

AP's Social Media Guidelines are based on our Statement of News Values and Principles. The guidelines below apply these long-tested principles to the social media space. The Social Media Guidelines are designed to advance the AP's brand and staffers' personal brands on social networks. They encourage staffers to be active participants in social networks while upholding our fundamental value that staffers should not express personal opinions on controversial issues of the day.

### **ACCOUNTS**

All AP journalists are encouraged to have accounts on social networking sites. These sites are now an integral part of everyday life for millions of people around the world. They have become an essential tool for AP reporters to gather news and share links to our published work. We recommend having one account per network that you use both personally and professionally.

Many AP journalists have had great success with this strategy.

Employees must identify themselves as being from AP if they are using their accounts for work in any way. You don't have to include AP in your Twitter or other usernames, and you should use a personal image (not an AP logo) for the profile photo. But you should identify yourself in your profile as an AP staffer. Posting AP proprietary or confidential material is prohibited. Employees may not include political affiliations in their profiles and should not make any postings that express political views.

### **OPINION**

AP staffers must be aware that opinions they express may damage the AP's reputation as an unbiased source of news. AP employees must refrain from declaring their views on contentious public issues in any public forum and must not take part in organized action in support of causes or movements. (See guidelines below on "liking" and following pages and groups that are associated with causes or movements.)

Sometimes AP staffers ask if they're free to comment in social media on matters like sports and entertainment. The answer is yes, but there are some important things to keep in mind:

First, trash-talking about anyone (including a team, company or celebrity) reflects badly on staffers and the AP. Assume your tweet will be seen by the target of your comment. The person or organization you're deriding may be one that an AP colleague is trying to develop as a source.

Second, if you or your department covers a subject -- or you supervise people who do -- you have a special obligation to be even-handed in your tweets. Whenever possible, link to AP copy, where we have the space to represent all points of view.

### **PRIVACY**

Employees should be mindful that any opinions or personal information they disclose about themselves or colleagues may be linked to the AP's name. That's true even if staffers restrict their pages to viewing only by friends.

We recommend customizing your privacy settings on Facebook to determine what you share and with whom. However, as multitudes of people have learned all too well, virtually nothing is truly private on the Internet.

Posting on a social network is not just like uttering a comment to your friends in person. It's all too easy for someone to copy material out of restricted pages and redirect it elsewhere for wider viewing.

### **RETWEETING**

Retweets, like tweets, should not be written in a way that looks like you're expressing a personal opinion on the issues of the day. A retweet with no comment of your own can easily be seen as a sign of approval of what you're relaying.

#### Examples:

1. *RT @jonescampaign: smith's policies would destroy our schools*
2. *RT @dailyeuropean: at last, a euro plan that works bit.ly/xxxxx*

These kinds of unadorned retweets must be avoided. Similarly, you shouldn't simply hit Twitter's "retweet" button on tweets like these.

However, we *can* judiciously retweet opinionated material if we make clear we're simply reporting it, much as we would quote it in a story. Introductory words, colons and quote marks help make the distinction:

Examples:

*Jones campaign now denouncing Smith on education: RT @jonescampaign: smith's policies would destroy our schools*

*Big European paper praises euro plan: RT @dailyeuropean: "at last, a euro plan that works" bit.ly/xxxxx.*

These cautions apply even if you say on your Twitter profile that retweets do not constitute endorsements.

### **FRIENDING/FOLLOWING**

It is acceptable to extend and accept Facebook friend requests from sources if necessary for reporting purposes. However, friending and "liking" political candidates or causes may create a perception among people unfamiliar with the protocol of social networks that AP staffers are advocates. Therefore, staffers should avoid friending and liking unless they have a true reporting reason for it. If we do friend or "like," we should avoid interacting with newsmakers on their public pages – for instance, commenting on their posts.

If reporters need to friend a newsmaker who is using a personal profile on Facebook, they should limit the newsmaker's access to their own personal information, using Facebook's lists and privacy settings. To keep track of tweets by newsmakers, we recommend using a Twitter list, which allows you to receive postings without joining the person's official list of followers. Again, the issue is possible perceptions by people who don't fully understand Twitter that we are supporters of the person.

AP managers should not issue friend requests to subordinates. It's fine if employees want to initiate the friend process with their bosses.

### **PUBLISHING**

AP staff are encouraged to link to AP content in all formats. They can also link to content from other media organizations, except if the material spreads rumors or unconfirmed information not fit for AP's news services. Be mindful of competitive and corporate issues as you post links.

Staffers should link to content that has been published on an AP or subscriber platform, rather than directly uploading or copying and pasting the material.

Don't break news on social networks that we haven't published in AP's news services. If you have a piece of information, a photo, video or audio that is compelling, exclusive and/or urgent enough to be considered breaking news, you should make it available to AP services before you consider putting it out on social media. There may be occasional exceptions to this rule, but they must be prearranged with your manager and approved by a Nerve Center manager.

If material you have gathered meets our standards for quality and accuracy, but for a variety of reasons isn't sent to our subscribers, it is acceptable to share it on social networks. This includes material we commonly refer to as "cutting room floor" content -- material that doesn't make it into our services because of space and time limits.

