Social media best practices - how to effectively connect with Waterloo students

Based on feedback from 1,100 Waterloo students and social media best practices, we have created guidelines to help you:

- Create a student-friendly social media strategy

No matter the platforms or approach you choose, there are three important steps for success:

**Strategy → Campaign → Content**

### Strategy

Every social media strategy should be part of your larger communications strategy and include four pieces:

- **Audience** – Think about who you are trying to reach; all students do not use social media the same way. For example, graduate students choose different platforms than undergraduate students. Review the student communications survey report to get a better understanding of your audience’s preferences.

- **Goals** – Think about why you’re using social media to communicate with students. Is it to share information? Gather feedback? Provide timely responses to questions? Laying out these goals will help you understand what type of social media campaigns make sense for your unit.

- **Platforms** – Once you understand your audience and goals, you can decide which platforms to use. If you’re looking to share messages with visual content, Instagram may be best. If you’re looking to engage in a conversation or provide quick and timely updates, Twitter may be best. Remember: you do not have to be everywhere. Choosing one platform and doing it well is better than choosing three and not having enough resources.

### A note about choosing platforms. Do you need to create a new account?

- The UWaterloo directory lists on-campus social media accounts. Before creating a new account, review what exists already. Could you partner with another account?
  - Live-tweeting an event: @UWaterlooLive
  - Supporting an event or initiative that impacts the entire campus: @UWaterloo
  - Supporting an event or initiative that impacts a faculty or department: faculty, department or school accounts
  - Supporting an event or initiative that impacts all students: @UWaterlooLife

### Measurement

Think back to your goals. How will you know if you’re achieving them? Measurement allows you to learn more about the types of content your audience does or does not engage with. You don’t have to measure everything, but this is a key step to help you evolve your content and meet your audience’s needs.
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Campaign
Once you have your strategy, you’ll want to create campaigns to support the strategy. Make your life easier by planning these campaigns in advance.

Campaign brainstorming - An example: if you’ve decided you’re going to use Instagram to showcase student life to prospective graduate students, maybe you would create a campaign that showcases a different graduate student club every day for a set time. You could also create a regular campaign feature like #TBT (Throwback Thursday) to show students what life looked like for previous classes at different points throughout a term. Looking for inspiration? Check out Social Media for Colleges, a great collection of ideas from North American institutions. Note: it’s ok to run multiple campaigns and ‘borrow’ ideas.

Campaign planning – Once you have a campaign idea, don’t leave it to chance. Use a planning tool to lay out content and dates. This means your content is planned and ready to go so you don’t have to come up with it on the spot.

Content
The content is the last piece of the equation. Campaigns need compelling and unique content to be effective. Good content takes time and effort. Co-op students can be a valuable resource when it comes to creating content that will resonate with students. When you’re creating content that supports a campaign, think about:

- What’s your audience interested in? What kind of language do they use?
- Content that includes visuals and videos will likely always perform better than just text
- Allow for two-way communication; ask questions, encourage participation
- Tag relevant accounts that can help share and amplify your message
- Look for opportunities for user-generated content
- You can find student-friendly content examples on UWaterloo Life Facebook and Twitter

Posting your content
Scheduling – once you have planned content, your social media routine becomes easier. Facebook and Twitter both have tools to schedule content so you can set it to publish at a specific time.

Responding – setting up a process for responding and engaging with your audience on social media is a critical element, and it should never be automated. If someone shares your content, asks a question, or leaves a general response, that’s an opportunity to engage. Whether you say thank you, respond with an answer or keep the conversation going, a response is important. Learn more at a social media SEW course.