



Social Media Guidelines

OVERVIEW

Social media is one of the many communication methods used by The University of Alabama to share information, engage with our audiences and create a sense of community among our followers. This channel, unlike most others, provides the opportunity for instantaneous, two-way communication with prospective students, current students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents of prospective and current students, media and other audiences. Social media allows the University not only to share information, but also to raise awareness of our mission and values, and to build support within our local, national and international communities.

These social media guidelines include best practices and recommendations intended to provide helpful direction to UA units using social media as a tool for marketing, public relations, crisis communication and student relation purposes. If your unit wants to use social media, we encourage you to do so responsibly.

MAIN UNIVERSITY CHANNELS + HASHTAGS

The University's Division of Strategic Communications has decided to pursue only those platforms that meet criteria related to popularity among our audiences, channel success and growth rate, communication need and resource availability.

Facebook (facebook.com) | <https://www.facebook.com/universityofalabama/>

Twitter (twitter.com) | <https://twitter.com/UofAlabama>

Instagram (instagram.com) | <https://www.instagram.com/univofalabama/>

LinkedIn (linkedin.com) | <https://www.linkedin.com/edu/university-of-alabama-17740>

YouTube (youtube.com) | <https://www.youtube.com/user/UniversityofAlabama>

Hashtags commonly used by main university channels:

#TideResearch | #WhereLegendsAreMade | #TodayAtUA | #RollTide | #Bama | #UA

CREATING ACCOUNTS

There are a number of social media tools and various ways to work with them to maximize your digital presence. The following information is intended to help ensure you're targeting and reaching the right audiences by learning how to effectively strategize your social media presence.

Before creating an account for your unit, you should do the following:

- *Evaluate and define* your goals and objectives
- *Determine* the needs of your audience
- *Decide* if content creation and maintenance will be feasible

You should have a clear plan that establishes objectives and desired outcomes. This plan should include clearly defined goals, your targeted audience and intended messaging. By thinking about your unit's

communication and marketing goals, you should be able to identify what social media channels your audience follows and whether or not a presence there would be beneficial.

Determine a manager

In order to stay focused on your social media goals, every social media account needs a coordinator to manage the content and monitor engagement. This does not need to be a time consuming effort, but accounts should be checked several times a day and updated regularly, along with consistent engagement from account coordinators.

Please note: If your designated social media coordinator is not able to provide new content on a regular basis, your unit may want to instead consider leveraging an existing account on campus that is regularly populated with content. For example, this could be a small department funneling messaging to their college's account, etc.

Strategic Communications recognizes that students may be managing University-related accounts and have access to login information. When determining an account manager and creating login information for your account, we recommend that a UA faculty or staff member also have access to this information. In the case that the student leaves or is terminated from their position, we suggest that the faculty or staff member with access to the login information change the password as soon as possible, in order to protect the integrity of the account. Please note: This is also applicable in the case that a faculty or staff member managing a social account leaves or is terminated.

Helpful tip: Establishing a backup person will help ensure that accounts continue to be populated with content when your account coordinator is out sick, on vacation or otherwise unavailable.

Listen and monitor

Are you comfortable and knowledgeable about the platform you're considering working with? We encourage you to take a little time to listen and review different channels in order to have a clear understanding of your audience and how they may be engaging on that channel.

Deciding on a social media platform

Make sure you don't spread yourself too thin – it's not necessary to have a presence on every channel. While it's important to stay aware of trends and emerging platforms, always keep your communications and marketing goals in mind when considering launching an account.

Clear identification

University-driven social media accounts should be easily identifiable as an official channel of the University. Including this identification in the "About" section, using the University logo when applicable, and including links to the University's websites will help convey this image. When appropriate, the University's Content Moderation Disclaimer can be referenced, along with the UA Social Media Community Standards.

