

## **Social Media Guidance for Newsrooms**

*(This guidance includes concepts and language developed by Gannett journalists and The Associated Press, NPR and Scripps.)*

Gannett's expectations for journalists in the social media environment are found in the *Principles of Ethical Conduct* and the *Gannett Social Media Policy*. The guidance below applies these long-tested principles to the ever-changing social media arena. The following questions and answers are designed to help journalists best operate in the world of social networks as to advance both our brands and their own identities. This guidance will be updated and revised as developments warrant.

Nothing in this document prohibits or interferes with employees' rights to communicate with work colleagues about terms and conditions of employment, social media accounts should not be used to comment inappropriately on the work of others or about Gannett.

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### **ACCOUNTS**

#### **Q: Should Gannett journalists have social media accounts?**

**A:** All Gannett journalists are strongly 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 a way to deeply engage with people, to better understand and engage with the communities we serve, a tool to improve news gathering, a method for further distribution, and a catalyst to improve our news products on all platforms.

#### **Q: Should Gannett journalists have separate accounts for personal and professional, or one account used for everything?**

**A:** Gannett journalists are encouraged, but not required, to use one social media account for both personal and professional use.

All social media activity, regardless of whether personal or professional is held to the standards of the Social Media Policy for Journalists.

Whether on your personal or professional account, Gannett newsroom employees should be mindful that any opinions or personal information they disclose about themselves or colleagues may be linked to Gannett's name, and may impact Gannett's position as a trusted source of news and information. That's true even if staffers restrict their pages to viewing only by friends.

Employees should also be aware that records relating to both personal and professional accounts could potentially be discoverable in litigation involving the company and/or the individual.

Gannett employees may also manage branded accounts as part of their responsibilities. These accounts are official accounts tied to the property's brand.

Examples of branded accounts include @USATODAY, the KUSA-TV Facebook page, and @newintowncincy. Access to the branded account belongs to the company and the name and contents are the property of Gannett. Gannett reserves the right to edit, monitor, promote or cancel the branded account.

For example:

Jane Smith writes a column called "Ms. Bargain."

The Twitter account is @msbargain.

If Jane Smith leaves the company, she would not take @msbargain with her and it will continue to be maintained by Gannett.

Accounts that incorporate a Gannett brand in any way shall be considered branded accounts. Example of a branded individual account includes @JohnSmithWZZM or Susan Smith's KARE-11 Facebook page.

For example:

John Smith is an anchor at WZZM.

His Twitter account is @JohnSmithWZZM.

If John Smith leaves the company, he would not take @JohnSmithWZZM with him. Access to the branded account remains with Gannett.

**Q: What if a Gannett employee who manages a branded account leaves the company?**

**A:** Access to branded accounts remains with the company. When an employee leaves, the company retains the account and responsibility is transferred to another Gannett employee.

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## **PRIVACY**

**Q: If my social network settings are set as private, can I say whatever I want?**

**A:** All social media accounts are held to the standards of the *Principles of Ethical Conduct* and the *Gannett Social Media Policy*. Employees should be mindful that any opinions or personal information they disclose about themselves or colleagues may be linked to Gannett's name. That's true even if staffers restrict their pages to viewing only by friends.

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

We do still 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.



## BLOGS

### Q: Are there any rules or restrictions for journalists maintaining personal blogs

**A:** A journalist's personal blog/Web site should not address issues typically covered by the journalist in his or her professional role. However, even on a personal blog, journalists' are held to the standards of the *Principles of Ethical Conduct* and the *Gannett Social Media Policy*.

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## OPINION

### Q: Is it okay for Gannett news staff to express opinions when posting on their social media accounts?

**A:** All content posted on a social media site should be considered "public," even if you have set privacy settings to restrict access to limited numbers of persons. As such the expression of opinions in a social media environment is subject to the same limitations that are placed on newsroom employees through the Principles of Ethical Conduct. These are designed to maintain the credibility of the journalist and the company brand with the audience.

There may be times when expressing an opinion is a good thing. For example, posts about hometown teams and community pride are areas where opinion is well received.

If you are ever unsure, please consult your manager.

