

MCSA Social Media and Netiquette Policy

Blogs, social networks and web sites such as Wikipedia, Facebook, Flickr, Second Life, Twitter and YouTube are exciting new channels for you to share knowledge, express your creativity and connect with others who share your interests. The MCSA supports your participation in these online communities.

Because social media channels are fairly new to many members and employees of the MCSA, we've assembled "best practice" guidelines from respected online and industry sources to help us use these forums effectively, protect your personal and professional reputation, and follow Church policies.

Netiquette is a set of rules for behaving properly online. When you enter any new culture -- and cyberspace has its own culture -- you're liable to commit a few social blunders. You might offend people without meaning to. Or you might misunderstand what others say and take offense when it's not intended. To make matters worse, something about cyberspace makes it easy to forget that you're interacting with other real people.

So, partly as a result of forgetting that people online are still real, and partly because they don't know the conventions, well-meaning cyberspace users, especially new ones, make all kinds of mistakes

General recommendations

The keys to success in social media are being honest about who you are, being thoughtful before you post, and respecting the purpose of the community where you are posting.

Be transparent. Be honest about your identity.

Be accurate. Make sure that you have all the facts before you post. It's better to verify information with a source first than to have to post a correction or retraction later. Cite and link to your sources whenever possible; after all, that's how you build community.

If you make an error, correct it quickly and visibly. This will earn you respect in the online community.

Be respectful. You are more likely to achieve your goals or sway others to your beliefs if you are constructive and respectful while discussing a bad experience or disagreeing with a concept or person.

Be a valued member. If you join a social network like a Facebook group or comment on someone's blog, make sure you are contributing valuable insights. Self-promoting behavior is viewed negatively and can lead to you being banned from Web sites or groups.

Think before you post. There's no such thing as a "private" social media site. Search engines can turn up posts years after the publication date. Comments can be forwarded or copied. Archival systems save information even if you delete a post. If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it's wise to delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed.

Maintain confidentiality. Do not post confidential or proprietary information about the MCSA, Ministers or any other leaders or lay persons. Use good ethical judgment. If you discuss a situation involving individuals on a social media site, be sure that they cannot be identified. As a guideline, don't post anything that you would not present at a conference or say to the persons face.

If you post on behalf of the MCSA

Be transparent. If you participate in or maintain a social media site on behalf of the Church, clearly state your role and goals. Discuss with your supervisor when you are empowered to respond directly to users and when you may need approval.

Be respectful. As a member of the MCSA, you must remember the Church's commitment to respect for the dignity of others and to the civil and thoughtful discussion of opposing ideas. Some online communities can be volatile, tempting users to behave in ways they otherwise wouldn't. Your reputation, and the Church's, is best served when you remain above the fray.

Be thoughtful. If you have any questions about whether it is appropriate to write about certain kinds of material in your role as a communications officer ask your supervisor before you post.

Be aware of liability.

You are legally liable for what you post on your own site and on the sites of others. Individual bloggers have been held liable for commentary deemed to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene (as defined by the courts). Employers are increasingly conducting Web searches on job candidates before extending offers. Be sure that what you post today will not come back to haunt you. In the same way, anyone who claims any association to the MCSA as a lay member or clergy should be careful what they do or say on social media platforms. If any such communication is deemed offensive and or libelous or brings the church's name into disrepute they will be disciplined in accordance with our Book of Order.

Don't use the MCSA logo or make endorsements. Do not use the MCSA logo, or any organizational logo or any other MCSA related marks or images on your personal online sites.

Do not use the MCSA's name to promote or endorse any product, cause or political party or candidate.

Protect your identity. While you want to be honest about yourself, don't provide personal information that scam artists or identity thieves could use against you. Don't list your home address or telephone number or your work telephone or e-mail address. It is a good idea to create a separate e-mail address that is used only with their social media site.

Follow a code of ethics. There are numerous codes of ethics for bloggers and other active participants in social media, all of which will help you participate responsibly in online communities.

Monitor comments. Most people who maintain social media sites welcome comments—it builds credibility and community. However, you can set your site so that you can review and approve comments before they appear. This allows you to respond in a timely way to comments. It also allows you to delete spam comments and to block any individuals who repeatedly post offensive or frivolous comments.

Remember the human. The golden rule your parents and your kindergarten teacher taught you was pretty simple: Do unto others as you'd have others do unto you. Imagine how you'd feel if you were in the other person's shoes. Stand up for yourself, but try not to hurt people's feelings. Use your network connections to express yourself freely, explore strange new worlds, and boldly go where you've never gone before. But remember the Prime Directive of Netiquette: Those are real people out there.

Would you say it to the person's face?

When you communicate through cyberspace -- via email or on discussion groups -- your words are written. And chances are they're stored somewhere where you have no control over them. In other words, there's a good chance they can come back to haunt you.

Another reason not to be offensive online

Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life. In real life, most people are fairly law-abiding, either by disposition or because we're afraid of getting caught. In cyberspace, the chances of getting caught sometimes seem slim. And, perhaps because people sometimes forget that there's a human being on the other side of the computer, some people think that a lower standard of ethics or personal behaviour is acceptable in cyberspace.

The confusion may be understandable, but these people are mistaken. Standards of behaviour may be different in some areas of cyberspace, but they are not lower than in real life.

Be ethical