

CIPR Social Media (#ciprsm) Best Practice Guide

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Created by [CIPR social media panel](#)

The logo consists of the letters 'CIPR' in a white, serif font, centered within a solid red rectangular box.

CIPR

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Definition of Social Media

The CIPRsm panel defines social media as:

Social media is the term commonly given to Internet and mobile-based channels and tools that allow users to interact with each other and share opinions and content. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks and encouraging participation and engagement.

CIPR CODE OF CONDUCT

Principles to be applied to social media

All CIPR members are bound by the Code of Conduct, which is based around three core principles: Integrity, Competence and Confidentiality. The Code of Conduct should be adhered to when engaging in any public relations practice. The CIPR advises that these core principles are applied to all elements of a communications campaign including social media activity.

Section four of this document, social media dos and don'ts, provides practical advice on how the CIPR Code of Conduct can be applied to social media activity and engagement. These set of dos and don'ts are by no means extensive; they aim to cover the basics.

The guidelines are peppered with examples relating to specific social media platforms. These examples are used to illustrate the point. The individual generic guideline, which is outlined in bold, can typically be applied to all popular social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, LinkedIn and many more.

Further information about the CIPR Code of Conduct can be found here: http://www.cipr.co.uk/sites/default/files/code_of_conduct.pdf

Dos and Don'ts of Social Media

DO

1- Engage in conversation

Interacting with an audience through various social media channels can be the fun part of building a brand online! Regularly contributing to relevant conversations is key to creating a strong dialogue with stakeholders.

2- Ensure a brand is consistent across networks and platforms

If practitioners confuse their audience, they will lose their audience. Ensure various social media profiles give off a similar 'vibe'. Keeping the style and tone of voice consistent will help an audience identify and engage with a brand.

3- Disclose relationships when endorsing an organisation/ client / customer

For example, if a practitioner tweets (or re-tweets) client news, it is best to include [client] at the end of the tweet. If a practitioner tweets (or re-tweets) its employers news on a regular basis, it is best they declare their relationship by including the name of their employer in biography section of the Twitter profile.

4- Be honest about who 'manages' social media channels

An individual: if a practitioner is updating a Twitter account, Facebook fan page or a YouTube channel on behalf of another individual, for example, a fellow employee or a client CEO, it is best to be open and clearly state '@person' typically 'manages' the channel. Preferably, this information should be outlined in the biography or administration sections of the social media platforms.

For an organisation: if a practitioner is updating a Twitter account, Facebook fan page or a YouTube channel on behalf of an organisation or movement, then it can be assumed that the person or people managing the channel have a vested interest in the organisation. It is preferable to declare who 'manages' the channel but not necessary.

5- Outline content approval process from the offset

Work with the parties involved in social media activities to agree the process of approval at the beginning of the campaign. For example, each blog entry that has been ghost written must be approved by 'x', 'y' and 'z' executives. In addition, 'a' has permission to update Twitter account /Facebook page / YouTube channel on a regular basis and individual tweets / status updates /comments do not need to be approved.

6- Be transparent when updating information

If a practitioner is working with a community to update company or client related information it is important they are upfront about who they are and their intentions. For example, if a practitioner is looking to update a Wikipedia entry on behalf of a company or a client, it is best visit the **discussion /talk pages** and **work with an editor** to update the relevant page – all updates and entries to Wikipedia must be neutral in tone, factual and verifiable. Please read the Wikipedia guidelines carefully before submitting or editing an article.

7- Correct errors openly and in a timely manner

Always admit errors and openly 'put them right'. It is advisable to tackle an online crisis as soon as possible to stop it escalating out of control.

8- Add a 'views are my own' disclaimer where appropriate

This disclaimer is typically needed if a practitioner uses an individual social media account to share both personal and professional opinion on matters. For example, it is advisable to add a 'views are my own' disclaimer to a Twitter biography, if a practitioner tweets about client and industry related news / opinions, [professional] and also shares their personal views on a subject that lies outside of their work remit [personal] through the same Twitter account. This will avoid confusion and will re-enforce that a practitioner's personal opinion on issues is NOT the opinion of their company.

