

Department of Communications Social Media Strategy

** This plan has been developed by Brian W. Bassett and modified for his portfolio.
This plan is not necessarily the adopted plan of any particular client.*

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I. PURPOSE STATEMENT

Social media has rapidly established a significant global presence as it pertains to information distribution and digital collaboration. It crosses borders, enhances transparency, and has become a reliable source for credible entities, including public institutions such as the public school system. Beyond its information-sharing capabilities, social media has allowed for a digital collaborative environment that engages the community in a setting where users can share ideas openly and on their time. The results are increased participation by the community, enhanced communication and transparency by the system, and a better overall partnership with the students and families we serve.

The purpose of this document is to outline a strategy for system-wide social media use. A social media initiative must be a system-wide cooperative effort that encompasses system-wide departments, schools, administrators, and must have purpose within other system educational and communication strategies.

Participating in a social media environment requires continuous diligence as it relates to understanding and soliciting new platforms, a commitment to dedicating resources, time, and personalization efforts to the initiative, and the responsibility to ensure the social and emotional well-being of those with whom we engage online as well as the community at-large.

II. VISION, MISSION, & VALUES

Vision

The Department of Communications aspires to be recognized as an innovator of inclusive and transparent system-wide communication strategies.

Mission

To provide essential information in a timely manner, as well as to establish a collaborative digital environment that seeks to enhance transparency, solicit input, and build a stronger partnership between the school system and the community in which we serve.

Values

- Committed to enhancing public outreach efforts to engage students, parents, teachers, staff, and the community at-large.
- Enhance transparency to build public trust.
- Solicit appropriate feedback on issues pertaining to the public school system.
- Establish a 24/7 digital platform to allow for better public engagement.
- Ensure social and emotional well-being of the digital community including students, parents, staff, and our business partners.

III. STRATEGIC GOALS

Goal 1: Increase Public Awareness and Understanding: The Department of Communications will utilize an effective social media strategy to enhance our messaging and allow for broader message delivery throughout the community we serve.

Goal 2: Engage the Public through Digital Collaboration: The Department of Communications will establish an inviting and accessible digital collaboration environment in which all topics relating to public can be discussed by the public and school system staff.

Goal 3: Enhance System Transparency and Credibility: It is essential that a public entity such ours be seen as credible and transparent in the eyes of the public we serve. An inclusive and reasonably unrestricted social media environment will help to serve this purpose.

Goal 4: Establish an Innovative Communication Forum that is Engaging, Relevant, and Provides Value: Social media initiatives will be used to bring the community closer and provide a service that they don't get elsewhere. We will alter primary focus from "push out" or one-way communication to "pull in" or two-way collaboration.

Goal 5: Utilize Social Media to Enhance Communication During Emergency Situations: The Department of Communications will utilize social media outlets to quickly provide essential information that the community needs during times of emergency.

Goal 6: Develop Digital Social & Emotional Safety Initiatives: A cross-departmental collaborative effort will aim to engage the community, our students, and strategic partners in the efforts of educating users on cyber-bullying and how to be a responsible consumer of social media.

IV. Objective 1: Community Collaboration Environment

Overview

As a system, we often seek public input on a variety of topics in the form of a survey, form responses, or through personal face-to-face sessions. Community input is essential to establishing a transparent process that solicits input using methods that are both widely accessible and easy to use. Social media provides an outstanding opportunity to engage the community in a collaborative environment while avoiding the drawbacks of engaging on a discussion forum that allows complete anonymity. Digital solutions can be utilized to supplement the current methods of collaboration by engaging the public through social media.

Strategy

Certain social media platforms allow for topical discussions to occur in an environment that is safe but not anonymous. Protections and best practices are easily instituted to ensure responses are appropriate and remain on topic. A platform such as Facebook, which is used by more than one billion people, reaches our target demographics in a method that is firmly established in their everyday lives.

To reach the county community, we must go where they are and they're on social media, particularly Facebook. Developing a Facebook collaboration strategy that is measured and inclusive is critical to our social media efforts. Piloting a single discussion to launch this strategy will allow users and administrators to establish the online presence in an environment that is easily manageable.

V. Objective 2: Sharing News via Social Media

Overview

The Public Information Office routinely distributes news, updates, and reminders for public consumption in a variety of online formats. Currently, we distribute information through websites, emails, texts, RSS feeds, and various news distribution services. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook offer outstanding opportunities to supplement those strategies and provide this information in a much more efficient and comprehensive way.

Strategy

With more than 200 million active users of Twitter, it has become the world's largest social media platform for message delivery. Twitter will be a highly useful platform for public information strategies and emergency situation management. Users can follow the system's Twitter account and receive updates instantly and automatically on their mobile devices or computers.

