Volunteer Guidelines – Using Social Media

Social media is increasingly becoming part of our everyday lives and is the number one reason we use the internet. For many people, more than a quarter of the time spent online is spent checking and updating social media profiles.

Capturing what an organisation like PSPA does isn't an easy task. So we have developed some key messages for anyone who needs to talk about PSPA. This is a great resource for explaining what we do in a clear and concise language. You can use these messages as an introduction on your social media pages. Our key messages document can be found on the volunteering hub page on our website.

A number of groups are already using social media. This guide is a basic introduction to help you take the first steps to promoting the work of your group online using social media.

What is social media?
Social media is all about instant communication – sharing information and connecting with people online. Social media channels work alongside, and compliment, more traditional channels of communication (magazines, newsletters, websites etc.)

Social media focuses on three things:
- What users produce themselves (content) – from short messages to pictures or videos
- How content is shared with other individuals or groups online
- How users interact with each other – by 'liking' each other's posts, sharing them or commenting on them.

Types of social media

There are numerous types of social media, however the ones we recommend using are Facebook and Twitter. Each one has a slightly different focus and potential value for your group.

- Facebook - The most prolific social network, allowing users to create personal profiles and 'friend' other individuals, or 'like' organisation/ company profile pages. 'Liking' your organisation page allows that person access to your full profile and updates.

By having a Facebook page, you are giving your group a shop window to promote what you do online.

- Twitter - This online 'micro blogging' service allows you to send short (maximum 140 character) posts referred to as 'tweets'. Registered users can 'follow' you enabling access to your updates. In return you may choose to 'follow' them back.

The benefits of using social media

Using social media increases your presence on the web, giving people more ways of finding out about your group. Other benefits include:
- You can control access to information about your group by deciding what's shared. It gets your message out direct to your audience
- It's easy - very little technical skill is needed (you don't have to be an I.T. expert to do the basics well)
- It's flexible - it can take up as much or as little time as you want.

What can you use social media for?
- Promote local fundraising events (walks, bucket collections etc.)
- Share your successes (photos, videos, and fundraising totals)
- Remind people about your support meetings, and thank those who came for attending
- Engage with the local community by sharing your plans/achievements.

How to create your group Facebook page

We strongly recommend that you set up a group page and not a group. A public-facing page will allow you to share your activity to a completely new audience. The multimedia nature of Facebook means it is ideal for hosting the broadest range of content.

A page is open to anyone, meaning that any Facebook user can 'like' your page. 'Liking' your page means they'll get updates or alerts on their own Facebook timeline every time you add anything to your page.

A Facebook group is a closed page that can only be seen by those who have requested, and been accepted, to join the group.

Please use the official logo that we can provide you with as your page 'profile picture' and use an appropriate 'cover picture' that is relevant to your group. Facebook doesn't have a particularly easy search function, so when choosing a name we suggest you use a format such as:

- PSPA – Northampton Local Group
- PSPA – Woking Group

With Facebook, people have to come to you. They may find out about your page through a link on your newsletter, or because their friend shared one of your stories.

Using Facebook
Facebook is based on simple status updates allowing you to share stories, photos and videos that your audience will find interesting, and want to share with their Facebook 'friends' too.

Simply type your story, event information or a link you want to share in the 'What's on your mind?' box to share it with anyone who likes your page. They can then comment, like or share your status.

Facebook has a number of extra features that make it stand out from other social networking sites. Each lets you accessorise your group page, and give supporters a unique insight into what you do, for example you can upload photos of your events and organise them into albums.

How to create a group twitter account
To set up an account for your group go to www.twitter.com and follow the sign up instructions.

Your username will be visible to other users across Twitter. To maintain consistency across the PSPA, please follow the format:

In your description, which sits on your Twitter profile, we recommend starting with something like: 'PSPA Woking Local Group, volunteers working in support of PSPA. The small image representing you is called your 'avatar'. For most charities, this is simply your logo. Your avatar will appear very small on people's feeds, so keep it clear and simple. Please contact the Director of Engagement for a suitable logo.

