

University Relations and Communications

MSU Billings Official Social Media Guidelines & Best Practices

We invite you to browse and connect with the university's Social Media Directory and engage with our faculty, students, staff and alumni.

Friend us, follow us, tag us, like us and tweet us. But do so carefully, thoughtfully and with Yellowjacket spirit.

Montana State University Billings recognizes social media as important and influential communication channels for students, faculty, staff and supporters and encourages the use of social media platforms to enhance communication, collaboration and information exchange in support of MSUB's mission.

Social platforms are essential for recruitment, retention, marketing, communication and awareness. However, social media can pose risks to the university's confidential and proprietary information and can compromise compliance with rules, regulations and laws. This document is intended to help guide university constituents in the use of social media for official university communications.

These guidelines help properly portray, promote and protect the institution. They also provide suggestions on how to protect personal and professional reputations. They apply to university faculty, administration and staff managing social media accounts associated with campuses, colleges, departments, programs, offices and any other entity of MSU Billings.

Whether you're a faculty member using social media as a part of the learning experience or a staff member who's been charged with the exciting task of growing a social media presence for a college or an administrative unit, these guidelines will be helpful in navigating the quickly evolving world of social technologies.

Although each unit operates its own social media outlet, all official MSU Billings social media accounts are a voice for the university. A central database compiled by University Relations and Communications, in conjunction with MSUB Information Technology, ensures continuity in social media. To be an officially MSUB recognized user, units must provide the names of social media account administrators as well as contact information and account login information. This information will be kept confidential and used for access during emergency situations or account transfers.

We ask everyone who participates in social media on behalf of MSUB to understand and follow the following guidelines. As new technologies and tools emerge, so will these guidelines. Please check them regularly.

I. Introduction

- a. The purpose of using social media channels on behalf of MSU Billings is to support the university's mission, goals, programs and sanctioned efforts.
- b. These guidelines are suggested by MSUB University Relations and Communications for faculty and staff in conjunction with their duties as representatives for the university on university-affiliated or branded social media networks and channels. Students, however, may find guidance applicable to their own use of social media on his/her personal spaces. Students who are representing MSUB on university-affiliated networks, sites or channels are expected to follow these guidelines under the guidance of MSUB faculty or staff.
- c. When using an officially recognized social media channel, you are representing MSU Billings. Avoid discussing or speculation on internal policies or operations.
- d. Confidential or proprietary university information or similar information of third parties, who have shared such information with you on behalf of MSU Billings, should not be shared publicly on university social media channels.
- e. Be mindful that all posted content on official MSUB sites is subject to review in accordance with MSU Billings' employee policies, editorial guidelines and the Montana University System guidelines.
- f. MSU Billings does not monitor personal websites but will address issues that violate established human resources policies, graphic standards and social media guidelines. MSU Billings logos and/or visual identity and property cannot be used for personal social media without university permission. Visit the University Relations and Communications webpage for guidelines.
- g. Do not link to external sites promoting a product or service that is not affiliated with MSU Billings without approval from University Relations and Communications or Information Technology.
- h. Keep your personal views separate. Uphold the university's mission and values. Do not include endorsements for political and social propaganda, except in support of positions MSU Billings has already taken.
- i. Be respectful of other people's opinions. As an MSUB employee, you understand the university's commitment to respect the dignity and diversity of others and to the civil and thoughtful discussion of

opposing ideas. However, there are circumstances in which it may be necessary to delete a post. If you are in doubt, contact University Relations and Communications

- j. As the technology evolves, these guidelines will evolve, but in general terms, these guidelines define regulatory principles for use of these technologies by MSU Billings employees. The use of social media technology follows the same standards of professional practice and conduct associated with everything else we do. Common sense and sound judgment help avoid most vexing issues.

II. Definitions

- a. Social Media: Mobile and web-based technologies, which allow people to communicate, receive news, share information and integrate technology. Social media use many technologies and platforms, such as blogs, photo and video sharing, social networking and news and calendar services.
- b. Personal Account: A social media account for the sole purpose of personal use. There are no identifications of the person as a representative of MSU Billings and content is restricted to personal information.
- c. Public Account: A social media account where a person represents MSU Billings as faculty, staff or a representative of a university-related organization. This includes personal branding accounts, such as a coach's blog, in which the employee identifies as a position facilitated by their employment with the university.
- d. Poster or User: A person submitting content to any social media site that is officially recognized by MSU Billings.
- e. Social Media Accounts: Accounts or profiles created within social media outlets. MSU Billings social media directory includes Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, LinkedIn and Flickr, and may continue to grow as new channels arise.

III. Guidelines

- a. **Officially-recognized** MSU Billings social media accounts must be reviewed and approved by your immediate supervisor within

your department and University Relations and Communications, in conjunction with Information Technology, must be notified.

