

Social Networking Etiquette

If you use social networking to promote your organization, it is important to do so in a professional manner. There are general conventions that apply to all social networking interactions in addition to ones that are specific to each network. It is wise to read through the rules for each network you belong to. As an example, in Facebook they have stated "Rights and Responsibilities" and LinkedIn has a lengthy User Agreement. Track down the one for the network you are using, familiarize yourself with it and follow their rules. Your compliance will reflect favorably on how you are perceived on the network.

Here are some other common social networking conventions that every organization should follow in order to present a professional appearance:

1. Be truthful in the information you provide about yourself, including the picture you post. Lies and overly touched up pictures have a way of coming back to haunt you. And, potential clients and other connections are going to wonder how you run your business if they find that you have lied on your profile. Lies include exaggerations of your experience, knowledge and skills. Silence is better than saying things that are not true.
2. Be selective about the information you share. If you are there for business reasons, responding on very personal information isn't necessary. Just because the network site asks the question, doesn't mean you need to fill in an answer.
3. Provide information about why you want to be a friend/connection when you request the link. Revise the standard friend request to include comments from you about yourself so that the person knows who you are and why you want the connection. You may remember them, but they may not remember you.
4. Choose your friends/connections carefully. Who is in your network says something about you. If someone asks to friend you or be a connection and you aren't interested, feel free to ignore them. Although it sometimes feels like the person with the most friends/connections wins, that is not true. Be selective. It is better to have a clearly focused group that you interact with than the most friends/connections.
5. Type in normal upper and lower case with correct spelling and grammar. All caps is considered shouting on the Internet. If spelling and grammar are really a problem for you, type the entry in a word processor first. Limit the number of emoticons and acronyms you use. While it is nice to add a little personality to your comments, don't go overboard. And, never use inappropriate language, even mild euphemisms. That is a turn off to many, many people.
6. Refrain from mixing personal use and business use in a social network. Unless you are discussing your passion for the organization, you don't want your customers and other associates knowing personal details of your life. This is not to say that you can't post things about yourself, just keep in mind that what you do post represents the organizations views as well as your own.
7. Post positive comments. That doesn't mean you need to be overly gushy. It simply reflects badly on you if you speak negatively about anyone or anything. If you have difficulty with being positive, try to state your comments in neutral terms, tempering them with a caveat about your concerns. Being snarky, gossipy and negative is simply not professional.

8. Send a limited number of messages to your connections/friends. None of them should be spam (i.e. unwanted solicitations). It is fine to send major announcements (changes in business hours, new locations, special sales), but you will lose friends and connections if you bombard them with endless information or promotions that are not useful to them.

Observing good etiquette is an important component in any business message. What it says about you is that you care about how the message is received and respect the recipient. Be sure you act as respectful online as you do in person, if not more so.