Using twitter

Tweet about your events, activities and your latest news. Share (re-tweet) content from our PSPA account or other group accounts, but remember that people follow you for content specific to your area.

Top tips:
- Hashtags (#) 'tag' your tweets as searchable content making it easier for people to find themes and topics. Hashtags can be specific to people, events and organisations and are also a good way of keeping within the 140 character because they can abbreviate longer names easily
- A 'DM' is a Direct Message and is a way of communicating with another Twitter account privately. Direct messages cannot be seen by the public
- A 'RT' or 're-tweet' is sharing another user's tweet by putting it on your own timeline. Only re-tweet if it is relevant to your group
- Directing a tweet at someone/mentioning them is done by using '@' symbol, with the name of the user immediately following. It is a bit like a 'cc' in an email and is a good way of directing your followers to something interesting and relevant and will help you increase your group following.

Spread your tweets throughout the day, if possible, and avoid re-tweeting lots of tweets in a short space of time as this may frustrate your own followers.

The more conversations you have, the more relationships you will develop. Just like in the offline world, if you talk to someone from a particular organisation or industry again and again, you will develop a good rapport.

Strong relationships with supporters' old and new, supporters who will help you create a buzz and bigger audience locally.

What makes 'good' media content?

- People like pictures. Photos are therefore the focus of almost all social media. Although every photo tells a story, don't forget to add some accompanying text, explaining (amongst other things) who is in the photo and why. If you are talking about a 'bake off' event, it's simple enough to include a picture and thank people for attending
- Questions are a great way to trigger a conversation and engage with your followers. For example, you could ask: 'Is anyone free to volunteer for us on...?'
- Re-tweeting useful information and the achievements of others helps your group to be seen as a reliable source of information. People you re-tweet will appreciate the additional exposure you have given them
- Remember: your group is the voice of the PSPA locally. Tweet from events and thank people for their contributions.

Top tips

- Familiarise yourself with the channel you are using (play and learn!)
- Decide, with other members of the group, what your objectives are, even if it's just to try something new.
- There's no true anonymity on the internet, so always respect the confidentiality of others
- Update your networks regularly and respond to queries in a timely manner
- Avoid using social media as a soapbox to air grievances. Whatever you write will be accessible online for a long time, even if deleted
- Look and see what other groups and charities are discussing
- Be clear and use simple English – it's important that people can understand your message, read your posts and understand why you have uploaded that particular photo
- Try to be interesting and provide useful information. People are excited by new content that is relevant to them. This kind of thing will help your group account get noticed
- Be succinct and respect the limitations of each platform (140 characters on Twitter and a couple of paragraphs on Facebook)
- Be transparent and honest - never misrepresent yourself, your intentions or those of the group or PSPA you represent
- Try to have a human approach, even if you're tweeting as a group
- Engagement is the key to success; have conversations with, not at people

- Try to connect with people in a strategic fashion rather than just following or 'friending' anyone. A scattergun approach rarely works.

Safety and security on social media

To maintain consistency and control, you should nominate one or two people to look after the social medial accounts for your group. Please let us know the contact details of that person, as well as details of any accounts set up.

Ensure that more than one person holds the usernames and passwords to your social media account(s).

Etiquette and problem solving

Because social media is public-facing, you might be faced with negative comments or difficult questions. If you are, remember to:
- Respond quickly
- Never show anger or engage in negative conversation
- Work towards a resolution and talk offline when necessary
- Provide feedback.

Confidentiality

You should never discuss the details of any person without their permission. While it might be okay to talk about PSP & CBD in general, you should never discuss anything that could identify an individual to an external audience without their agreement.

Personal privacy

Privacy is an issue for anyone sharing content online, regardless of their role within the organisation. A sensible approach is to remember that all interactions on your social media account are public. Ensure you protect your passwords and account information.