Social Media Best Practices

The people of OSU Institute of Technology make exciting and meaningful connections every day—through research, public service, alumni connections, daily interactions on campus, and more.

Social networks help us to advance these connections while furthering relationships, cultivating Cowboy pride, and acting as good stewards of the OSU Institute of Technology brand. Social media offers OSU Institute of Technology and its units and programs opportunities to engage specific audiences, including prospective and current students, parents, alumni, faculty and staff, donors, media and opinion leaders. Our overarching goal is to raise awareness of OSU Institute of Technology.

These best practices can be applied whether you’re a staff member managing a department Facebook account, a faculty member operating your own professional Twitter account, or a student group running a university-affiliated Instagram account.

Starting a New Account

Before starting a new social media account, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What are the goals or objectives to be achieved?
- What do you plan to achieve by adding a/this social media platform? Inform? Communicate with? Listen? Collaborate?
- Would your current web presence support this effort?
- Who is your target audience? Who will be reading and commenting on your social media? Who are you trying to engage?
- What content will be solicited? (e.g., answers to questions, photos/video)
- How will you grow a follower/fan/audience base?
- What is your editorial calendar?
- Do you have enough content?
- What topics will be discussed?
- Who will have posting access?
- Comment monitoring/response frequency
- Who will establish your account?
- Who will be the administrator?
- Who will maintain it?
- How often will it be updated? (Daily, weekly, weekends)
- How will you promote or generate awareness of these platforms?
These questions and the answers you give should help you determine whether to create a new account or use an existing account that has established followers.

Note: If you wish to do this for a time-bound event (like a conference), ask yourself if you have time to build up an audience. If not, do not create a new account and instead utilize an established account with an event-specific hashtag.

**Social media platforms**

Your communications plan for your social media accounts will depend on the platform and the intended audiences. University-wide, OSU Institute of Technology has more than 40 social media accounts. The following are accounts that OSU Institute of Technology currently uses on the central university level:

**Facebook**
- Audience skews female, age 18-49; all other demographics are relatively equal.
- A platform that allows individuals to follow or become “fans” of business and institution pages in addition to personally connecting with other individuals.
- Posts that include native photos and videos (not linked to from an outside source, such as YouTube) have higher rates of engagement than those without.
- Should drive audiences to a call-to-action.
- Emerging trend of live videos on the platform.
- User-friendly analytics with some demographic information available; downloadable to a spreadsheet.

**Instagram**
- Audience skews age 18-29.
- Photo- and video-sharing platform using posts or stories.
- Posts limited to 10 photos. Videos limited to 60 seconds.
- Posts can be tagged with geolocation; tends to boost engagement.
- Heavy use of hashtags; recommended to include 8-10 per post.
- Posts cannot include links; include the phrase "link in bio" in posts.
- Utilizes stories to craft a visual narrative.
- Stories are only available for a limited amount of time after viewing.
- Metrics are limited and are not downloadable to a spreadsheet.
- Posts must be made from a mobile device or tablet.

**Twitter**
- Audience skews male, age 18-29, college graduates, and typically live in urban environments.
Micro-blogging platform that utilizes messages with 140 characters or less.  
Uses hashtags to tap into conversations and/or aggregate groups of posts easily.  
Easy to “talk” to individuals and groups via replies, retweets and quote retweets.  
Useful for live updates from events, conferences, etc.  
Useful for driving audiences to a call-to-action and creating awareness.  
Posts that include photos have higher rates of engagement than those without.  
Began the live video trend but is used less commonly today outside of news coverage.  
User-friendly analytics and demographics; downloadable to a spreadsheet.

Snapchat  
- Photo- and video-sharing platform that utilizes decorative filters.  
- Images and videos are only available for a limited amount of time after viewing.  
- Utilizes stories to craft a visual narrative.  
- Emerging platform for reaching prospective and current students and young alumni.  
- Metrics are limited; cannot accurately determine the number of followers.  
- Metrics are limited and are not downloadable to a spreadsheet.  
- Posts must be made from a mobile device or tablet.

