



## THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

### FACEBOOK GUIDANCE

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The past five years has seen a revolution in the way people communicate on the internet. Social media, which includes sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, allows people to stay in touch with each other 24 hours a day. The public can hold conversations with thousands of people at once, and get instant feedback on their actions and opinions.

As the lead for social media in West Midlands Police, I want to ensure we are embracing all of the latest technology available to communicate with our communities. There is a genuine thirst from the public to know what officers are doing, and to be kept informed using social media, and I want officers and staff to take advantage of this.

To help you we have put together this guidance document which gives you hints and tips to make sure your Twitter account is a success and avoids some of the potential pitfalls.

Essentially, the most important thing to remember is to use your common sense – once you have an account, make sure you use it regularly and respond to questions that you are asked and don't post anything that you would not say to the public or you would not want to see printed in the media.

Every message that you put out needs to serve a policing purpose, and remember to think about the values-based decision making model whenever you are using social media, in the same way as you do with any other decision that you make at work.

This guidance is around the *professional* use of social media but in respect of its *personal* use, I would urge staff to look closely at the policy and think carefully about any information they are putting into the public domain. This follows some learning from the USA and other countries, which shows there is a risk of being compromised if users fail to take common sense precautions.

Social media gives us lots of new opportunities to engage with our communities in new, innovative ways, enhancing their trust and confidence in their local police. Let's ensure that we use it effectively.

**Assistant Chief Constable Sharon Rowe**

## BEFORE STARTING OUT....

- Be clear about how your use of Facebook will benefit the organisation. For example, if you are a neighbourhood officer, the advantage of being able to communicate directly with the public is a benefit. If you work for a central department, the messages that you want to get out might be better coming from one of the LPU or central Facebook accounts.
- Are you clear about WHY you want to use Facebook – is it for a clear policing purpose e.g. to increase trust and confidence? What are the business benefits you can bring to the organisation? What benefits will the public get from your messages? Will there be an outcome from your message?
- Do you have the time keep your Facebook account up to date? Out of date sites look unprofessional.
- Who do you want to read your messages and how are you going to attract them? Have you drawn up a communications plan?

## STARTING OUT

- Read the Part 1 order about social media (add number here)

## SECURITY

### Lock down your personal account

If you have a personal Facebook account, and you are setting up a new corporate Facebook profile which identifies you as an officer, you need to make sure that you have enabled the full security settings on your personal account. This means that only your friends will be able to access your profile.

When you log into your Facebook account, click on the small arrow on the top right hand side of the page. Go through the options in both “Account Settings” and “Privacy Settings” to ensure that

## VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

### Regular updates

The success of Facebook relies on users regularly updating their status. While we don't want officers spending all of their time on the internet, it's important that you don't leave your account without an update for weeks.

### Broadcast vs engagement

The key to Facebook is to engage with your followers (i.e. have conversations, answer their questions and join in their discussions) as well as broadcast (i.e. tell them what you are doing). So ask your followers questions and answer any questions that they ask you.

### Keep it interesting

Tell people about the operations that you have done, what you are doing to tackle local priorities and ask them what they think about policing issues.

### Avoid the use of text speak

Avoid using text abbreviations, such as “lol”, “gr8”, “2moro” in status updates.

### Be careful about logging into the account from smartphones

Particularly if it is somebody else's phone. Smartphones generally stay logged in once you have put in your name and password.

### People reporting crime

We cannot accept reports of crime through our social media sites. If somebody tries to report a crime, refer them to the 0345 113 5000 number, and this webpage, <http://www.west-midlands.police.uk/contact-us/reporting-crime> which explains what to do to report a crime.

## FACEBOOK TERMS

### People, pages and groups

- **People** are individuals who make friends with each other and follow other pages and groups.
- **Groups** are set up by people and are joined for people with similar interests and experiences
- **Pages** are set up by companies, organisations, and some people such as celebrities. These are what West Midlands Police uses for the main / LPU Facebook accounts.

**Like** – People ‘like’ pages and groups. This means that any status updates from these pages appear in the persons news feed when they log into their account.

## DOs AND DON'Ts

### Do:

- Tell people what officers are doing as often as you can. Try to make your tweets as interesting as possible.
- Promote successful sentences of offenders
- Use Facebook to direct people to appeals on the WMP website
- Link back to [www.west-midlands.police.uk](http://www.west-midlands.police.uk), or an appropriate page (such as YouTube videos, partner agencies) whenever possible.
- Avoid jargon and formal language.
- Use every opportunity to promote the Facebook account.
- Update your followers following successful appeals etc.

### Don't:

- Add images of people sentenced, missing people or wanted offenders (see below)

## PICTURES

There have been lots of examples of images of people who have been sentenced, wanted people and missing people being left on Facebook indefinitely.

This can lead to issues around contemporaneousness or identification issues at court. In all instances the appeal / release text should be added, with a link to the press release that contains the image.

Therefore the following principles apply:

- Don't Facebook images of wanted people or suspects.
- Don't Facebook images
- Don't Facebook pictures of juveniles.
- Don't Facebook pictures of anything that may be used as evidence in court.
- Don't Facebook graphic or sensationalist images, eg, pictures of vehicles involved in RTCs.
- Don't identify crime scenes. You can add pictures from scenes such as cannabis factories, but don't do anything that would identify addresses, victims or suspects.
- Don't Facebook anything from a crime scene that is outside the investigation or policing.
- Make sure that if you have taken pictures of people who can be identified, you have sort their permission and they have signed a release form (available from the press office)
- Be careful about Facebooking pictures of children. Not only will you need parental permission (as above) but some Safeguarding Boards do not allow pictures of school children to be used on any social networking sites.

## INFORMATION POSTED ONLINE SHOULD NOT:

- Contain personal details of other people
- Contact protectively marked, sensitive, restrictive or sensitive information
- Be libellous
- Breach copyright
- Undermine operational activities or the security of staff
- Damage the reputation of WMP

## DELETING MESSAGES

It's easy to delete a message – but remember tweets are never really deleted from the internet.

### Updated Guidance

This guidance will be updated regularly to reflect any changes in the use of Facebook. To view the most up-to-date guidance for all social media, please see the Press & PR Dept's website or click here:

[http://intranet2/hq\\_departments/press\\_and\\_pr/multimedia\\_and\\_web\\_development/social\\_media.aspx](http://intranet2/hq_departments/press_and_pr/multimedia_and_web_development/social_media.aspx)