- b. Each social media account will have a minimum of two administrators assigned who will be registered with the Office of University Relations and Communications. *Registered accounts will be included in the university's official Social Media Directory.* Account usernames and passwords must be registered with University Relations and Information Technology. Accounts must be registered under an msubillings.edu email domain. When an administrator leaves the university, he or she must be removed as an administrator and passwords should be changed.
- c. Any social media account that has been inactive for a consecutive 90 days may be deleted. A successful social media account takes time to maintain and requires staff resources to develop content that engages users. Inactive social media accounts reflect negatively on the university.
- d. Illegal and inappropriate content deemed offensive or injurious by university officials may be removed by MSU Billings employees identified as account administrators or as requested by University Relations and Communications or Information Technology staff.
- e. Provide your MSU Billings social media site(s) URLs to the University Relations and Communications and Information Technology office to be included in the university's official Social Media Directory. Doing so encourages cross-site collaboration with all university-managed social media properties and creates a one-stop directory for the university community and the university's Web audiences to connect with our social media platforms.
- f. Social media sites should be marked "official" when/where appropriate with university branding and mention of the university's social media guidelines to make clear expectations of community members, as well as of its site managers.
- g. Official MSU Billings social media properties should provide contact names and email addresses, or correct website URLs that point back to the university Web properties.
- h. Never share your social media passwords around the workplace or classroom. Administrative publishers (posters and users of social media sites) should be limited and departments must have rules in place for managing login credentials.

- i. Protect confidential and proprietary information. Do not post confidential or proprietary information about MSU Billings students, prospective students, staff, faculty or alumni. Employees must follow the applicable federal requirements such as Title IX, FERPA and HIPAA, as well as NCAA regulations. Adhere to all applicable university privacy and confidentiality policies. Employees who share confidential information do so at the risk of disciplinary action or termination. (See Resources)
- j. Respect copyright and fair use. When posting, be mindful of the copyright and intellectual property rights of others and of the university. If you are uncertain about a post, contact University Relations and Communications.
- k. Obey the Terms of Service of any social media platform employed.

IV. Best Practices

- a. The social media landscape has changed the ways in which we communicate. Think of using social media as creating a conversation — it is as much about listening as it is about generating content.
- b. Keep in mind that social media outlets add a friendly and engaging element to MSU Billings and our outreach efforts. They provide new opportunities to promote the university and build relationships with multiple audiences. The expectation is that everyone must follow MSUB's Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices when using social media to communicate consistently on behalf of the university.
- c. Make it easy for people to find you. Increase exposure for your social media account by using Montana State University Billings in the title and avoid using acronyms. In sections describing your unit, include a statement that acknowledges your affiliation with Montana State University Billings. Protect the university brand by using the official graphics and logos included in the *university identity guidelines*.
- d. Remember, everything you post is public. Privacy does not exist in the world of social media. Everything you post reflects on the university. Search engines can turn up posts years after they are created, and comments can be forwarded or copied. If you are unsure about posting something or responding to a comment, ask your supervisor for input or contact University Relations and Communications.

- e. Use correct grammar and write in complete sentences. Abbreviations are sometimes necessary to meet word limits, but don't overdo it. Do not use unprofessional abbreviations, such as "u" or "r." Uphold university editorial standards by referring to the *university editorial standards and guidelines*.
- f. Strive for accuracy. Get the facts straight before posting them on social media. Review content for grammatical and spelling errors. Be sure to follow MSUB's branding and editorial style guidelines. This is especially important if posting on behalf of the university in any capacity. Never represent yourself or MSUB in a false or misleading way. All statements must be true and not misleading; all claims must be substantiated.
- g. Remember your audience. Be aware that a presence in the social media world is or easily can be made available to the public at large. This includes prospective students, current students, current employers and colleagues, and peers. Consider this before publishing to ensure the post will not alienate, harm, or provoke any of these groups.
- h. In the scenario where negative comments are posted on a social media outlet, respond to them professionally. Be respectful of others' opinions and do not suppress disagreement. Use it as an opportunity to correct misinformation and turn a negative into a positive. Delete profanity and other offensive content. We encourage you to add the following MSU Billings official social media policy to your pages:

"Montana State University Billings encourages participation through our social media channels and welcomes your interaction and engagement. We hope to provide a forum for dialogue among the many diverse voices of our university and we encourage comments about the content you find here. However, posts containing personal attacks, profanity, nudity, hate speech or illegal material are prohibited. We reserve the right to remove any post or to revoke a user's privilege to post to our sites. Please be aware that we cannot immediately review every comment posted on the page. Opinions expressed in non-Montana State University Billings posts are not necessarily those of the university, its students or employees, and we cannot guarantee the accuracy of these posts. All content posted by Montana State University Billings is the property of Montana State University Billings and is subject to copyright laws."

