



THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

TWITTER GUIDANCE

The past five years has seen a revolution in the way people communicate on the internet. Social media, which includes sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, allows people to stay in touch with each other 24 hours a day. The public can hold conversations with thousands of people at once, and get instant feedback on their actions and opinions.

As the lead for social media in West Midlands Police, I want to ensure we are embracing all of the latest technology available to communicate with our communities. There is a genuine thirst from the public to know what officers are doing, and to be kept informed using social media, and I want officers and staff to take advantage of this.

To help you we have put together this guidance document which gives you hints and tips to make sure your Twitter account is a success and avoids some of the potential pitfalls.

Essentially, the most important thing to remember is to use your common sense – once you have an account, make sure you use it regularly and respond to questions that you are asked and don't post anything that you would not say to the public or you would not want to see printed in the media.

Every message that you put out needs to serve a policing purpose, and remember to think about the values-based decision making model whenever you are using social media, in the same way as you do with any other decision that you make at work.

This guidance is around the *professional* use of social media but in respect of its *personal* use, I would urge staff to look closely at the policy and think carefully about any information they are putting into the public domain. This follows some learning from the USA and other countries, which shows there is a risk of being compromised if users fail to take common sense precautions.

Social media gives us lots of new opportunities to engage with our communities in new, innovative ways, enhancing their trust and confidence in their local police. Let's ensure that we use it effectively.

Assistant Chief Constable Sharon Rowe

Press & PR Dept, Social Media Guidance – Twitter

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1 August 2011

PERSONAL USE OF TWITTER

It is important that officers and staff remember

- Check the security settings on your personal account. Consider making your Twitter account closed so that you have to approve followers.
- Don't make reference to working for West Midlands Police.
- Be careful about identifying lots of personal information, such as details of your family and friends.
- Be very careful about posting photographs of your family on Facebook.
- Be careful about the opinions that you put onto Facebook. Remember that whilst WMP will not be monitoring your account, any complaints that are received will be investigated by Professional Standards, even if your account is private and not associated to WMP.

BEFORE STARTING OUT....

- Be clear about how your use of Twitter will benefit the organisation. For example, if you are a neighbourhood officer, the advantage of being able to communicate directly with the public is a benefit. If you work for a central department, the messages that you want to get out might be better coming from one of the LPU or central Twitter accounts.
- Are you clear about WHY you want to tweet – is it for a clear policing purpose e.g. to increase trust and confidence? What are the business benefits you can bring to the organisation? What benefits will the public get from your messages? Will there be an outcome from your message?
- Do you have the time to tweet? Out of date sites look unprofessional.
- Who do you want to read your messages and how are you going to attract them? Have you drawn up a communications plan?

STARTING OUT

- Talk to your supervisor who needs to approve your request.
- Read the Social Media Policy, available on the intranet (Press and PR > Social Media)
- Put together a business case outlining what you want to do and the benefits of doing it. Guidance can be found on the Press and PR intranet site. Submit the case to the press office.
- Go to www.twitter.com
- Sign up. If your account is going to be used as a police account, you can use your police email address.
- When naming your account use the format "FirstnameSurnameWMP"
- Make sure your password is strong and unique. Don't just use your name, collar number, or the name of your team. Use a combination of upper and lower case letters, numbers and symbols.
- Choose a good picture of yourself to go with your account.
- **Tell your local Communications Manager, Communications Officer, or the central multi-media team your login details and your password.**
- Use the search tool to find local tweeters, people that you know, and start to follow them. They will then generally start to follow you back and see the posts that you are putting out.
- Tell the community that you are on Twitter. Talk to you local Communications Officer about how you can promote your account.
- Read the Home Office "██████████" document which gives you lots of insight into social media and how it can be used successfully by police.
- Start tweeting!

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VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Regular updates

The success of Twitter relies on users regularly tweeting. While we don't want officers spending all of their time on the internet, it's important that you don't leave your account without an update for weeks.

Broadcast vs engagement

The key to Twitter is to engage with your followers (i.e. have conversations, answer their questions and join in their discussions) as well as broadcast (i.e. tell them what you are doing). So ask your followers questions and answer any questions that they ask you.

Keep it interesting

Tell them about the operations that you have done, what you are doing to tackle local priorities and ask them what they think about policing issues. Don't be afraid to talk a bit about yourself if you want to – it shows your human side!

Be careful about personal opinions

The best way to keep followers interested is to make your tweets more personal, so you can talk about what you are doing outside of work. However, remember that you are still representing West Midlands Police, so try to avoid making comments or giving opinions that might be controversial. For example, avoid political preferences, comments about other stories in the news or comments that criticise other people.

Avoid the use of text speak

You only have 140 characters for each tweet, so you need to keep it brief, but avoid using text abbreviations, such as "lol", "gr8", "2moro". Remember it's a work tool and you're representing WMP.

Be careful about logging into the account from smartphones

Particularly if it is somebody else's phone. Smartphones generally stay logged in once you have put in your name and password.

People reporting crime

We cannot accept reports of crime through our social media sites. If somebody tries to report a crime, refer them to the 0345 113 5000 number, and this webpage, <http://www.west-midlands.police.uk/contact-us/reporting-crime> which explains what to do to report a crime.

TWITTER TERMS

Hash tag – Twitter uses hash tags (#) as searchable terms. This allows people to search for a particular phrase and see every post on Twitter which has been tagged, even if you are not following the users.

For example, #serveprotectwmp has been added to all the tweets sent out about Serve and Protect. Anybody who searches for #serveprotectwmp would see a list of tweets with that hash tag.