We rely on you to use your news judgment to determine if a piece of content is urgent enough that it should be filed first to our news services. If you have any hesitation about a tweet or post, you should consult with your manager, regional desk or the Nerve Center before sending it.

### **SOURCING**

It can be difficult to verify the identity of sources found on social networks. Sources discovered there should be vetted in the same way as a source found by any other means. If a source you encounter on a social network claims to be an official from a company, organization or government agency, call the place of business to confirm the identity, just as you would if a source called on the phone.

You must never simply lift quotes, photos or video from social networking sites and attribute them to the name on the profile or feed where you found the material. Most social media sites offer a way to send a message to a user; use this to establish direct contact, over email or by phone, so you can explain what you're working on and get more detailed information about the source.

Use particular caution if you find a social networking page or feed that appears to belong to a person who is central to a story, especially if you can't get confirmation from that person. Fake accounts are rampant in the social media world and can appear online within minutes of a new name appearing in the news. Examine the details to determine whether the page could have just as easily been created by somebody else.

Many athletes, celebrities and politicians have verified Twitter accounts, meaning that Twitter has determined that the account really does belong to that person. However, even Twitter's verification process has been fooled, meaning we should still do our own checking with the newsmaker. Also, before you quote from newsmaker's tweets, confirm who is managing the account. Is it the famous person? His or her handlers? A combination? Knowing the source of the information will help you determine just how newsworthy the tweet is and how to characterize it.

To include photos, videos or other multimedia content from social networks in our news report, we must determine who controls the copyright to the material and get permission from that person or organization to use it. Any exceptions must be discussed with the Nerve Center and Legal.

### **INTERACTING WITH USERS**

AP is strongly in favor of engaging with those who consume our content. Most feedback we receive is constructive. It often leads us to terrific information and imagery. But there's another side. People may accuse us of bias in our writing or photography. They may make denigrating comments about our writers and photographers.

Any substantive criticism of our content should be taken seriously, however it may be phrased.

AP's News Values and Principles say, "Staffers must notify supervisory editors as soon as possible of errors or potential errors, whether in their work or that of a colleague." Beyond that, responses to our audience can largely be guided by the nature of the comments that come in.

A thoughtful note from a reader or viewer that leads to a correction by us deserves an email or tweet of thanks (try to avoid repeating the original error). If someone offers a businesslike criticism of a story or image but has their facts wrong, it's good to reply, time permitting, to clarify the facts.

However, abusive, bigoted, obscene and/or racist comments posted to an AP-managed platform should be flagged to the Nerve Center immediately.

### **OTHER THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:**

- I. Any response we make to a reader or viewer could go public. Email and direct Facebook and Twitter messages may feel like private communications, but may easily find their way to blogs and political pressure groups, attorneys and others. In the case of a story or image that stirs significant controversy, the editor is likely the best person to reply, rather than the person who created the content. The Standards Center can also reply, saying it looked into the complaint and here's what we found. This is particularly true if the response requires an explanation of AP policies or otherwise goes beyond the immediate content in question.
- I. Any incoming message that raises the possibility of legal action should be reviewed by an AP attorney before a response is made
- II. We should not get into protracted back-and-forth exchanges with angry people that become less constructive with each new round. Particularly insulting or abusive comments directed to any individual staffer should be reported immediately to a manager. If such comments are posted online, contact the Nerve Center and we will work to get them removed, even from non-AP platforms. Of course, any comments that are truly threatening to individuals should be brought to the immediate attention of AP Global Security (Contact: Danny Spriggs at dspriggs@ap.org)

### **INTERACTING WITH AP ACCOUNTS**

Staff are welcome to retweet and share material posted by official AP-branded accounts on social networking sites (e.g. @AP, @AP\_Stylebook, etc.). We ask that AP staff refrain from liking or commenting on official AP-branded Facebook posts. These accounts are official, public-facing channels of communication, and we want to reserve the comments and the interactions for the public, not for journalists to talk among themselves in a public-facing spot. It can be off-putting and alienating for an average Facebook user to click on a post and see conversations between colleagues or virtual insider pats on the back.

### **DELETING TWEETS**

Twitter.com allows us to delete tweets we've sent. Deletion, however, removes the tweet only from Twitter.com and perhaps some other Twitter clients. Tweets of ours that have been retweeted or reposted elsewhere will still remain publicly visible. If you believe a tweet should be deleted, contact a Nerve Center manager to discuss the situation.

### **CORRECTIONS**

Erroneous tweets or other social media posts need to be corrected as quickly and transparently as errors in any other AP service. This applies to AP-related tweets or posts on personal accounts as well.

The thing to do is to tweet or post that we made a mistake and explain exactly what was wrong.

Example:

*Correction: U.S. Embassy in Nigeria says bombings could happen this week at luxury hotels in Abuja (previously we incorrectly said Lagos): [apne.ws/uxr9ph](http://apne.ws/uxr9ph)*

Serious errors need to be brought to the attention of a Nerve Center manager and the appropriate regional or vertical desk.