

Marine Corps Social Media Principles

Defense Media Activity – Marine Corps Element

Marine Corps News



Throughout the Marine Corps' history, people have discussed, debated and embraced the United States Marine Corps and our Marines. These discussions are now taking place in online conversations and social networks.

The Marine Corps recognizes the importance of participating in these conversations, and is committed to operate in social media the right way. These Social Media Principles have been developed to help empower the Corps' public affairs professionals to participate in the new frontier as better communicators and improved representatives of our Corps. Social networks allow us to more widely showcase the positive esprit de corps we share as Marines.

The Marine Corps must continuously innovate communication strategies in media-intensive environments to remain the nation's force in readiness. This mission is derived from Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025 and from the Division of Public Affairs tasks outlined in the Marine Corps Service Campaign Plan for 2009-2015.

These Marine Corps Social Media Principles are intended to outline how our core values should be demonstrated online to guide Marine's participation in this expanding communication medium, both when they are participating personally, as well as acting on behalf of the Marine Corps.

The Division of Public Affairs' Strategic Communications plan and all Department of Defense policy governing

Public Affairs in traditional media still apply in the online space; simply because the development and implementation of an online social media program can be fast, easy, and inexpensive doesn't mean that different rules apply.

The Marine Corps encourages all Marines to explore and engage in social media communities at a level at which they feel comfortable. The best advice is to approach online worlds in the same way we do the physical one -- by using sound judgment and common sense, by adhering to the Marine Corps' core values of honor, courage and commitment, and by following the Uniform Code of Military Justice and all other applicable policies.

Marine Corps Commitment

The Marine Corps strongly adheres to its core values in the online social media community, and we expect the same commitment from all Marine Corps representatives -- including Public Affairs and other Marine spokespersons. Any deviation from these commitments may be subject to disciplinary review or other appropriate action.

The Marine Corps' Core Values in the Online Social Media Community:

The vision to achieve sustainable credibility online is guided by accepted standards that we live by as public affairs officials:

Listen to active audiences to determine how to best engage in online social media. The paradigm of telling everyone what they need to know no longer carries significant weight when communicating via social media channels - social media requires, and begins with, listening. If Marines don't know and understand the audiences they are communicating with the response will be counterproductive. Listening to the online community and compliance with applicable Department of Defense policies is paramount to communications success. Marines must ensure that these online social media principles remain current and reflect the most up-to-date and appropriate standards of behavior.

Freedom of information and Transparency of releasable, unclassified and non-sensitive information will be made readily available to the public and provided upon request. Our organization's activities are legitimate and the assumption is, an informed public will agree with this principle. This guidance is formalized in law by the Freedom of Information Act that emphasizes the importance of transparency in military activities. The Marine Corps does not condone manipulating the social media flow by creating posts designed to mislead followers and control a conversation. Every Web site, "fan page", or other online destination that is ultimately controlled by the Marine Corps must make that fact known to users and must be authorized according to applicable internal protocols in order to track and monitor the Corps' collective online presence. All Marines engaging social media must disclose to this to their readers, when

they're associating with them, whether it is done in an official or un-official capacity. Marine Corps Public Affairs Officers or the Marine Officer in charge must monitor whether Marines are complying with this principle.

Timeliness is defined in terms of the information interests and demands of the public. Marines must anticipate these interests in order to effectively balance the timing of communication against the other methods of engagement. Early and open communication is paramount to credibility but must not sacrifice the security or privacy of the Corps or our Marines.

Privacy of individual service members must be protected. The Privacy Act of 1974 set this principle into law. Marines must remain conscientious with regard to any personally identifiable information that we collect, including how we collect, store, use, or share that information; all which should be done pursuant to applicable privacy policy, laws and information technology rules.

Security to operations, personnel, equipment and facilities must be anticipated and evaluated before information is communicated to the public. (For example: preventing the premature disclosure of dates, times and locations of deployments and homecomings to and from CONUS or ports of call.)

Intentionally communicate with the public to maintain a positive flow of information. This helps to avoid misunderstanding of commanders, policies and personnel, and assists in helping build an informed public opinion.

Unite the voice of all Marines engaged in social media speaking on behalf of the command. These Marines must have an accurate understanding of information that can, should, and should not be communicated to the public in order to ensure accuracy and preserve credibility during their interaction with others.

These values should guide the participation in the social media process and strengthen organizational credibility in the short, intermediate and long term.

Marines' online social media activities

The Marine Corps respects the rights of its Marines to use blogs and other social media tools not only as a form of self-expression, but also as a means to further explain the Marine Corps' story. It is important that all Marines are mindful of the implications through social media and online conversations that make reference to the Marine Corps. These Marines are potentially viewed as spokespersons and should be made aware that the Marine Corps may be held responsible or accountable for their behavior, statements and opinions in that capacity.

Marine Corps expectations for personal behavior in social media

There's a big difference between speaking "on behalf of the Marine Corps" and speaking "about" the Marine Corps. This following set of principles refers to personal or unofficial online activities where Marines might refer to the Marine Corps.

