed.

If a designated moderator changes roles or leaves the County's employment, access to corporate social media accounts will be revoked and a replacement moderator will be named.

Emergency management and maintenance

The Communications Officer will have access to all County social media accounts for the purposes of emergency management or maintenance; however, day-to-day activities are the responsibility of the account moderator.

In the event of a declared emergency by Grey County Council, the main corporate social media accounts will be used to communicate information to the public and

answer questions. During the declared emergency the account will be moderated by the Communications Officer or another specified individual as laid out in the County's Emergency Plan.

Hours of operation

Social media operates 24 hours a day. Because County accounts cannot realistically be monitored every hour of the day, the following statements will be made on the grey.ca, greyroots.com and visitgrey.ca websites and should also be added to all new social media accounts where possible:

- Grey County monitors social media accounts between during business hours Monday to Friday, excluding holidays.
- Comments and content posted on Grey County social media by the public does not necessarily reflect the values of the County.

Moderators may choose to update or monitor social media outside of standard business hours, but it is not required.

Creation of Grey County social media accounts

Employees require authorization from both their Director and the Communications Officer before creating a new social media account for the County. The Director and Communications Officer will determine if the new social media channel supports the County's objectives and if the effort required is warranted.

If the new social media channel is approved, a moderator and backup moderator will be identified. The moderator will create the new account and share login information with their backup moderator and the Communications Officer. The Communication Officer will provide assistance as required during the account creation processes. Moderators are responsible for maintaining the content and security of the new account. Once the account has been launched, only the moderator, backup moderator and Communications Officer will have access to the account, but other employees are encouraged to direct content to the moderator for review and posting.

If an unofficial or fraudulent Grey County page is discovered the Communications Officer will attempt to reach the account owner and respectfully ask for the account to be closed or renamed. If the account is uncooperative or nonresponsive the Communications Officer will reach out directly to the social media corporation for assistance.

Identification

Social media accounts need to be clearly identified as corporate accounts managed by Grey County and must follow the County brand.

Closure of Grey County social media accounts

If a social media account is no longer relevant, effective or otherwise required, the moderator or the Communications Officer will receive approval from the appropriate Director to decommission the account. Once an account becomes inactive it must remain publicly available for a minimum of six months and a final post or entry will be made informing the public the account has been closed and redirecting to grey.ca or a more relevant account.

For example, if the number of users on a platform decreases to a point where it is no longer worthwhile to update the account, it may be decommissioned with a posting saying, "Grey County has closed this account. Please follow us on Twitter [@GreyCounty](https://twitter.com/GreyCounty) or visit grey.ca for more information."

Before the account is formally closed all account information must be saved physically or electronically for records retention purposes.

Corporate posting guidelines

Social media will be used as a communications tool to support specific goals or objectives, promote County news and activities, or update the public on important information.

A strong social media posting should:

- Support the best interests of Grey County
- Be timely, relevant and informative
- Work towards a specific goal or objective
- Be professional, clear and written in plain language
- Be interesting or fun
- Be conclusive or have follow up (a post about a road closure must be followed by a post indicating the road has reopened)
- Respect copyright
- Avoid crosslinking between platforms (linking to Facebook from Twitter)
- Link to more detailed content such as a media release or webpage if applicable

All Grey County accounts must abide by the social media website's Terms of Service, all applicable laws, and other County policies.

Social media postings should not:

- Be confusing, unclear or complicated
- Be unrelated to the activities or interests of Grey County
- Reveal personal or confidential information
- Contain images of any person without consent
- Be vulgar, sexual or otherwise inappropriate
- Violate the Terms of Service or any law or the Ontario Human Rights code

Personal use of social media by employees

Employees are encouraged to use social media on their own time outside of business hours but must recognize content posted to social media is public and may directly or indirectly reflect back on the County. Employees should be cautious about what they say and share as inappropriate use of social media may be subject to disciplinary action.

Inappropriate uses of social media include but are not limited to:

- Posting negative comments about the County, staff members, or other associated partners
- Revealing private or confidential information relating to Grey County, the people we serve, or County employees
- Harassing or bullying others
- Breaking any applicable law or Grey County policy
- Posting information or opinions on behalf of Grey County without authorization

Personal use of social media can be very constructive both to the growth of an individual's personal network and to the promotion of the County. Using a personal account to promote County news and activities is encouraged, but it's important to be transparent by identifying yourself as a County employee and to be careful of speaking on behalf of the County without authorization.

Public use of Grey County social media

The purpose of social media is to engage in conversation with an audience. For this reason, all County social media websites should enable commenting/sharing features. The public may share their views and opinions, however content will be moderated periodically throughout the business day by the account moderator.

The County has the right to remove inappropriate public posts from social media if they violate this policy or any applicable law. Examples of inappropriate posts are:

- Comments completely unrelated to the posting, topic or thread
- Obscene language or sexual content
- Slanderous, offensive or discriminatory remarks
- Promotional posts about commercial services or products unrelated to County business
- Comments or images that violate copyright or the privacy laws or the security of the public
- Comments regarding political campaigns
- Comments in violation of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- Other posts the moderator or Communications Officer decides are not appropriate for the social media webpage

Creating a dialogue is important when engaging the public on social media. Locking comment sections or limiting the public's ability to contribute should be avoided unless approved by the Communications Officer and the appropriate Director as a last resort.

In the event a member of the media contacts the County through a social media seeking further information about a story the moderator should notify the Communications Officer or appropriate director to follow up with the publication.

If you have any questions about these policies, please email the Communications Officer at communications@grey.ca.