Alongside social media, advances in technology have allowed digital multimedia to swell to unprecedented levels of use. YouTube has been at the forefront of that charge and has become the default platform for social video delivery. Between our professional and school-based productions, videos are constantly being produced that are appropriate for public viewing. Whether it's a studio-based interview, event coverage, or a class community service project, social media provides an outstanding platform for widespread public distribution.

VI. Objective 3: Emergency Communications Medium

Overview

Effective communication during an emergency situation is crucial to earning public trust in an organization's ability to respond appropriately and in a timely manner. When an emergency situation arises, our staff and the community expects that we will provide essential information that they require to ensure safety in our facilities and trust in our ability to respond.

In a crisis, our primary responsibility as a system is to provide information to those affected by the situation. Our required efforts may vary depending on the event; however, effective communication is a function of any event that may arise.

Strategy

Social media offers a number of platforms that provide the ability to communicate a message instantly to mobile devices. A social media communication strategy should supplement any emergency response plan that we institute. A Twitter account already in use for communicating emergency information to the public and promoting this service will be an immediate priority for the Department of Communications. Through our web presence and school-based communications, the word will spread and the service will produce tremendous value to our efforts during times of emergency.

VII. Objective 4: School-Centric Social Media Strategy

Overview

Throughout our system's strategic planning process, a consistent theme arose among each planning group: We must establish a strategy that empowers system and school-based administrators to communicate more efficiently and effectively to specific groups. The groups may be established based on a number of criteria, but the most common request was to reach out to school-centric communities. A social media presence is a substantial step to fulfilling this request.

Strategy

School-based administrators require a medium in which they can disseminate information to the community in a timely fashion. Whether they are providing reminders, school news, or emergency information, the chosen medium must be easily accessible, immediate in nature, and require little training.

Furthermore, school-based administrators must be trained on how to institute such an initiative into their school community and provided best practice strategies to ensure effective user-centric outcomes.

VIII. Objective 5: Superintendent Twitter Strategy

Overview

In a continuous effort to increase transparency and establish more direct lines of communication with the community in which he/she serves, the Superintendent has shown a willingness to engage in new strategies of communication. Many school Superintendents around the nation and in the state of Maryland have taken to social media as another form of public engagement.

The key to success in this particular social media strategy is that the Superintendent have the time and develop a routine of posting regularly on a variety of school system and personal topics. While this can be a difficult transition to make initially, the benefits of doing so are significant. One of the goals of this account will be that the public feels that they have an established connection with the Superintendent. If users believe they are receiving communications from somebody other than the Superintendent, they will undoubtedly tune out.

Strategy

Twitter has been the social media platform of choice for Superintendents around the country. Twitter allows the Superintendent to quickly disseminate information and thoughts to the public without the responsibility of filtering user comments. There is a level of separation inherently built into the Twitter platform.

Uses range from disseminating educational information from the school system, to re-tweeting information collected from other education experts, to sharing personal thoughts and experiences.

IX. Objective 6: Instructional Use Cases for Student Collaboration in the Classroom

Overview

Since 2011, the departments of Instructional Technology and E-Learning have instituted Edmodo as the digital platform best suited for our digital collaboration efforts in the classroom. Edmodo is a social learning platform for teachers, students, and parents that offers a collaborative environment similar to Facebook, but offers the privacy assurances required by our system.

More than 1,500 teachers and 16,000 students are currently using Edmodo's unique and secure online environment to engage in topical discussions, submit and receive class assignments, and utilize supportive multimedia. Furthermore, numerous departments within the school system have begun using Edmodo as a platform for digital professional development, resulting in more time for administrators and teachers to remain in their schools and classrooms.

Case Studies

Class Collaboration & Assignments

Teachers are using Edmodo in their classroom to engage their students in an online collaborative community. Edmodo provides a secure forum and is accessible only to those who the teacher allows in. Students share ideas, engage in discussion, and even submit and receive class assignments through the Edmodo platform.

Edmodo seamlessly integrates with Google Apps for Education which allows students to submit and receive various documents. Students are utilizing this strategy not only to submit completed assignments, but to solicit peer review prior to completion as well.

Professional Development

The offices of Instructional Technology and Professional Development are utilizing Edmodo as an essential part of the Continuing Professional Development courses. Courses that occur in a classroom or face-to-face environment, as well as online courses tap into the functions of Edmodo as a digital collaboration environment in which to engage during and outside of scheduled course times.

As is the case in the school classroom, professional development instructors are utilizing Edmodo's connectivity to Google Apps for Education to allow participants to receive course assignments, turn them in, and solicit feedback from fellow classmates.