- i. Keep your personal views separate. Don't include political comments or comments on social issues unless it is in support of positions MSUB has already taken. If you identify yourself as a MSUB faculty or staff member on personal social media sites, identify your views as your own—it should be clear that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the institution.
- j. Focus on Montana State University Billings and its mission. Do not comment on other institutions or legal matters.
- l. Connect and integrate MSU Billings social media sites to your posts for greater outreach and engagement. Ex: using #hashtags and tags @msubillings or other units.
- m. University Relations and Communications is here to help. For further questions about social media at MSU Billings, please contact us at socialmedia@msubillings.edu or call 657-2269.

V. Things To Consider Before Engaging in Social Media

Before developing a social media presence, it's recommended you have a solid plan. Objectives should be long-term and focus on the outcomes and the quality of engagement rather than the numbers. You will need to have a plan for monitoring the conversations on your social sites, responding to questions and feedback. You also need a content-development plan. At a minimum, your plan should outline and identify the following:

- a. What would this site intend to create and/or what are the objectives and outcomes we hope to achieve?
- b. What practices are currently in place?
- c. What are the strengths/weaknesses of those practices?
- d. How does social media align/connect with MSUB's mission, learning outcomes and strategic plan?

VI. Implement a Social Media Strategy

- a. First, identify what your goal(s) are for social media.
- b. Know your audience; whom are you trying to reach?
- c. Commit time and worthwhile content to post. To see significant results, it takes commitment. Quality content takes an investment of time to curate. Remember: an inactive site equates to an "Out of Business" sign on the door.
- d. Choose quality over quantity.

- e. Think cross-pollination and seek collaborations with other social media accounts across campus. Connect with @msubillings and other MSUB social media accounts with #hashtags. Social media, if used correctly, is a supportive communication tool. Social media should not be done in silos! Content can and should be shared generously. (See below for more information on connecting)
- f. Ask: *do we really need to be on this particular social media platform? What channels will yield the best results for the identified goals?*
- g. Manage social media platforms with managers and student leaders. When it's practical, allow student voices to be heard to engage with current and prospective students.

VII. Social Media Channels

- 1. *Facebook: Build an online community around your unit's activities, events, news and resources.* You can use Facebook to develop an online community and share information about events and programs with words, links, videos and photos. To get started, visit the [Facebook guide to Facebook Pages](#)—a way to provide a home on Facebook to interact with your audience.
- 2. *Twitter: Share brief messages of 140 characters or less.* The social networking phenomenon known as Twitter lets you post brief, telegraphic messages of 140 characters or less. By posting to Twitter, you can share information about MSUB, your college, group or organization, as well as information your audience would find interesting. Visit [Twitter](#) to create an account and begin your Tweeting.
- 3. *YouTube: Grab attention with short and compelling videos.* [YouTube](#) videos can attract attention from a worldwide audience. Be sure the videos produced are worthy of sharing. Keep videos short, two minutes or less, to keep viewers interested.
- 4. *LinkedIn: Rev up professional networking.* LinkedIn is a great way to interact with students, alumni or partners in industry. See LinkedIn's resources for forming a [LinkedIn](#) group.
- 5. *Flickr: Share your photos and invite your audience to share theirs.* The photo sharing service [Flickr](#) can be a way to allow students, faculty and others to contribute photos for display.
- 6. *Instagram: Capture and share the world's moments in a fast, beautiful and fun way!* Take a picture or video, choose a filter to transform its look and feel, then post to [Instagram](#) — it's that easy. You can then share to Facebook, Twitter and more. It's a new way to see the world.

7. MSU Billings communicators use a series of hashtags and handles in an effort to uniformly catalog the university's most important stories. Here is some explanation:
 1. **Hashtag:** This symbol: #. These are used to emphasize important or relevant words in your tweet. Users can search certain words and twitter and other social media channels will show other users who have “hashtagged” that word. For example, you could post “Join Alumni Relations today for the annual Yellowjacket Spirit Party, #Yellowjacketspirit #yellowjacketforever #bestuniversity #msubalumni
 2. **Handle:** The username you create when you make a profile, preceded by the @ sign. For example, Montana State University Billings looks like this: @msubillings. If you want to connect with other users, use the @ i.e. “Hey @MSUBAthletics, great article about earning the third-straight GNAC women’s academic all-sports title!”
 3. **Favorite, Like, Heart:** Recognizing you “like” a post.
 4. **Retweet or Share:** Reposting, or sharing content from another user’s post. This will repost to your page.
 5. **Popular #hashtags:** #msubillings, #ccmsub, #yellowjackets, #gojackets, #msubnews, #msubevents, #msubalumni, #MSUBAthletics, #GoMSUBJackets

VIII. Resources

- a. [FERPA](#)
- b. [HIPPA](#)
- c. [TITLE IX](#)
- e. [NCAA Regulations](#)
- f. http://www.msubillings.edu/humres/PDF>Title_IX_Info.pdf
- g. University Identity and Editorial Guidelines