LinkedIn  
- Audience is nearly even split with male and female users, age 30-64, college graduates, higher income and urban.  
- Used for networking with others in your field of business and recruiting potential employees.  
- Personal profile is an online resume.  
- Company pages can be used to aggregate and connect alumni and students with each other and with the institution.  
- Can get demographic information to inform strategic alumni and development decisions.  
- Area to feature news, links and updates.

Scheduling Content

Every day social media users generate 690 million Facebook posts, 500 million Tweets, 80 million Instagram posts, and 1 million Snaps. How is your one post a week or even one post a day supposed to make an impact in a sea of content? CoSchedule has compiled research from 14 different studies outlining recommended posting frequency for each social media platform:
Facebook: 1-2 posts daily
Twitter: 15 tweets daily
Instagram: 1-3 posts daily
LinkedIn: 1 post daily
Snapchat: 1-5 posts daily

Fortunately several social media management tools allow you to schedule your social media posts in advance. By using these tools, you can take a couple of hours at the beginning of each week to plan and schedule posts for following week. Allowing you to focus on moderating comments and engagement as they happen each day instead of creating content daily.

Hootsuite - [https://hootsuite.com/](https://hootsuite.com/)
Hootsuite is a free social media management tool that allows you to schedule posts for up to 3 social media accounts.

AgoraPulse - [https://www.agorapulse.com/](https://www.agorapulse.com/)
AgoraPulse is the tool used by the Office of Marketing & Communications. It includes features such as social listening, requeuing posts and collaboration. It costs roughly $15/mo per social media account. To add your social media accounts and yourself as a user on our AgoraPulse accounts, please contact Briana Johnson, web content strategist, at 918-293-5034.

SM Hack - [https://smhack.io/](https://smhack.io/)
SM Hack is a new social media management tool with much better pricing than AgoraPulse and some of the same features. The Office of Marketing & Communications is evaluating the possibility of switching to this tool as certain features are added.

For further info on best times to post, see [https://coschedule.com/blog/how-often-to-post-on-social-media/](https://coschedule.com/blog/how-often-to-post-on-social-media/)

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**Tips on Content Creation**

**Be Transparent.** Always make sure you are honest about your identity and relationship to OSUIT. Be sure to state the purpose of any site or page created. When possible, provide contact information for individuals to connect with your group through other channels.

When posting, as an individual, on digital media platforms, honesty is the best policy
and other users will tolerate nothing less. Use your real name when posting rather than a pseudonym or posting anonymously. When appropriate, clarify your position with OSUIT. If you have a vested personal or professional interest in a topic you are discussing, acknowledge this.

Protect Your Privacy and that of Others. While it is important to disclose your true identity when engaging in any online community, for your own protection you should not share personal information such as phone numbers, complete physical addresses, passwords, etc.

When managing a digital media site, review the settings to determine what information is being disclosed and adjust the settings accordingly. Likewise, don’t pass along personal information about others.

Offer Value to Others. Digital media initiatives should be created when there is an opportunity to share information and build relationships. Listen and engage to get to know the others who are there. Your level of participation will determine the level of success of your participation.

It's a conversation. Talk to your readers like you would talk to real people in professional situations. It’s okay for your comments to reflect your own personality and to say what's on your mind. Try to engage with questions or content that are open-ended, invite response and encourages comments. You can also broaden the conversation by citing others who are posting about the same topic and allowing your content to be shared or syndicated. Make sure you post in ways that easily enable sharing.

Respect Others. Treat others as you would like to be treated. Keep in mind everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion and spirited debate can be a good thing. Always maintain a level of respect for others and their viewpoints. Resist the temptation to make fun of people even if it would get you a laugh or you feel they might deserve it. When disagreeing with others' opinions, be polite. OSUIT is known for its friendliness, and this should be reflected in our online efforts just as it is in our personal interactions.