Make sure all University-driven accounts are easily identifiable as it relates to visual identity. When choosing a profile or avatar photo or logo, keep in mind that these will likely be reduced in size – so keep it simple! The more complex a profile image is, the less recognizable it will be. When selecting a cover photo for your channel, Strategic Communications recommends searching in our photo database, Libris. If you do not have access to Libris, please contact the Strategic Communications Department of Photography:

<https://strategiccommunications.ua.edu/departments/photography>

Regarding comments or replies by the public: Content Moderation Disclaimer

Strategic Communications encourages account managers to share the following statement in the “About” or “General Information” section on applicable platforms:

Disclaimer: While we welcome all feedback and encourage engagement in the social space, all comments will be moderated, so please be respectful of comments posted by others. We ask all users to refrain from hate speech or profanity. See our social media Community Standards for more details.

Connect with your audience

It’s essential to be available, helpful and friendly when managing a University-driven social media account. Make sure to answer questions and “like” or react to responses to ensure your audience knows you’re always there.

Keep in mind:

Previously established social media accounts may need to be reviewed and evaluated. Accounts that have been inactive for three or more months and/or accounts with very few followers and little engagement should be closed. The University’s main social media accounts, administered by Strategic Communications, may be able to post information and updates on behalf of your unit. Please contact the Strategic Communications social team if you need assistance determining what platforms to be on or whether to delete accounts.

SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Account-generated posts

Account coordinators have the opportunity to schedule posts if they wish to do so. While Facebook offers scheduling directly through the platform, Twitter and Instagram do not. For Twitter, Strategic Communications recommends the use of a tool such as Hootsuite or Tweetdeck. For Instagram, users are unable to schedule posts, but do have the option to create a draft within the Instagram platform. Strategic Communications recommends creating the draft of your post and setting a reminder to post at your specific posting time. In the event of a campus emergency or sensitive situation, we ask that you delete your scheduled content and if applicable, hold it for another time to post.

Be mindful that all content posted on University-driven social media accounts is reflective of The University of Alabama. Never post content that contains profanity, hate speech, personal attacks against others or slurs. Always remember – content posted lasts forever on the Internet!

**If you mistakenly post incorrect information, admit it and move forward by posting the updated, correct information; your followers will be more likely to move forward with you if you are forthcoming and honest.

University News/Announcements

Strategic Communications recommends that major University announcements not be leaked through social media. This includes situations where the University is waiting to officially release information to the public and/or members of the press. Use caution before posting “breaking news” to your University-driven social media accounts or speculating on big announcements that do not have details included in official University correspondence.

*During the case of an emergency on campus, we encourage the campus community to update their followers by retweeting the @UA_Safety account on Twitter. This tactic will: ensure one consistent voice is providing the official message, limit the spread of misinformation in such situations, and help establish awareness of the @UA_Safety account.

Attribution

Copyright and fair-use laws should be followed; do not plagiarize. Attribute sources by tagging the source or linking to the website where the original content was generated.

Posting user-gen content

If you see content posted by a student or another individual that you'd like to share on University-related channels as original content (not retweeting / sharing from source), ask their permission with a comment or direct message before sharing. Please note that if you share user-gen content, it is highly encouraged to review the social platform of the person who posted, in the case they're sharing inappropriate content on their own channel. If an individual is posting inappropriate content on their own channel, Strategic Communications does not recommend sharing their user-gen content on University-related channels.

Privacy

In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 and student privacy policies, personal information of University of Alabama students should never be disclosed. Care should also be taken not to compromise the privacy of faculty and staff.

Compliance

The University of Alabama is committed and obligated to the principle of institutional control in operating the athletics program in a manner that is consistent with the letter and spirit of NCAA, SEC and University rules and regulations. All interactions between The University of Alabama and student-athletes or prospective student-athletes are governed by the aforementioned rules and regulations.

The NCAA has determined that an institutional department other than athletics (such as admissions, schools/colleges, etc.) may send electronic correspondence that is not private (such as a public post/repost, tweet/retweet, like/favorite) at any time, provided the institution's athletics department is not involved in any way and the correspondence is not created for an athletics recruiting purpose. For further questions, email compliance@ia.ua.edu. Not sure if you should share something concerning a prospective student-athlete? When in doubt, refrain from sharing.