Professional Mentoring

In an example of professional collaborative efforts across the system, the STEM teams at eight middle and high schools are using Edmodo in conjunction with Google Docs to collaboratively plan cross-curricular STEM projects and to communicate with the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. The ability to continue discussions and collaborative sessions between physical meetings in a private online environment has allowed these educators to significantly enhance their lessons and teaching strategies while remaining in the classroom with the students.

Strategy

The Department of Communications will work closely with the departments of Instructional Technology and E-Learning to enhance and expand the use of Edmodo by teachers and staff. This outstanding tool has undergone significant scrutiny by very qualified employees in those departments as well as classroom teachers and is quickly gaining widespread acceptance.

X. Objective 7: Social & Emotional Safety Efforts

Overview

A social media strategy that fails to consider the social and emotional effects of cyber-bullying is not a complete strategy. Legislation that recently passed in Maryland, and which goes into effect October 1, aims to define and prevent cyber-bullying of minors. The Misuse of Interactive Computer Service act, or Grace's Law, describes digital harassment this way:

FOR the purpose of prohibiting a person from using an interactive computer service to maliciously engage in a certain course of conduct that inflicts serious emotional distress on a minor or places a minor in reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury under certain circumstances; defining a certain term; establishing a certain penalty for a violation of this Act; and generally relating to electronic harassment.

Furthermore, the act states:

A person may not maliciously engage in a course of conduct, through the use of electronic communication, that alarms or seriously annoys another with the intent to harass, alarm, or annoy the other; after receiving a reasonable warning or request to stop by or on behalf of the other; and without a legal purpose.

Strategy

As a proponent of any attempt to curb cyber-bullying, the Department of Communications will institute a cooperative educational strategy aimed at informing and encouraging our students to stand up to bullies, particularly cyber-bullies. This strategy will utilize the framework provided in school system policy. The department will cooperatively engage the county government, local law enforcers, community partners, parents, and students to establish a comprehensive strategy of educating students who engage in digital communications.

XI. Strategy Overviews

System Twitter Strategy

The Public Information Office will utilize Twitter as a news and information delivery platform. This account will be used for emergency communications, the source for daily news, updates, event coverage, and serve as a primary conduit to the community.

The Public Information Office will manage the account and establish an implementation strategy that details the types of information that will be broadcast through Twitter. Protocols will be established in which departments and schools will contact the account manager in Public Information when they have potential news to share on Twitter.

Goals

- Streamline communication with parents and the school system community by establishing a single primary method of receiving news and information.
- Take advantage of broad mobile connectivity in an effort to relay news and information as efficiently as possible.
- Tailor our communication efforts to fit user needs.

Considerations

- Social media is a 24/7-365 undertaking. Financial resources such as mobile devices and considerations regarding flexible work hours/financial compensation to employees must be considered.
- Twitter leaves a significant digital footprint. Once information is posted, it will be online forever. Account managers must be constantly aware of this fact when posting.
- Community members have already established accounts that are not associated with the school system and more will certainly arise. The ability to monitor these accounts and respond appropriately when necessary is crucial to a successful social media presence.

Superintendent's Twitter Strategy

The Superintendent's Twitter strategy, as detailed earlier in this document, will allow the Superintendent to disseminate information and thoughts on a variety of themes including system-related items, general education thoughts, and even personal notes. There are two potential approaches that could be instituted for this strategy.

Option 1:

The Superintendent personally assumes responsibility for posting to the account. This option is the recommendation of the Department of Communications. If the account claims to be that of the Superintendent's, it would be misleading if a subordinate were creating the posts. Furthermore, we risk giving a poor impression to the community regarding honesty, transparency, and communication relevance.

Members of the Department of Communications would create the account and provide the Superintendent with technical and best practices training prior to the account going "live". The strategic approach would be to begin small and gradually increase the account activity.

This account could potentially be used by a staff member to document coverage of a particular event in which the Superintendent is participating and is unable to post. This person must clearly identify himself or herself prior to posting to maintain account credibility.

Option 2:

Should the Superintendent want the account but is not comfortable with the responsibility of posting, a new strategy must be formulated. While the Department of Communications won't post as the Superintendent, there may be alternative strategies that maintain integrity but provide something different than the system's primary Twitter account.

For instance, one solution would be creating an account that provides updates from the Superintendent's office. It would clearly be the postings of somebody other than the Superintendent and could include his/her daily schedule, insights from meetings and conversations, quotes and thoughts, and live updates from events he/she attends. This account would also be differentiated from the system account if it were used as more of a true two-way communication platform in which followers could ask questions of the Superintendent. Again, while this account would provide followers with unique insight from the Superintendent and the interworking of the system, it would be clearly identified as an account that is not being updated directly by the Superintendent.