Keep Your Engagement Clean and Tasteful. Do not post offensive, obscene, racist, homophobic, sexist or sexually explicit language or photos. This type of content will not be tolerated and will be dealt with according to applicable university policies. As the administrator or manager of a site or page, it is your responsibility to ensure such content is removed immediately.
Adhere to Legal or Regulatory Requirements. Never share proprietary or confidential information or comment on anything related to legal matters without the appropriate approval. Please be familiar with university policies and procedures as well as FERPA limitations.

Do not speak or state a position on behalf of the university without prior approval. As a state–funded university, OSUIT cannot take a position a variety of topics (i.e., political candidates), and employees of the university are prohibited from stating any position on behalf of the university without prior approval.

No Alcohol or Drugs Allowed. The university’s alcohol and drug policy still applies online. Do not post content or images involving the use of these substances.

Admit Mistakes. If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and be quick with your correction. If you’re making changes to a blog to correct an earlier post be clear that you have done so.

Create Some Excitement. Your audience is inundated with information every day. Give them a reason to follow or engage with you.

When in Doubt, Don’t Post. If you are concerned whether posting something is appropriate, go with your gut feeling, and don’t post the content. Take a minute to review these guidelines again and modify your approach accordingly. If you’re still unsure, you might want to discuss your concerns with someone in authority. Ultimately, what you publish is yours, as is the responsibility.

The ever-evolving landscape of social media means that you’ll have to stay abreast of emerging technology and platform developments. Take time to assess new content features and if they can help you achieve your goals.

Some sites will assist you with creating graphics for your posts:

- Canva: https://www.canva.com/
- Boomerang - App that creates 5 second videos that play forward and backward on a loop.
- GIPHY - App with thousands of memes, movie and TV show clips
- Lumyer - App that adds FX filters to your photos or videos. Some are free. Some are $0.99.
- Snapchat - Take a photo or video with a filter or lens, save it and post to your Facebook or Instagram stories too.
Some sites offer information on image sizes for each platform:

- Sprout Social: https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-image-sizes-guide/
Using Submitted Content

To help maintain good relationships with students and alumni and to give you more content for your posts, you can solicit submissions for photos and other content from your followers. If you receive submissions that you intend to post from your account, ensure you have permission from the user as well as the photographer (if a different person) before sharing.

Collect the following information and give proper attribution:

- Name
- Hometown (if student)
- Major
- Graduation year

Tools for Instagram, such as the Repost app, will add an attribution box to the image. You should still tag the submitter's username in the comment box with the other pertinent information.

Hashtag Usage and Recommendations

Hashtags have taken over social media platforms in the last few years, originating on Twitter but slowly making their way to Instagram and Facebook. Hashtags allow users to easily find messages, conversations, posts and content with a similar theme all in one place. Anyone can create a hashtag quickly and easily, but there are some key factors in making your hashtag successful.

Make it short and sweet. A hashtag can be whatever you want it to be, but it’s best to keep them short, simple and easy to understand. For example, consistently using #osuit rather than #OSUInstituteofTechnology keeps posts short and simple while still making the concept easy to understand.

Do not use punctuation in hashtags. Punctuation marks and spaces will put an end to your hashtag, so make sure to spell out words like “and,” and don’t use periods, exclamation points or question marks unless they are at the very end of your hashtag (like in #GoPokes!). For example, use #LoyalAndTrue rather than #Loyal&True (which will only link as #Loyal).

Use capitalization to make your hashtags more readable. If hashtags are one word and already easy to read, like #okstate or #cowboys, use all lowercase letters. However, when using longer hashtags with more words, capitalize the first letter of each word to
make your hashtag. For example, use #GoPokes rather than #gopokes, or #OrangeFriday rather than #orangefriday.

Using capital letters to separate the words in your hashtag will differentiate the words from each other so your hashtag is easy to read and understand quickly.