9- Be upfront about conflicts of interest and paid for opportunities

If writing or contributing to a blog which recommends a service supplier, make extra effort to make readers aware of any conflicts of interest, such as a financial or a partnership link between the client / member and the supplier.

10- Be respectful

Always seek permission when updating information and uploading images and videos featuring colleagues or clients to various social media platforms including but not exclusive to, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

DON'T

1- Forget that a social media presence becomes part of a brand legacy

Posts, pictures, images, tweets, status updates (content in general) can stay online forever. Think about what message to share via social media channels.

2- Make an audience feel uncomfortable

It is good to be authentic and provide a hint of personality but continuously being grumpy or openly criticising people can put an audience off and deter them from engaging with an individual or organisation.

3- Bring a company into disrepute

It is likely that most legally binding contracts include a clause about employees not bringing an organisation into disrepute. It is important to remember this clause relates to online activity as well as offline activity. Refer to social media guidelines to understand the online boundaries at a specific organisation.

4- Reveal company / client sensitive information or intellectual property

Offline information that should be kept confidential such as new business wins should not be disclosed online unless specific permission has been granted by the parties concerned; or unless it is in the public interest; or unless required to do so by law.

5- Be fake

Using 'flogs' (fake blogs created by a PR agency or organisation to promote a service or product) or 'astroturfing' (the practice of falsely creating the impression of independent, popular support by means of orchestrated and disguised public relations activity) is bad practice. CIPR suggests practitioners steer clear of these tactics.

Legal Considerations

A growing number of organisations are incorporating social media into their communications. As a relatively new phenomenon, this is still, in legal terms, a developing area. While the medium may be different, however, many of the legal considerations associated with print and broadcast need to be borne in mind. In the absence of legislation relating specifically to social media, English law has tended to use established areas of the law as a starting point in cases to date. This section details the legal considerations to take into account when working with social media.

There are several areas of legislation to consider:

1. Advertising Standards Authority
2. Intellectual Property (Creative Commons, copyright and trade marks)
3. Law of Confidence
4. Defamation
5. Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulation 2008
6. Data Protection 1998
7. Privacy (Human Rights 1998).
- 8.

These guidelines do not constitute legal advice. Action should be taken only after specific legal advice has been sought. The CIPR accepts no liability for any action taken or not taken as a result of this information.

In addition to the above legal considerations, members are advised to review the respective industry regulations as they may have specific policy and guidelines that also need to be taken into account. For example, a member working within the pharma industry is advised to review the policies and guidance of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry ([ABPI](#)) and members working in the financial services industry should refer to the Financial Services Authority ([FSA](#)).

Advertising Standards Authority's (ASA) Code of Practice

The ASA's digital remit

As of the 1st March 2011, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) extended its digital remit to cover marketing communications on companies' own websites and in other third party space under their control, such as Facebook and Twitter.

This move has a significant impact on marketing communications and PR practitioners as the extension empowers the ASA to apply the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing (the CAP Code) to marketing messages online.

Stephen Waddington, managing director of Speed Communications and member of the CIPRsm panel was one of many practitioners to work with the ASA to define the extension to the CAP code. Stephen summarises what does and doesn't fall under the CAP code on www.mycustomer.com. He states:

- **Websites.** For example, all copy and messages on your web site or in social media channels where a business is promoted must be "legal, decent and honest". All claims must be qualified and any statistical data must be properly referenced.
- **Press releases.** Press releases however are excluded from the CAP Code. The distinction lies in the labelling of the document and the fact that it is intended primarily for bloggers and journalists, and not consumers.
- **Search engine optimisation.** Natural search results that turn up via a Bing or Google search are excluded from the CAP Code however paid for advertisements are a form of advertising and fall within the remit of the code.
- **Social media conversations.** Here's where it gets tricky; user generated content falls within the new remit only if it is adopted and used proactively within an organisation's own marketing communications, on its own website or in other non-paid for space online under the organisation's control. Comments about a brand on a company's Facebook page by consumers as part of a natural conversation don't fall under a code, but if, for example, a company used those quotes to promote its business on its home page then they would fall under the ASA's scrutiny.
- **Video.** Promotional videos such as adverts or content aimed at selling a product or search are covered by the code but editorial video content intended to communicate an opinion are not.