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## RETWEETING

### Q: Are there issues with retweeting or sharing posts?

**A:** Retweets, like tweets, should not be written in a way that looks like you're expressing a personal opinion on the news issues of the day. Similarly, a retweet should not endorse the accuracy of the reposting if the original tweet relates to a developing story that your newsroom hasn't confirmed. In addition, 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](http://bit.ly/xxxxx)
3. RT @TMZ: Michael Jackson has died.



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

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

*Examples:*

1. *Jones campaign now denouncing Smith on education:*  
RT **@jonescampaign**: *smith's policies would destroy our schools*
2. *Big European paper praises euro plan:* RT **@dailyeuropean**: *"at last, a euro plan that works" bit.ly/xxxxx.*
3. *TMZ reporting Michael Jackson died moments ago:* RT **@TMZ**: *Michael Jackson has died*

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

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## FRIENDING/FOLLOWING

### **Q: Are there any issues with friending or following sources or politicians?**

**A:** It is acceptable to friend or follow parties or groups so long as you follow those on the other side of the issues as well.

In addition, there are technically ways to follow people without actually following or friending them. Using Facebook's Interests Lists and Twitter Lists you can receive postings without joining the person's official list of followers.

For further information on sources, please see the sourcing section of this document. Additional caution is necessary so as not to inadvertently disclose the identity of a source by friending that person.

### **Q: Is it okay to follow competitors?**

**A:** Yes, you can and are encouraged to follow competitors on social media. This can help you not only keep track of what your competitors are working on; it can also help you create reciprocal relationships with others who may cover the same beat. In social media, audiences like when you share items of interest, even if you didn't write/produce them yourself. That said, caution as noted above should be exercised when retweeting a developing news story which your news organization has not verified. And if the competitor's post is based on an anonymous source, a manager's approval is necessary before you retweet.

## PUBLISHING

### **Q: How should I handle breaking news and social media?**

**A:** Social Media should be an important part of your breaking news strategy. When breaking news on social platforms, you should use the same standards and treatments (attribution) as on every other platform we currently use. You may break news on social media if you have thoroughly verified its accuracy. As rumors begin to spread on social media, the public looks to traditional media for the facts.

You should be transparent in your reporting of breaking news and give a window into the process. Social media audiences look for real time updates and will appreciate the efforts we take to obtain the truth.

Sometimes giving the facts to debunk a rumor is the story you can own. We should check out tips. Ignoring rumors is as irresponsible as reporting them.

As soon as you are able, you should provide links to Gannett content.

You can also link to content from other media organizations, unless the material spreads rumors based on anonymous sources or unconfirmed information not fit for Gannett publications. Be mindful of competitive and corporate issues as you post links.

### **Q: May I post information on social media that wasn't in my story?**

**A:** If material you have gathered meets our standards for quality and accuracy, but wasn't included in the story, it is acceptable to share it on social networks. This includes material sometimes referred to as "cutting room floor" content -- material that doesn't make it into our products because of space and time limits. You must consult with your manager before posting.

In addition, behind-the-scenes glimpses of newsroom activity are very well received on social media sites.

Of course material that hasn't been verified or that you promised to keep confidential should not be posted.

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## CORRECTIONS/DELETIONS

### **Q: What should I do if I post something I later realize is incorrect?**

**A:** Erroneous tweets or other social media posts need to be corrected as quickly and

transparently as errors in any other Gannett product. This applies to any of your social media accounts.

You should tweet or post that you made a mistake and explain exactly what was wrong.

For 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](https://apne.ws/uxr9ph)*

Serious errors need to be brought to the attention of a manager and the appropriate desk.

**Q: If I post something I later realize is incorrect or inappropriate, can I just delete it?**

**A:** In most cases, deleting a message is not the best response. However, if the further spreading of the message is detrimental to public safety or could seriously damage our brand reputation; deleting a post may be the best course of action. You need to get approval before deleting a post.

Deleting a post does not necessarily remove it from all social media sites. Posts that have been retweeted or reposted elsewhere will still remain publicly visible. If you are deleting a post because of incorrect information, see previous question.

If you do delete a post, the next post with the correct information should note that a previous post had incorrect information and was deleted.

**Q. What are the differences with social platforms that I should keep in mind?**

**A.** Some general guidance:

**Facebook** – FB posts are editable, so edit the post depending on severity, and put a note in comments noting the correction. If the error was also repeated in a story that's part of the post, be sure to correct it there and "refresh share attachment" so the latest information is available to FB readers.

