

## **SOCIAL MEDIA: *tips and advice***

You may not like it. You may not understand it. You may not know how to use it. But social media has taken hold and people of all ages are mad about tweeting, updating and uploading. So how can your club use social media?

Amid all the cautionary advice and fear surrounding the internet and social media it's easy to forget that these new technologies offer clubs a quick, inexpensive and very effective way to communicate with members, recruit new people and increase your volunteer base.

So, how do you do it? Where do you start? What are the dangers?

### ***Facebook or Twitter or YouTube?***

Why not all three? Of all the social media sites on the internet, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the most popular and perhaps most useful to a club. What's the difference?

- Facebook is all about connecting with friends to share photos, events, personal news and interesting links.
- On Twitter you choose the information you want to receive and who you want to 'follow'. Whereas Facebook focuses on social networking, Twitter is closer to a news network.
- YouTube is a place to upload, share and view videos online. You can even set up your own television station and broadcast live vision.

Think about how your club wants to use social media, the resources you need and what you want to achieve. Also consider which social media will give you the most value, which social media sites are the most popular with your members and who has the skills to manage it?

### ***How do we manage the club's social media?***

You may like to recruit someone from within the club to set it all up and look after it. Keeping pages and tweets up to date can be a time consuming task and, just like traditional newsletters and advertising campaigns, needs a dedicated project manager.

Limit the club to high-impact relevant content, not only to save time, but also to engage your members and fans. People will quickly block or desert you if the messages your club posts are irrelevant or clogging up their in-box.

Tweet and message regularly. Even though quality is important, your 'followers', 'fans' and 'likers' may also depart if they hardly hear from you. Make sure communication is consistent but keep it short, sharp and interesting.

Before adopting social media your club should develop some policy that provides guidelines about how this new technology should be used. Think about how, when, where and what should be shared.

### ***How can we use social media to help the club?***

Every club is different and no one social media marketing strategy will work for all. Experiment with social media and get feedback from your members to work out which options are most effective and useful for your club.

Here are just a few examples of the ways your club could use social media:

- Use Twitter to quickly advise members of a last-minute change of venue or cancellation due to rain.
- Let committee members know via Facebook when and where the next meeting will be. Use the RSVP option to find out who will attend.
- Get on Twitter and report live on matches, especially to fans, members and sponsors who can't be there.
- Post videos of match highlights on YouTube for everyone to see (with permissions of course).
- Market club merchandise online via Facebook.
- Use a photo sharing application like Flickr to post a selection of good quality club photos that journalists and bloggers can access any time of the day or night (again, with permissions).
- Promote come-and-try days and team trials dates to potential new members with a Facebook ad.
- Drive people to your website where they will find more information about the club.
- Use Facebook to start a discussion about a particular topic or issue at the club.

Remember, social media offers two-way communication. Be prepared for positive and negative feedback and use it to improve your club.

### ***Managing the risks***

So your club is taking the leap into social media? Why not! Social media and social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr and online forums and blogs are accessible, instantaneous, cost-effective and user-friendly. They offer sporting clubs a fantastic opportunity to communicate more effectively with members and supporters. But, with opportunity comes risk.

### ***Know the rules***

Each social media site and platform has its own online terms and policies which apply to all users. In creating a page or becoming a member, your club and administrators may be agreeing to (among other things) payment terms, advertising guidelines and privacy policies. These are often very detailed and constantly changing. Make sure you are aware of your rights and responsibilities as determined by the social media site your club plans to use.

### ***The law still applies***

Despite the seemingly unregulated nature of social media, the law still applies online. Postings online (and similarly in email or text messages) are subject to the law in areas like defamation, racial discrimination, intimidation, breach of copyright and trademark infringement. Liability for uploaded content may extend to the club and those who engage in online activities on its behalf.

### ***Offensive and inappropriate content***

Social media when used most effectively is a conversation between users and is therefore open to comments both good and bad.

There have been recent examples in the media of members of a team using a club's Facebook page to attack a coach or another player. **This is not acceptable.** Your club's Social Media Policy should promote guidelines for responsible social media use and outline how offensive or discriminatory comments will be moderated and/or reported if serious enough.

### ***Protecting children and young people***

Young people are big users of social media and they are also inclined to underestimate the associated risks. The anonymity and immediacy offered by social media increases the potential to engage in cyber-bullying and 'sexting', both of which can cause serious harm.

Any images, text or representations of people under the age of 18 in a sexual pose or engaged in sexual activity is child pornography. Never consent to post, publish or distribute such material or allow it to go unreported. Always report it to the police.

Your club's use of social media comes with an obligation to encourage all members and supporters – including children and young people – to use social media responsibly.

### ***Careful campaigning***

Before conducting a competition, sale or promotion using social media, consider all the possible outcomes and make sure your objectives and entry conditions are clear. It may even be worth consulting an expert in advertising and online media.

### ***Tips for avoiding social media issues***

- Develop a social media policy detailing what can be uploaded and how the club can be marketed using social media.
- Read and understand the terms and conditions of the social media platform you will be using.
- Never upload or post illegal, offensive or inappropriate content anywhere on the internet and always report such content to the relevant authority.
- Always gain the permission of people in photos or videos before posting online.