The full article can be found here:

<http://www.cipr.co.uk/content/news-opinion/profession-news/74085/is-your-digital-pr-ready-for-the-asa-regulations->

Advice and further information about digital remit can be found here:

<http://www.cap.org.uk/CAPServices/Digital-remit-advice.aspx>

Further information relating to the CAP code can be found here:

http://www.cap.org.uk/The-Codes/CAP-Code/CAP-Code-Item.aspx?q=CAP+Code+new_Scope+of+the+Code#c2

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The use of visual and audio assets

Intellectual property (IP) describes ownership of an intellectual 'product' which may have commercial value. There are three main areas to consider: Creative Commons, copyright and trademarks.

Creative Commons

As social media is built upon interaction, information and content sharing specific protocols have been developed to facilitate and encourage the widespread and free distribution of content providing certain conditions are met.

This protocol is called Creative Commons and social media best practice suggests practitioners should strongly consider distributing and using Creative Commons licensed content where possible and appropriate. For example, there is a difference between using content for personal use (e.g. a personal blog) and commercial use (e.g. a company / client blog). Further information about the specific conditions for Creative Commons content usage can be found here:

<http://creativecommons.org/>

Members can search for freely licensed assets here:

<http://search.creativecommons.org/>

Copyright

Copyright covers material including literature, music, film, audio and art. If material is copyrighted, the copyright owner has certain economic and moral rights – for example, the right to be credited as the creator of the material and the right to be financially rewarded if another party uses the material.

In most cases, the copyright owner needs to give permission for the material to be used, although there are exceptions to this. The concept of fair uses in copyright law allows for certain actions with regards to copyrighted material; for example, there is provision for quoting from publicly available material if the source is cited, its use can be justified and only the necessary amount is included.

Information from Government websites may often be covered by Crown Copyright, which generally sets out terms for free use of material.

Further information about Copyright can be found here:

<http://www.copyrightservice.co.uk/copyright/>

Stock photography that is 'rights managed' (RM) can be found at sites such as:

- <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/>
- <http://www.istockphoto.com/>
- <http://www.corbisimages.com/>

These sites also provide 'royalty free' (RF) assets.

Trademarks

Trademarks include logos, slogans and words, and are 'signs' used to distinguish products or services of one company from another. A trademark owner has the right to prevent unauthorised use of that trademark.

Further information about trademarks and Intellectual Property in general can be found at: <http://www.ip.gov.uk/types.htm>.

THE LAW OF CONFIDENCE

Duty of confidentiality

The law of confidence in the UK is an important right, recognised by the courts and in the world of Intellectual Property. The law requires that a duty of confidentiality is established – this could be in the form of a written contract, for example an employment or business contract. However, the absence of a written document does not necessarily mean a duty of confidentiality does not exist.

Practical examples of circumstances where disclosure / confidentiality laws could be applied include:

- Announcing a new client account before all details have been finalised
- Posting financial information or reports for your own or a client's company
- Revealing information about a competitor
- Revealing information that is not in the public domain.

Public relations practitioners should bear in mind issues around disclosure and confidentiality when posting information to any social media platform about their own company, a client or a competitor. If in doubt, it is best to seek permission from senior members of staff, a client, or on some occasions, a legal team.

DEFAMATION

Libel statements

Defamation is the act of making a statement about a person or company that is considered to harm reputation, for example by lowering others' estimation of the person or company, or by causing them to lose their rank or professional standing.