**Twitter** – You can't edit a tweet, so if it's circulating bad information, take it down and issue a correction tweet.

**Instagram** - You can edit the captions, so start there. If the incorrect information is in the image or graphic, remove it and put the new image and note the correction in the comments.

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## SOURCING

**Q: Are there any considerations I need to be aware of when finding story sources via social media?**

**A:** 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.

**Special note:** Use of social media to locate sources should be restricted to first communication (exchanging contact information). To protect the confidentiality of your newsgathering, avoid exchanging information with your sources via social media. Since social media sites routinely turn over user posts in response to subpoenas, you should conduct your interviews outside the social network -- over the phone or in person.

**Q: Are there any special steps I need to take to verify information I see on social networks?**

**A:** Verify information obtained from social networks just as you would for everything else. You should assume that most of the posts you are seeing are unverified rumors. Only once it's proven to be fully accurate should you feel comfortable sharing. To verify a tweet, take a look at the account: How many followers does it have; how many is it following? What is the link in the bio? Is it an official Twitter verified account?

Investigate the creator of the content just as you would for any other source.

You can always ask a manager for help when trying to verify information or an account.

**Q: Are there issues with using tweets, photos or other media shared via social networks?**

**A:** To include photos, videos or other multimedia content from social networks in your news report, we must determine who controls the copyright to the material and get permission from that person or organization to use it. You should 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.

Any exceptions must be discussed with a manager and Legal.

See the Gannett Re-Usage guidance.

**Q: I'm always careful about checking for sources and permissions with photos I use in Presto. Social media is different though, right?**

**A:** No. Copyright is copyright. If you don't have permission to use something in Presto, you can't use it on FB, Twitter, IG, etc., - unless you're using an embed function or are re-sharing.

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## INTERACTING WITH USERS

**Q: Is it okay for me to engage with readers and viewers on social media?**

**A:** Gannett is strongly in favor of engaging with those who consume our content. Engaging with our communities adds value to the relationships our consumers have with our brands. It is important the audience sees us as more than just their local news source. They need to think of us as fellow members of their community.

**Q: How should I respond to audience feedback?**

**A:** Feedback comes in many forms: story chat and comments, corrections and clarifications and audience complaints.

**Reacting to audience comments**

Journalists, editors and other staff members should consider responding to comments especially when doing so will clarify a point or correct a misstatement.

Don't rise to the bait. It goes without saying that staffers should not offer personal opinions or betray emotions that would raise questions about impartiality or professionalism. That said, all staffers should comment in a voice consistent with their role.

Audiences should be treated with respect. In addressing comments, staffers should be at all times fact-based and respectful.

If you have questions about the best way to handle a comment, contact your manager.

**Corrections and clarifications**

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 a correction or clarification is needed, it should be changed as soon as possible (news managers should be familiar with the site's guidelines for handling corrections.)

If someone offers a businesslike criticism of a story or image but has their facts wrong, it's good to reply to clarify the facts.

However, abusive, bigoted, obscene and/or racist comments posted to a Gannett-managed platform should be flagged to a manager immediately.

**Audience complaints**

If someone posts a complaint, which is not about the accuracy of the story, but about your skills, or you personally, respectfully acknowledge that you have received their complaint. However, you should not get into protracted back-and-forth exchanges with angry people that become less constructive with each new round. While the vast majority should receive a respectful acknowledgment, sometimes silence is the best policy. Insulting or abusive comments directed to any individual staffer should be reported immediately to a manager. If such comments are posted online, contact a manager. Of course, any comments that are truly threatening to individuals should be brought to the immediate attention of your manager.

Any response you 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 news manager is likely the best person to reply, rather than the person who created the content. News managers can also reply, saying they looked into the complaint and here's what they found. This is particularly true if the response requires an explanation of Gannett policies or otherwise goes beyond the immediate content in question.

**Q: How should I respond to an incoming message that threatens legal action?**

**A:** Any incoming message that threatens legal action against the Company or you should be reviewed by a Gannett attorney before a response is made.

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## **CREDENTIALLED NEWS EVENTS**

**Q: I'm credentialed to cover an event and I'd like to cover it for our social pages too. Do I need to do anything special?**

**A:** Yes. In addition to touching base with your social team colleagues to see what works for them, review your credentials closely – they may not permit live streaming or other types of social sharing.