Social Media Training for Staff

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• **What is Social Media?**
  
  • **Basic idea** – Social media is the online forms of communicating that any individual can employ, which include blogs, microblogs such as Twitter and social networking sites such as Facebook.
  
  • **History**

![The History of Social Networking](image)

• **Purpose** - The purpose of social media is to allow individuals to connect with one another electronically regardless of their physical location. Today’s social media networks allow as few as 140 characters per message and as much as a large paragraph.
along with pictures and the use of various apps (such as polling and requesting RSVP’s) to enhance the message. This network can include games that people can play with others users on the same network with whom they have connected with. Users can access their social media pages from their desktop or Smartphone’s. As a business interested in tapping into this network, we can join in this online community and engage users in conversations, invite them to events, and inform them about new programs and facilities.

- **Forms** - There are several forms of Social Media. Each network has a specific focus. Here are just some of those categories. In many cases, you could place one network in two (2) or more categories.
  1. Blogging -- Wordpress, Blogger
  2. Social Network -- Facebook, Orkut, Hi5, LinkedIn, Google +
  3. Social Curating – Pinterest, Etsy, Stumbleupon, Tumblr, Evernote
  4. Microblogging -- Twitter, Snapchat, Vine, Voxer, LinkedIn, Vine, Instagram
  5. Social Bookmarketing -- Digg, StumbleUpon, Mixx, Reddit
  6. Video Sharing -- Youtube, Hulu, Vine
  7. Broader Content Sharing – Slideshare, Scribd

There are many sites which fall into one or more of these categories. Some people even call social gaming as a part of social media. If you can comment and reply, it’s social.

A few other tools to mention that you might find useful:

- Mutli-network management tools (free) – Hootsuite, LaterBro
- URL Shorteners – TinyURL, Bitly
- Picture filtering apps: Instagram, Tadaa, Splitpic, Pic Stitch, Colorblast, Halftone, ComicBook

- **Why Use It?**
  - Most mass-communication tools that the City has used in its history have been of the ‘one-way’ variety. These include, but are not limited to: newspaper PSA’s, flyers, brochures, letters, postcards, banners, posters, etc. These methods get the message out there, and unless there is direct mailing involved, we do not know who sees it. Even if it is a flyer that his sent home with a child, there is no guarantee that the parent actually received the information. Likewise with direct-mailings, we’re pretty sure the individual received the information, but the information may not have been read (as it may have been thrown out like ‘junk mail’).
  - Electronic communication (email, web site) improved our ability to share information, and in a much more cost effective way, but is often used for one-on-one or small group communication, and while numbers of visitors to our site may be known, we do not necessarily know who our visitors are.
  - Social media allows us to communicate with a certain amount of exclusivity (meaning people have to ‘Like’ us in order to get our messages (and can ‘Unlike’ us to stop
receiving it). When we post something it is not shared with everyone on the network – only with those following us or who are our fans. The challenge is growing our fan base in order to reach more of our customers. Most of all, this allows us to have two-way communication. We post information, people 'Like' or comment back, and we can respond, keeping the conversation going and possibly increasing the number of fans involved in the conversation. Two-way communication is the objective here.

- The very nature of social media (everyone + everywhere + anytime + every time) means we must be public and transparent. This makes honesty imperative. Spin will be apparent and we will not be able to hide our flaws or errors by ‘sugar-coating’ issues or situations. This also means we have to know our customers, which requires feedback. We need to ask questions and find out what our customers (city residents or anyone purchasing a service or program from us) want and don’t want. We are going from the old web page mind-set of “here’s what we have for you” or pushing information/programs/facilities at customers (and hoping they’ll visit our web site to actually see what we have to offer) to the new social media, which is a conversation in a new media that is not ours – it is simply one that we are participating in. With social media (Facebook, Twitter, Yelp!, YouTube, etc.) control shifts from us to the customer. We are no longer on our turf . . . we are on theirs. If we are not engaged in this medium we will become obsolete and our customers will go where they can have control. If we do not respect the customer and are not honest, we will lose them . . . and they will tell everyone, everywhere, anytime and every time.

**Pros, Cons, and Common Sense**

**Pros:**

1. One benefit is the simplicity with which people can connect with one another. It allows people to make connections with old friends as well as new. People separated by thousands of miles can communicate with each other and be part of an exclusive group (family, classmates, clubs, and shared interests).

2. Another benefit of social media is the sharing of one's ideas to a much wider audience. Through social media, anyone and everyone can spread his or her thoughts to the entire community of their chosen social media outlet. This makes it so much easier to collaborate with others and find where one really stands on topics and what to think of what is going on around him or her.

**Cons:**

1. The simplicity of being found can be viewed as a ‘negative affect’ of today’s social networking. Unfortunately, there are individuals who use networks, like Facebook, to find people who may not want to be found by that individual or who may prey on people they don’t know. The naïve or vulnerable, if careless enough to arrange for a face-to-face meeting, may find themselves the victim of fraud or a violent crime. To a lesser degree, a person may expose themselves to online harassment, though there are methods available to the user to sever their connection with someone they do not wish to interact with or hear from, and to report such offending conduct.

