

Social media: maintaining an account

General guidelines:

- Accounts must be administered by University employees.
- No posting of personal opinions on Mizzou-branded accounts
- Accounts should identify the program or department represented
- Posted content must reflect Mizzou's brand tone.
- Be aware of HIPAA and FEROA privacy requirements.
- All MU Extension-branded accounts shall post guidelines for engagement.
- **Provide a link to the guidelines in bio and about pages of social media accounts. Text should read:**
 - **Social media guidelines:** bit.ly/mizzousocial

Composing posts

Good social media content is short and to the point. Provide links to articles or pages where users can find more information if they are interested. Maintain the MU Extension reputation as a reliable, research-based source of information, and share only information that is relevant to your audience and the programs and mission of MU Extension. Remember that you are posting on behalf of MU Extension, so your posts should contain only information the organization can stand behind.

Use the following guidelines to accomplish these goals:

- Focus on quality over quantity. Maintain our reputation as a reliable source of information, and only post information that you know to be accurate and objective.
- Use photos and graphics that are relevant to the post. If you post graphics with text on them, make sure the text is legible, and if possible either repeat the text in the post or link the graphic to a page with the information in a format that can be read by a screen reader (e.g., HTML or PDF).
- Tie content to relevant current events or issues when you can. When tragic national or international events occur, do not post general comments such as, "Our condolences go out to the earthquake victims." If we have relevant content, such as an article on explaining tragedies to children or earthquake recovery resources, consider sharing those resources. If we don't have relevant content, and it was a serious event that has the nation's or Missourians' attention, don't post at all.
- Do not comment on a religious or national holiday if MU Extension has no resources relevant to that event. Generally don't comment on religious holidays or appear to favor one holiday over another. However, if extension has related content, such as real Christmas tree or candle safety tips, you can post that content at appropriate times. For example, on July 4, instead of posting "Happy 4th of July," provide a link to a publication about food safety or avoiding heat-related illnesses.
- If possible, have a second set of eyes edit your content before you post it. While social media is more casual than other publishing venues, correct grammar and clear language are vital to communicating effectively and accurately.
- Remain professional. It's OK to have some personality in your social media posts, but avoid posting opinions or attributing feelings to the organization. Point people to MU Extension sources with relevant facts and allow them to develop their own opinions.
- Do not use "we" or "I" because you are not commenting under your personal account, and the organization is not a person.
- If your social media account serves a specialized group rather than a general audience, make sure the content you post is relevant to that group.
- Share or retweet posts from the main MU Extension account; most are applicable for a statewide audience.
- It's OK to share non-extension content too, as long as the content is relevant to extension's mission and is from a trusted source. Examples of acceptable sources include: Missouri Department of Agriculture, Missouri Department of Conservation, local newspapers, local partners and community agencies.

Mixing it up

Vary your posts. Sharing articles and events may be your most common type of post, but some other options that can encourage audience engagement are to:

- Ask viewers to share pictures, videos or comments.
- Share an interesting fact related to a current issue.
- Post photos of extension events.
- Build on comments or posts from other sources.
- Create a survey.
- Look at other extension social media sites or other organizations for ideas.

Posting photos or copyrighted material

Respect the intellectual property of others. Do not use copyrighted material without written permission, and provide attribution for non-extension material.

Do not post pictures of people without signed consent. You need consent from guardians to photograph or post pictures of minors or anyone who cannot give consent themselves. Do not tag or identify people in photographs. If they wish, individuals may identify themselves.

Review copyright policies and find photo release forms under "Resources" on the Communications and Marketing web pages.

Socializing

Interact. Social media is about building relationships and putting a human face on communications, which means you need to learn about and interact with your audience. Don't always just "push" information to users. Find ways to encourage interaction and sharing.

Responding to and moderating comments

Social media are by their nature interactive, and participants can comment on content and share their own information. Some social media platforms may allow you to limit or turn off comments, but limiting comments has the drawback of decreasing interaction. However, the open nature of social media also has its drawbacks. Users may post inappropriate, inaccurate, negative or harmful content.

Do not delete comments simply because they are critical of extension or MU. As a representative of MU Extension, remain courteous and avoid arguing. If there are inaccuracies in a comment or post, clarify any misconceptions without being confrontational or defensive. Remember, our customers are entitled to their opinions, and a comment may alert us to a problem that needs to be addressed.

While dialogue between MU Extension and our customers is desirable, we need to set standards of acceptable behavior. In the about section, or another easily accessed area, post the following disclaimer.

Posting policies

University of Missouri Extension accounts should not post content that includes any of the content listed below. In addition, the admins of these accounts reserve the right to remove user-posted content that:

- is not relevant to the subject being discussed or to MU Extension's work;
- campaigns for or against voting issues or political candidates;
- contains profanity;
- conflicts with our anti-discrimination policies;
- is of a pornographic nature;
- solicits business;

- is of an illegal nature;
- contains threats to any person or people;
- contains disparaging remarks about individuals;
- compromises the safety or security of the public; or
- violates copyright laws.

We reserve the right, at our discretion, to remove any post or to revoke a user's privilege to post to our page.

All social media accounts need to be monitored and moderated by a responsible MU Extension representative on a daily basis.

Keeping it professional

Social media has blurred the lines between personal and professional, public and private. If you are posting for an extension account, your content needs to represent MU Extension, not you. Think before you post. Remember, nothing is really private on the Internet.

Analyzing and re-evaluating

Most social media platforms have ways to help you track your impact, and tools such as Google Analytics can help you analyze traffic to your website. Periodically re-evaluate your goals and your outcomes, and adjust accordingly. Maybe you planned to reach young participants through your Twitter account, but instead you notice that collaborating organizations are following your Twitter feed. Adjust your message to meet the audience you have, or change tactics to reach the audience you originally identified.

Planning worksheet

Social media campaigns or projects are most successful when they are well-planned and thought out before being implemented. Use this planning worksheet to assess your goals, audience, needs and message before beginning a social media project. The worksheet also provides assistance with deciding what social networking tool is best, planning contributors to the account, posting, idea generation for promoting the account and ways you can evaluate its success.

[Social media planning worksheet \(PDF\)](#)

Additional Resources

[MU Social Media Guidelines](#)

[MU Social Media Guidelines for personal use](#)