THE UNIVERSITY BRAND

Visual identity

Social media account coordinators should follow The University of Alabama's graphic standards manual to ensure the University maintains a strong, unified visual identity online. This includes logos and/or text for avatars, thumbnails and other photos. Images for backgrounds, avatars and covers should be in good taste and representative of the University. Resources related to The University's visual identity can be found on the Strategic Communications website: <https://strategiccommunications.ua.edu/>

Official University Accounts

The Division of Strategic Communications has developed a Social Media Directory – a central directory of official University of Alabama social media pages. This directory is for internal and external use, to assist in collaboration among University units and to direct our audiences to University-affiliated social media accounts. To add or edit a listing, go to <https://www.ua.edu/social/>.

BEST PRACTICES

Listen, assess, adjust

A strength of social media is you receive feedback from your audience, providing insight on how to improve your approach. Listen to that feedback, and use it to make adjustments as necessary. In addition to what

your audience may tell you directly, we encourage you to listen to conversations people may be having about you.

Listening to your peers and competitors may be beneficial as well. How are they being successful online? You may be able to find ways to improve your own account.

Publish content to social on a regular basis

While it's not always necessary to publish every day, your audience should see that someone is consistently engaging and attending the information on the social channel. Provide accurate information, keeping in mind that content should always fit in with brand standards, along with being relevant to your audience and the mission of the University.

Be a valued community member

You don't want to constantly just talk about your own department! By paying attention and following other University-driven accounts, you have the opportunity to add more variety to your content. It's important to promote and share content from other University-driven accounts (as they'll also be more likely to share yours!)

Ask for input from your audience

If you need your audience's opinion on a particular topic, sometimes it's appropriate to just ask. Writing a post in the form of a question can be a simple and effective way to do this. It's important to remember – you don't control the answers, so be prepared for both positive and negative responses.

Be prepared to respond to questions or feedback shared through your social channel

Not all feedback you receive will be positive. When you answer in a public setting, many people may read that answer. If the information you are providing is sensitive or valid only for the individual being addressed, you may need to make that clear in your response or provide them with a more direct way to contact you (email or phone). Take each negative situation case-by-case, referring to the UA Social Media Decision Tree and Community Standards as needed.

Assume everything you share is public

The privacy policies of third party websites are outside of UA's control and subject to change. In addition, you are interacting with other people whose notions of privacy may differ from yours - possibly resulting in something you thought was a private communication becoming public.

Separate personal from professional

It's essential to remember to separate your personal life from your professional life when managing a University-driven account. Everything you post, including how you respond to your audience, is representative of The University of Alabama. Most of the time content you share on your personal social media accounts would not be the best content to share on your unit's social media account.

Recognize that social media is not about control

You can only control what you say through your social channels – but you cannot control how people interpret your message, how they will react, or what they will communicate to others through these channels about your organization. Focus on telling your story honestly and providing accurate, timely information that is relevant to your audience.

Hiding a Facebook comment vs. deleting it

If a user makes a questionable post or comment on University-driven accounts, care should be taken to respond appropriately and as soon as possible. If needed, refer to The University of Alabama's Social Media Decision Tree. Strategic Communications recommends you do not hide or delete a comment or post just because it is negative, but only if it contains spam/links, profanity, hate speech, attacks on others, commercial advertisements, political endorsements or unlawful activity. In terms of Facebook, the platform gives page administrators the ability to hide or delete a comment. When hiding a comment, the user can still see their comment on the page, as can their friends. If you delete a comment, it is gone from the page. Strategic Communications utilizes both features, on a case-by-case basis. If you have questions about a specific situation, please contact the Strategic Communications social team.

Tracking

Take advantage of free metrics and tracking capabilities that are available – this will help you to become more educated on your audience's interests and how they are responding to your content. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn all have tracking metrics built within the platforms. Note: In order to access Instagram analytics the account must be a business account. For instructions on how to set up a business account please visit: <https://help.instagram.com/502981923235522>

Strategic Communications recommends looking at your analytics on a weekly basis, to help make strategic decisions when it comes to posting content. Other helpful tracking sites include bitly.com and hootsuite.com.

**For assistance with tracking metrics or other questions, please contact Social Media Specialists Olivia Ann Hodges at olivia.ann.hodges@ua.edu or Mallori Hudgins at mallori.hudgins@ua.edu.