2. In some instances, the problems people experience with social media are brought upon by themselves with the posting of inappropriate remarks, rants, and the use of foul language. Worse are instances where individuals post pictures or videos of themselves that may be less than flattering or that is clearly socially unacceptable.
Common Sense: Today’s Internet requires a hint of skepticism, common sense, discretion, and savvy.

1. If it sounds too good to be true it probably is.
2. Avoid clicking ads, pop-ups, and opening emails and links from senders you don’t know.
3. Newspaper Test – If you’re writing something and you’re unsure how others may perceive it, then think about this before you post or click send: would I want to see this in the headlines of tomorrow’s newspaper for the world to see (as well as my boss, my mother, my kids, or my significant-other)? If the answer is ‘no’, then don’t post or send it.
4. Know when not to respond. If a response is necessary, be careful how you respond – seek the input/advice of others on how best to proceed.

• Social Media as a Business Tool
  o Social media is the latest platform that is used by both businesses and the public-at-large to connect electronically for the purpose of social interaction. Initially, social media was developed to allow individuals to connect with other individuals, but due to its popularity, a large number of companies are exploiting its potential and are seriously looking to connect to the audience.

Social Media Communicators Training

• What makes for a good post?
  o Being accurate – information should be double-checked before posting, especially when dates, times, locations and fees are involved.
  o Being relevant – it’s important that the post be timely
  o Sounding friendly – having an ear for your own words
  o Being witty – if your post puts a smile on their face, you’ve created a successful post
  o Planning ahead – you may want to keep a calendar of important dates (program registrations, event dates, holidays, etc.)

• Use tools
  o Pictures
  o Polls
  o RSVP for events
  o “Encourage the ‘Like’ button . . . . Like = awareness. The simplest form of feedback.
  o Ask people to ‘Comment’ . . . . Comment = engagement. The brass ring!
  o Apps that may provide opportunities to post more effectively or efficiently

• Goals & Objectives
  o Social media is part of our marketing mix and should be viewed as part of a strategy to increase brand equity and awareness. It should be viewed as one of the essential tools for promoting/marketing our programs, services, and facilities.
  o To engage our ‘fans’ and ‘followers’ in a dialogue so that we may have an exchange of
information, ideas, wants and needs. This format allows for two-way communication, and we should make the most of those opportunities.

- **Rules**
  - SPELL CHECK! – do the best you can to make sure both spelling and grammar are correct. We suggest creating your post in Word or an email and using the spell check feature there, and then do a cut-n-paste into the posting box. Spelling errors and grammatical errors will occur; we just want to keep them to a minimum. NOTE: any captions for pictures can be edited, so correct those errors when you find them.
  - OWN YOUR POST! If someone responds with a comment to your post, be sure to reply. Even if the only reply is ‘thank you’, you still need to respond (that’s the whole point of social media – having a conversation). Other ways to respond would be to ask for any further comments or ideas, or even redirect them to the department web site (Thanks! You can see more information on this program at www.westsacfun.org). We should always have the last comment, as it shows we are willing to keep the conversation going.
  - ALWAYS BE POLITE, especially when responding to a negative comment. It’s ok if someone says something that stings us a little. Perhaps they are right; the important thing here is that we respond appropriately.
  - HOW OFTEN SHOULD I/WE POST? That all depends. One of the objectives for putting messages out on social networking sites is to increase the number of eye-balls that will see this information. With Facebook, the more people see it on their ‘wall’ (and especially when they click on ‘Like’ or a picture or make a comment) the more likely they are to get future postings in their ‘Top News’ feeds. For the Parks & Recreation Facebook page, two to three postings a day is acceptable.
  - WHAT ABOUT INACCURATE INFORMATION? If someone provides inaccurate information about, reply with the correct information, but do it in such a way as to not cause the person any embarrassment.
  - REMOVE INAPPROPRIATE POSTS – if someone posts something that is truly unacceptable (use of foul language, disparaging remarks about others, disclosing personal/private information, spam postings)

- **Your role in Social Media**
  - To be a creative, ambitious, a multi-tasker who actively stays ahead of industry trends contributing to the success of the Parks & Recreation department in all social environments.
  - Help develop brand awareness (Parks Make Life Better!), generate inbound traffic and encouraging program participation and facility visits.
  - Manage social media campaigns and day-to-day activities. Responsibilities include online advocacy, writing editorial, community-outreach efforts, promotions, etc.
  - Manage presence in social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter, and other
similar community sites, posting on relevant blogs, and seeding content into social applications as needed

- Become an advocate of the City of West Sacramento and the Parks & Recreation department in social media spaces, engaging in dialogues and answering questions where appropriate