**Official university hashtags:**

#osuit - Represents all conversations about OSU Institute of Technology. Include in posts you want to be connected with OSUIT and its audiences.

#okstate – Represents all conversations about Oklahoma State University. Include in posts you want to be connected with OSU and its audiences.

Note: When creating a hashtag or naming a social media account that includes “okstate” and multiple words, the first letter of each subsequent word would be capitalized.
• For instance, the Oklahoma State University Pet Center would be #okstatePetCenter.

#GoPokes – A cheerful phrase that encompasses the Cowboy spirit. Use to emphasize excitement in your social content.

#AmericasBrightestOrange – OSU’s official tagline. Use to emphasize OSU as a national leader in academics and research.

#AmericasHealthiestCampus – Use in any wellness-related post to emphasize OSU’s efforts as America’s Healthiest Campus.

#OrangeFriday – Celebrates the OSU tradition of wearing orange on Fridays.

#CowboyFamily – Emphasizes the family atmosphere at #okstate.

#okstate20 (or other class number) - OSU’s official tag for future Cowboys. Used to connect with incoming freshmen. Number changes with graduation year. For example, the class of 2021’s hashtag will be #okstate21

#okstate125 – OSU’s official hashtag for content related to its 125th anniversary. Use in any post that includes content from timeline.okstate.edu.
#BeAnOSUCowboy – Used in posts encouraging prospective students to be an OSU Cowboy.

#WellnessWednesday – Used each Wednesday to highlight wellness efforts at #okstate.

#okstateHC – OSU’s official Homecoming hashtag.

#OrangePower – The hashtag used to invoke the power of all things #ORANGE in your social content

#LoyalAndTrue - A nostalgic phrase that elicits the spirit and dedication of the Cowboy Family

**Moderating Comments**

If you are unsure about how to best resolve a situation regarding comment/conversation moderation, contact Briana Johnson, web content strategist, 918-293-5034.

Social media administrators should respond to commenters who express concerns and attempt to address them directly or refer them to a person or department who can.

The structure of your response will vary based on the nature of the social networking platform but it should always be friendly and representative of OSU Institute of Technology’s culture and values.

Not every critique needs a response; some people are just venting frustrations, or they are “trolls” — those who engage in off-topic or inflammatory posts in an attempt to provoke others.

Comments that are inappropriate, offensive, insult or attack, contain illegal suggestions, or use foul language should be removed as allowed by that particular social media platform, as should those that are intentionally repetitive (spam). Keep a log of any comments removed, and most importantly, be consistent with the treatment of all commenters.

**Removing posts that have become controversial**

Occasionally, you may find that something you’ve posted to your page has taken a life of its own in the comments section. If your audience is staying on-topic and remaining civil as per your community commenting guidelines, it is advisable to let the
commenters keep each other in check. If needed, remind commenters about your commenting guidelines.

However, if the conversation seems to be sliding toward only one point of view in a manner that is contrary to the spirit of your post, you may need to make a moderator decision. Please contact Briana Johnson, web content strategist, at 918-293-5034 to discuss the best course of action.

Communications During Campus Emergencies

In an emergency or another incident, university-affiliated accounts should not post information that has not been approved for dissemination from approved sources or spokespeople. If you wish to disseminate the information, you should share posts from the official channels listed below.

Contact Shari Erwin, executive director of marketing & communications, at 918-293-4966 for more information.

Threats received via social media

If you become aware of a potential threat via your role as a social media administrator, report it immediately to the following individuals:

- OSUIT Chief of Campus Police Matt Woliver - matt.wooliver@okstate.edu
- Director of Students Devin DeBock - devin.debock@okstate.edu
- Executive Director of Marketing & Communications Shari Erwin - shari.erwin@okstate.edu

Include as much information as possible, including the username of the individual involved, a screen shot of the message, who or what is involved, when the message was received, and other pertinent information.