If the defamatory statement is written down (in print or online) it is known as libel. If it is spoken, it is known as slander. There are exceptions to this – posting a defamatory statement online or recording it on a podcast would both be examples of libel.

Points to note:

- A company may be held responsible for something an employee has written or said if it is on behalf of the company or on a company-sanctioned space including a blog or website
- Action can also be taken against you for repeating libelous information from another source, so a member must check carefully before quoting statements from other blogs or websites. This can also apply to linking to defamatory information
- A member should consider whether a statement can be proved before writing or using it (in print or online) – in English law, the onus is on the person making the statement to establish its truth
- A company that provides a forum for blogging can be liable for defamatory statements they host.

CONSUMER PROTECTION FROM UNFAIR TRADING REGULATIONS 2008

'Misleading' and 'unfair' practices

The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations sets out how commercial practices can be unfair through misleading or aggressive practices and lists 31 specific practices that are banned.

This regulation does not specifically relate to social media however any practice used online which is deemed unfair, misleading or aggressive will fall under these rules. For example, 'astroturfing' and 'flogs' (outlined in section four) are not best practice and would be deemed misleading.

Further information about Consumer Protection law can be found here: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2008/9780110811574/contents>

DATA PROTECTION 1998

The use of consumer details

Some social media campaigns may allow members or their clients to collect data on consumers'. For example, clients may run competitions where consumers must register through a website. In cases such as these, it is important for members to be aware that UK data protection laws state (amongst other things) that visitors to websites must be aware of how their details are being used.

Further information about the Data Protection Act 1998 can be found here: http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/data_protection.aspx.

PRIVACY

The rights of individuals

The legal concept of privacy in the UK is complex as there is no one privacy law. However, the Human Rights Act 1998 incorporates the right to privacy for both individuals and companies. The law of confidence is bound with the right to privacy, and many legal cases centering around the right to a private life focus on breaches of confidentiality.

It is advisable to seek permission from colleagues or clients before disclosing information on a blog, website or social network.

Further information about the Human Rights Act 1998 can be found here: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents>

Guidance for Employers

There is much debate over the boundaries companies should set for their employees' use of social media, and there is, as yet, no definitive answer.

The CIPR advises that employer and employee are both responsible for understanding and adhering to social media best practice. The social media dos and don'ts are general guidelines for employees. As an employer, it is advisable for a member to take the following into consideration:

1- Understand the circumstances under which employers can be held legally responsible for online content published by their employees

Situations that may apply include action taken as part of their role for the company and material published on an official company space or somewhere that has been previously sanctioned by the company.

2- Ensure employees are familiar with social media best practice

Encourage employees to adhere to the CIPR code of conduct and follow the social media guidelines when engaging in any public relations practice

3- Inform employees of the company policy / code of conduct / guidelines on social media

Giving employees clear guidelines on what is and isn't considered acceptable helps both parties to understand the parameters when dealing with social media from an employment perspective. A social media policy can be incorporated into email and Internet policies; it may also be deemed necessary to include a clause relating to social media in staff contracts.

Consideration should be given to what steps will be taken if the policy is disregarded by an employee.

4- Review and update

Employers should regularly review the legal considerations to ensure they are following the most recent law or protocol. If an update does occur, the policy / code of conduct / guidelines on social media should be updated, accordingly.

Social Media Measurement

Social media measurement plays a fundamental role in demonstrating the effectiveness of social media activity. Social media *can* be measured but, unfortunately, as of yet the PR profession has not created an industry wide measurement standard. However, thanks to the Barcelona Principles agreed in July 2010, the global PR profession is united behind a set of principles that lay AVE to rest and clearly recognise the importance of measuring outcomes linked to organisational objectives.

