



Social Media Best Practices

Here are some best practices to follow when using social media, which should be broadly understood to include blogs, wikis, microblogs, message boards, chat rooms, electronic newsletters, online forums, social networking sites, and other sites and services that permit users to share information with others in a contemporaneous manner.

Members of the America's SBDC network (the network) should remember that any and all posts, publications, etc. may have long lasting effects—both of a positive and negative nature.

1. Although not an exclusive list, some specific examples of social media conduct that should be avoided include posting commentary, content, or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or that can create a hostile work environment.
2. Network members are prohibited from publishing, posting or otherwise releasing information considered as confidential, especially with regard to client information.
3. Social media networks, blogs and other types of online content sometimes generate press and media attention or legal questions. All inquiries of this type should be referred to authorized network spokespersons.
4. If a network member encounters a potentially antagonistic situation, s/he should disengage from the dialogue in a polite manner and seek the advice of a supervisor.
5. A network member should get appropriate permission before referring to or posting images of current or former SBDC staff and clients.
6. Social media use shouldn't interfere with network members' responsibilities with their SBDC.
7. Network members should keep SBDC-related social media accounts separate from personal accounts.

Publicity Releases and Client Confidentiality

1. All clients mentioned in social media by the network must have a publicity release prior to posting about them.
2. If a client tags the network or mentions the network specifically, "liking" or "commenting" is acceptable since the post was client-initiated. Similarly, when a client is mentioned in a news story where the network is also mentioned as providing assistance, this posting is acceptable since the client disclosed the relationship.
3. If a potential client posts a question online or requests business assistance, suggest an offline meeting/contact for further assistance.
4. In the event that affiliation with a client could be damaging to the network's reputation, it is advisable to delete all postings related to the client.

Branding

The America's SBDC logo should be clear and consistent to further promote brand awareness.

Cover Page Photos

Cover page photos on social media can be reused across multiple social media accounts and should be changed frequently. Cover photos could include, but should not be limited to:

- Upcoming events
- Center award/recognition
- Network or SBDC Services
- Client testimonials
- Center staff (consultant of the month)

Content Ideas

1. Focus on inspirational messages about business ownership, small business statistics, or tips for small business owners.
2. Repost or share posts from other network members.
3. Images are great content to share and can be easily “liked” or shared quickly.
4. Source reputable infographics from the Census Bureau or other information gathering organizations.
5. Remember to “tag” a client, the network, or a network member in any post about them. This increases the likelihood of it being shared further.
6. Commenting and liking other posts are a very important part of social media outreach. For every post or tweet about the network or a network member, there should be 5 retweets or posts about others.
7. Follow and like all of your network’s local and regional economic partners. Use their posts as feed for good information to “like” or repost.
8. Follow national partners and supporters of small business (SBA, Inc., Fast Company, Kauffman Foundation, etc.). These stakeholders offer relevant, trusted content to share, especially when resources are limited.
9. Share grand openings or other client events located within a legislator’s (national, state, county, local) respective district but refrain from showing political party favoritism.

Post Composition Suggestions

- Avoid negativity; stay positive.
- Avoid using “I”; use “we” instead.
- Shorten URLs to track clicks.
- For more clicks, place the link in the first part of the post.
- Use action words in the post such as see, watch, check out, look.
- Tweet later in the day and later in the week; experiment with timing (ideally Friday afternoon).
- Do not send more than one or two tweets an hour.

- Consider adding “Please RT” (re-tweet) to see if your message spreads further.
- Check grammar and punctuation; avoid ALL CAPS and always start with a capital letter.
- Avoid using “txt spk”.

Hashtags

Hashtags can be useful in connecting with others, especially younger entrepreneurs. They should be included in posts as appropriate, depending on your message. Here are some sample hashtags; feel free to search for other useful hashtags.

#SmallBiz

#Business

#EconomicGrowth

#Biz

#StartUp

#BusinessDevelopment

#LocalBiz

#BusinessAssistance

#Entrepreneur