Hash tags need to be as unique as possible, but keep them short as they will use up your character limit!

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If you want to use Twitter for a specific purpose - such as to promote an event – don't create a new account, but use a hash tag. This way you will not have to spend time building up lots of followers but instead be able to signpost existing followers.

@mentions – if you are referring to another Twitter user, adding their name with an @ at the beginning (such as @WMPolice) will mean that your tweet will appear in that person's Twitter feed. This means you can see people that mention you in your Twitter feed and respond to their comment or question.

Re-tweet – you can forward on messages from other people by simply clicking on the re-tweet icon on the message and it will appear in your Twitter feed.

DOs AND DON'Ts

Do:

- Tell people what you are doing as often as you can. Try to make your tweets as interesting as possible.
- Tweet your team's meeting dates.
- Tweet agreed priorities and feedback from meetings – let your community know what priorities they have set you to work on.
- Keep an eye on other police accounts and re-tweet anything that's relevant to your followers.
- Link back to www.west-midlands.police.uk whenever possible (neighbourhood accounts will be directly linked to your LPU web pages).
- Avoid jargon and formal language.
- Promote your Twitter account when you're out and about.
- Update your followers following successful appeals etc.

Don't:

- Tweet about mispers without following the correct process. (We have to have the permission of the family to put any information out to the media / public. If we have done an appeal then you can tweet, but remember you will need to tell people when they are found.)
- Tweet when you are going to an incident (officers have tweeted about incidents while on the way, then turned up and found nobody is there.)
- Let criminals know when your neighbourhood team is on and off duty.
- Tweet from a **live** incident. The media will be reading your tweets. As soon as you publish that something is happening they will have the story and you may compromise an investigation. This is particularly important with major incidents such as murder investigations.
- Don't tweet jokes or 'blags'. Although it might seem a light hearted way to engage with your followers it might make you or the force look unprofessional, and is likely to be picked up by the media.

PICTURES AND TWITPIC

Tweet pictures using www.twitpic.com via your Twitter login details. From here you can upload pictures which to link into your Twitter account.

Tweeting pictures makes your account more interesting to your followers and gives you a chance to show the public what you are doing.

Remember:

- Don't tweet images of wanted people or suspects.
- Don't tweet pictures of juveniles.
- Don't tweet pictures of anything that may be used as evidence in court.
- Don't tweet graphic or sensationalist images, eg, pictures of vehicles involved in RTCs.
- Don't identify crime scenes. You can tweet pictures from scenes such as cannabis factories, but don't do anything that would identify addresses, victims or suspects.
- Don't tweet anything from a crime scene that is outside the investigation or policing – for example, we have had instances where people have tweeted pictures of pets owned by the arrested people.
- Make sure that if you have taken pictures of people who can be identified, you have sort their permission and they have signed a release form (available from the press office)
- Be careful about tweeting pictures of children. Not only will you need parental permission (as above) but some Safeguarding Boards do not allow pictures of school children to be used on any social networking sites.

INFORMATION POSTED ONLINE SHOULD NOT:

- Contain personal details of other people
- Contact protectively marked, sensitive, restrictive or sensitive information
- Be libellous
- Breach copyright
- Undermine operational activities or the security of staff
- Damage the reputation of WMP

SOME USEFUL MESSAGES

1. What do you want us to tackle in your neighbourhood?
2. Local meeting dates
3. Priorities
4. Good court results
5. Relevant appeals
6. The arrest of a regular trouble maker (don't give people's names!)
7. Beat the burglar - don't forget to lock your doors and windows when you leave the house
8. Shed break-ins
9. If you have elderly friend and relatives make sure that they check ID, use a door chain?
10. What we are doing to tackle ASB?

DELETING MESSAGES

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It's easy to delete a message – but remember tweets are never really deleted from the internet.

IF YOU NEED TO LEAVE...

If you are moving to a new position or want to stop tweeting, think about how you're going to leave and don't just stop tweeting eg:

Can you pass the account on to somebody else? For example if you are a neighbourhood officer and a new officer is going to take your place, simply change the account name to theirs. That way they can keep all of the followers from that community, without having to start again.

Make sure that you let people know this is what you are going to do.

Tell your followers where you are going (if you can). Don't just stop, tell them why you are stopping (changing teams, not able to give them regular updates, new position etc)

Do you want to use your account in your new position? If you have a new position and will be able to carry on tweeting interesting and relevant information to your followers then carry on using it.

Remember that your followers may have initially decided to follow you for a particular reason (for example you are their neighbourhood officer) and you might be better handing over to the person taking over from you.

What to do if your account is hacked

Twitter accounts can be compromised using a low level phishing scam. This allows third parties to send out messages to your followers, purporting to come from you. Clicking on a link in the message allows the third party access to your account.

To protect yourself, follow these steps:

- Do NOT click on any link you are unsure about - even if the message originates from someone you trust.
- If you suspect you may have done this, change your password immediately.
- Inform the Press Office as soon as possible if you suspect your account has been compromised and give them your new password.
- Check there aren't any Applications that you don't recognise in your Settings > Applications page. Revoke access to any that you aren't sure about.

For more information see: <http://blog.twitter.com/2010/02/avoid-phishing-scams.html>

Updated Guidance

This guidance will be updated regularly to reflect any changes in the use of Twitter. To view the most up-to-date guidance, please see the Press & PR Dept's website or click here: http://intranet2/hq_departments/press_and_pr/multimedia_and_web_development/social_me

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