For further information on how to measure social media, can be found here:

The CIPR research, planning and measurement toolkit –
<http://www.cipr.co.uk/content/policy-resources/for-practitioners/planning-and-measurement>

The CIPR social media measurement guidance -
http://www.cipr.co.uk/sites/default/files/Final_Social_Media_Measurement_Guidance%20March_2011.pdf

Links

Resources for CIPR Members

- **CIPR Code of Conduct** - <http://www.cipr.co.uk/content/membership-networking/code-conduct>
- **The CIPR research, planning and measurement toolkit** – <http://www.cipr.co.uk/content/policy-resources/for-practitioners/planning-and-measurement>
- **CIPR social media measurement guidelines** - http://www.cipr.co.uk/sites/default/files/Social%20media%20measurement%20guidance%20March%202011_0.pdf
- **Social media (a starting point)** - <http://www.cipr.co.uk/content/news-opinion/features/pr-and-technology/5153/social-media-a-starting-point>
- **Law and the PR practitioner** - <http://www.cipr.co.uk/content/policy-resources/businesses/legal-resources/law-and-pr-practitioner/law-and-pr-practitioner>
- **PR and technology** - <http://www.cipr.co.uk/content/news-opinion/features/pr-and-technology>
- **Further information regarding comparative advertising/PR: trademarks, defamation, malicious falsehood, codes and regulations** - <http://www.cipr.co.uk/content/policy-resources/businesses/legal-resources/comparative-advertising/pr/comparative-advertising-pr>
- **See CIPR skill guides for practical advice on blogging, online videos and much more** - <http://www.cipr.co.uk/content/policy-resources/practitioners/skills-guides>

Useful links

Disclaimer: The links listed below are not controlled by the CIPR. The content of these websites is intended as a helpful starting point in your research; the content is not controlled or endorsed in any way by the CIPR and the websites listed are not under CIPR control.

Social media (including blogging, community and social networking) guidelines:

- Intel Social Media Guidelines - http://www.intel.com/sites/sitewide/en_us/social-media.htm
- BBC Personal Use of Social Media - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/page/guidance-blogs-personal-summary#editorial-guidelines-issues>
- Guardian Community Guidelines and FAQ - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/community-faqs>

Examples of company privacy policies:

- BBC - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/privacy/>
- IBM - <http://www.ibm.com/privacy/us/en/>

- ITV - <http://www.itv.com/Privacypolicy/>

Advice on social media measurement:

- Katherine D Paine's PR Measurement Blog - <http://kdpaine.blogs.com/>
- Philip Sheldrake's social web analytics eBook - <http://www.socialwebanalytics.com/>

Further information on legislation and laws to consider:

- Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 - http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/draft/ukdsi_9780110811574_en_1
- Advertising Standards Authority extension of digital remit - <http://www.asa.org.uk/Media-Centre/2010/ASA-digital-remit-extension.aspx>
- ASA Advice on digital extension - <http://www.cap.org.uk/CAPServices/Digital-remit-advice.aspx>
- CAP information - <http://www.cap.org.uk/The-Codes/CAP-Code/CAP-Code-Item.aspx?q=CAP+Code+new+Scope+of+the+Code#c2>
- Creative Commons information - <http://creativecommons.org/>
- Copyright information - <http://www.copyrightservice.co.uk/copyright/>
- Trademarks and Intellectual Property information - <http://www.ipo.gov.uk/types.htm>
- Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 - http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/draft/ukdsi_9780110811574_en_1
- Data Protection Act 1998 - http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/data_protection.aspx
- Human Rights Act 1998 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents>

With thanks to the CIPRsm panel:

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- Stuart Bruce MCIPR – Managing Director, Wolfstar (@stuartbruce)
- Dominic Burch - Head of Corporate Communications, ASDA (@dom_asdaPR)
- Simon Collister - Head of Non-Profit and Public Sector, We Are Social (@simoncollister)
- Gemma Griffiths ACIPR – Managing Director, the crowd and i (@GemGriff)
- Katy Howell – Managing Director, Immediate Future (@katyhowell)
- Marshall Manson - Director of Digital Strategy, Edelman (@marshallmanson)
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- Danny Rogers – Editor, PR Week (@dannyrogers2001)
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