Goals

- Align our strategies with those instituted by public school systems across the country.
- Further increase transparency and establish better lines of communication between the Superintendent and the school system community.
- Allow members of the community to connect with the superintendent on a personal level.
- Collaborate with and learn from other Superintendents that are posting on Twitter.
- Develop a unique strategy that provides followers with an experience that they don't receive elsewhere.

Considerations

- The Superintendent will decide whether he/she will maintain the account or if it will be done so by somebody else. At that point a strategy can be finalized and implemented.
- If the Superintendent chooses to have somebody else handle the account, then financial resources such as mobile devices and considerations regarding flexible work hours/financial compensation to employees must be considered.

System Facebook Strategy

User interaction is the primary purpose of Facebook. While the Twitter strategy will be implemented to push out information to the community, Facebook will be utilized to collaborate with them. The Facebook account should limit duplicating postings on Twitter, and will be an attractive environment for discussions to occur on education and system-related topics.

The account will be moderated by the Department of Communications and user-created content will be regularly monitored for appropriateness and relevance. Furthermore, employees may engage in Facebook discussions as long as the responses are responsible, portray the beliefs and attitudes of the Superintendent, and the employee clearly discloses their identity. An implementation strategy will be established prior to account activation to detail the types of conversations to occur on this site.

Goals

- Develop a platform that allows for interactive communications with the community.
- Increase opportunities for two-way communication.
- Provide another opportunity for input into school system and Board of Education issues.

- Allow for collaboration with other county agencies and organizations, which are already using Facebook to their advantages.

Considerations

- We must accept that Facebook opens the door for potential criticism. However, the inability of users to maintain anonymity will dampen much of the unconstructive criticism and inappropriate behavior.
- Social media is a 24/7-365 undertaking. Financial resources such as mobile devices and considerations regarding flexible work hours/financial compensation to employees must be considered.

System YouTube Strategy

YouTube has become the primary social distribution platform for video. A YouTube channel will be established and maintained by the Television & Video Services Department. There, videos that are appropriate for public consumption will be displayed. Furthermore, appropriate school-based productions may be considered for inclusion on the channel.

The advantage to housing videos on YouTube rather than internally is the potential visibility provided by the YouTube platform. YouTube also inherently eliminates many of the problems encountered in the past by Television & Video Services relating to video compatibility across various platforms and browsers.

Goals

- Allow our original productions to receive increased visibility.
- Broaden viewership by eliminating compatibility issues that exist with current digital video distribution strategies.
- Establish a place for school-based productions that offer widespread value to be available for public consumption.

Considerations

- YouTube offers the ability to open videos up for user comments. All comments should be turned off at the creation of the account. Discussions can occur on Facebook.
- Television & Video Services will establish quality-control and standardization guidelines for video consideration on the YouTube channel.

XI. Recommendations & Implementation Schedule

Recommendation	Implementation Deadline
<p>Create an implementation strategy to determine the purpose of each platform, the content in which to display, and professional expectations of platform managers. Identify strategic personnel throughout the school system that will assist when called upon to answer questions or provide information to our social media audience. Expediency and accurate information are keys to success.</p>	TBD
<p>Create an official Twitter account. Utilize this account regularly for purposes relating to public information, emergency updates, and event coverage.</p>	TBD
<p>Establish the official Facebook account. Utilize Facebook to generate collaborative discussion on a variety of topics that interest parents and the community, or for which we desire community input.</p>	TBD
<p>Launch an initial Facebook pilot discussion. Facebook will undergo a piloting process prior to full release. The pilot will be a single online discussion on Facebook revolving around the idea of utilizing social media for public outreach and collaboration efforts. Once we are comfortable that the pilot has run its course, we will reevaluate the full launch of the Facebook page.</p>	TBD
<p>Establish an official YouTube account. The Television & Video Services Department will manage initial content creation and uploads. Further staff and student generated videos will be considered following the development of quality control and standardization guidelines. YouTube comments will be turned off and all video uploads will go through one single channel and adhere to the predetermined guidelines on quality and purpose.</p>	TBD
<p>Establish a Twitter account for the Superintendent. Provide the Superintendent with best practices training and assist in the launch of the account.</p>	TBD
<p>Develop quality-control and standardization guidelines for YouTube videos.</p>	TBD
<p>Secure a Twitter handle for each of the county schools.</p>	TBD
<p>Develop a best practices & protocols document and supplement with an online training initiative.</p>	TBD
<p>Develop and adopt a social media safety initiative designed to educate students on and eliminate cyber-bullying.</p>	TBD
<p>Work in conjunction with the departments of Instructional Technology and E-Learning to increase awareness and usage of Edmodo among staff, students, and parents.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Conduct monthly social media evaluation reports based on each platform's analytics and offer recommendations.</p>	Monthly