Adhere to the UCMJ and other applicable policies. All Marines, from officers to enlisted, must adhere to Department of Defense policy, Secretary of the Navy Instructions and Marine Corps Orders and Directives related to online media in every public setting.

Marines are responsible for their actions. Anything a Marine posts that can potentially tarnish the Marine Corps image will ultimately be their responsibility. The Marine Corps encourages Marines to participate in the online social media space, but urge them to do so properly, exercising sound judgment and common sense.

Be a "scout" for compliments and criticism. Even if a Marine is not an official online spokesperson, they are one of the most vital assets for monitoring the social media landscape. If a Marine comes across positive or negative remarks about the Marine Corps online they should consider sharing it with their local or command Public Affairs Office.

Let subject matter experts respond to negative posts. You may come across negative or disparaging posts about the Marine Corps or see third parties trying to spark negative conversations. Unless you are a trained Marine Corps online spokesperson, avoid the temptation to react yourself. Pass the post(s) along to official spokespersons that are authorized to address such comments at the unit's or command public affairs office.

Be conscious when mixing business and personal lives.

Online, a Marine's personal and business personas are likely to intersect. The Marine Corps respects the free speech rights of all Marines, but they must remember that civilians, fellow Marines and supervisors often have access to the online content you post. Marines must keep this in mind when publishing information online that can be seen by more than friends and family, and know that information originally intended just for friends and family can be forwarded on. Online content can, and will be shared with thousands or more people and is nearly impossible to retract once it has entered the public arena.

Remember: NEVER disclose non-public information about the Marine Corps or violate operational security and be aware that taking public positions online which are counter to the Marine Corps' interests could cause or result in conflict.

Marine Corps expectations for online spokespeople

Just as with traditional media, Marines have an opportunity to provide an inside perspective to the Marine Corps' reputation online and to engage and participate in potentially thousands of online conversations that mention the Marine Corps every day. The following 10 principles guide how our certified online spokespeople should represent the Marine Corps in an online, official capacity when they are speaking "on behalf of the Marine Corps:"

Get Certified in the Social Media Program. All Marines who choose to officially represent the Marine Corps online must complete Social Media Certificate training prior to beginning or continuing these activities. A training curriculum will be available from the social media team at the Defense Media Activity – Marine Corps Element and other Department of Defense entities.

Remember: you are representing the Marine Corps.

As a Marine, it is important that your posts convey the same journalistic excellence the Marine Corps instills in all of its communicators and public affairs professionals. Be respectful of all individuals, races, religions and cultures; how you conduct yourself in the online social media space not only reflects on you -- it is a direct reflection on the Marine Corps.

Fully disclose your affiliation with the Marine Corps.

All Marines who are communicating on behalf of the Marine Corps should always disclose their name and their affiliation. It is never acceptable to use aliases or mislead. State your relationship with the Marine Corps from the start, e.g., "Hi, I'm Cpl. John Smith and I'm an infantryman with 2/3...." This disclosure is equally important for any agency, vendor, contractor or third party who is representing the Marine Corps online.

Keep records. It is critical that social media Marines keep records of online interactions and monitor the corresponding conversations with whom we engage. Although online conversations are often fleeting and immediate, it is still important for Marines to keep track

of interactions when officially representing the Marine Corps. Online Marine Corps statements can be held to the same legal standards as traditional media communications. Marine Corps units or those with a social media presence should strive to keep records of any online dialogue pertaining to the Marine Corps.

Give credit where credit is due and don't violate others' rights. DO NOT claim to have authored something that is not yours. If you are using or referring to another's content, make certain that they are credited for it in your post and that they approve of you using their content. Do not use copyrights, trademarks, publicity rights, or other rights of others without the necessary permissions of the rights holder(s).

Be responsible for your duty assignment. The Marine Corps understands that Marines sometimes engage in online social media activities at work for legitimate purposes and that these activities may be helpful for Marine Corps public affairs. However, the Marine Corps encourages all Marines to exercise sound judgment and common sense to prevent online social media sites from becoming a distraction at work.

Remember that your local posts can have global significance. The way that Marines answer an online question might be accurate in some parts of the world, but inaccurate (or even illegal) in others. Marines must keep that "world view" in mind when participating in online conversations.

Know that the Internet is permanent. Once information is published online, it is essentially part of a permanent record, even if Marines "remove" or "delete" it later or attempt to make it anonymous.

Provide meaningful content. If your complete thought, along with its context, cannot be squeezed into a character-restricted space (such as Twitter), provide a link to an online space where the message can be expressed completely and accurately. It is difficult to effectively communicate a thought or concept about the Marine Corps or the Corps' position on a topic if you lose the reader in the process by getting too verbose or entering confusing posts.

Collaborate or Ask for Guidance. There is never a topic so important, urgent or immense that requires an immediate post or knee jerk reaction. Always gather the facts, know the rules, and understand the audience and be familiar with the medium through which you are communicating. If you need assistance, seek our your local public affairs office, command public affairs professionals, the staff at Headquarters Marine Corps Division of Public Affairs or the Social Media staff assigned to the Marine Corps production directorate at the Defense Media Activity.

Get more in depth guidelines, best practices and links to policy and resources at <http://www.marines.mil>