

Social Media Troubleshooting

Description: Social media scenarios and guidelines inspired by the collective experience of social media managers in the Service

Purpose: To help troubleshoot those complicated or less-than-ideal social media scenarios that leave you asking “What should I do in this situation on behalf of the Service?” Government is a forum for the people, and we want to encourage open communication at all times. Our hope is to turn a potentially negative situation into something positive.

Food for thought from *Consumer Reports* (2012):

- 68% of consumers that posted a complaint or a negative comment on social networking sites, about their negative experiences, got a response from the retailer/business/agency.
- 18% of them turned into loyal customers and consumed more goods/services/information.
- **33% of them turned around and posted a positive review after that**
- 34% of them deleted their negative review that they had left earlier.
- 25% of customers expect a response within an hour, and 6% expect a response within 10 minutes.

Scenario 1: *You have made a mistake on your page and didn't realize it immediately. This mistake is brought to your attention by your leadership and/or members of the public that follow your page.*

1) Consider the scope of the mistake.

- If the mistake is **relatively small** (e.g. you misidentified/misspelled the name of a person, species, or place), you can simply correct it by clicking on the post itself and choosing the ‘edit’ option. Note: This may not be an option if you have commented on post you have shared from another page. In this instance, you can leave the post “as is”.
- If the mistake is **larger in scope** (e.g. you accidentally presented inaccurate information or commented on an issue outside of the scope of our work), your first step should be an apology. Admitting as quickly as possible that you made a mistake will help diffuse the situation.

2) Secondly, take down (or hide) the post from your page unless editing the post in some way will correct the problem.

3) Lastly, consider tagging those you offended offering an additional apology and an explanation. This added step will be unexpected and has the potential to turn an unhappy “customer” into an advocate - see Consumer Report stats above.

Scenario 2: *There is a comment of a questionable nature on your page and you aren't sure if you should delete it, respond to it, or ignore it.*

1) If the comment is blatantly offensive or derogatory (e.g. using profanity, racial slurs, hate speech, etc.) **delete it**. Per our Comment Policy, we welcome questions, comments, and even disagreement, but negative or hurtful remarks don't further the kind of respectful conversation we are trying to engage in with our public. This also applies to "fights" that breakout between commenters on a subject. Once the comments become personal attacks, these comments should be taken down to discourage negative dialogue.

We never discriminate against any views, but we reserve the right to delete any of the following:

- violent, obscene, profane, hateful, or racist comments
- comments that threaten or defame any person or organization
- solicitations, advertisements, or endorsements of any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency
- comments that suggest or encourage illegal activity
- multiple successive off-topic posts by a single user
- repetitive posts copied and pasted by multiple users
- personal information such as email addresses, telephone numbers, or mailing addresses

Egregious or repeated violations of the comment policy may result in the deletion of your comment or the reporting of your account to third party site administrators.

2) If the comment is a question (about policy, a species, an event, etc.), always answer the question accurately and in a timely fashion. **Even if the question is negative or accusatory**, respond with tact and respect, and only respond to the aspects of the question for which you can provide additional insight and information. (Remember, you are representing the entire agency, so if you feel frustrated, step away from the computer and try again later.)

- **If the question merits a complex, detailed response that will not fit on Facebook and/or may not be ideal for posting to Facebook**, (e.g. "Why won't you let beach sweepers on refuges affected by the oil spill?") ask the commenter if you may contact them via email or some other means, and work to develop a personalized response.
- **If you are certain you can answer the question accurately yourself**, go ahead and answer. Always provide a link to an additional resource, such as an FWS website or fact sheet, that validates your response.
- **If you cannot answer the question yourself**, you have three options:
 - **Consult a Subject Matter Expert**. Send the question to an expert in the agency and ask for their assistance developing a response. If you do not receive a response within a few hours, reply and let the commenter know that you are consulting with an agency expert on the matter, and that you will get back to them soon.
 - **Do your research**. Search FWS resources first, then move on to other federal government agency or state agency resources. Again, provide a link to either your source or somewhere that validates your response.

- **Consider taking the opportunity to turn the question into a new post.** Respond to the commenter letting them know they asked a quality question, and you are working to develop a new post to answer it.

3) If the comment is advocacy-related or politically charged (e.g. You post about a book on the historic range of condors including the Pacific Northwest and someone responds with “Bring condors back to the PNW! Hunters and their lead shot and climate change are to blame for the decline of these beautiful creatures. Guns should be banned and USFWS should reintroduce condors!!!”), consider the following:

- **The agency stance on the issue.** USFWS is not discussing reintroducing (or not) condors. This book simply shares information about their historic range. Be sure you know where we stand on an issue before you post about it.
- **Have an idea on the public opinion on this issue and check with leadership on sensitive or controversial issues.** Do not respond to any aspects of the comment that are not directly related to the work of our agency (e.g. the banning of guns.) This example is both advocacy related (pro-condor reintroduction) and politically charged (anti-gun) and will likely incite backlash that you won’t be able to moderate.

4) If the comment is strange or doesn’t make sense (a non sequitur, a religious exclamation, etc.), consider leaving it in place. If it doesn’t offend anyone or contain misinformation, don’t respond to it but leave it on the page.

5) If the comment is positive, interesting, or helpful (e.g. “Great work!” or “Nice video USFWS! I took this video in my backyard this morning of a rare silverspot butterfly!”), say thank you!

- The simplest way to show gratitude and acknowledgement is to “Like” the person’s comment.
- If the comment merits a more thoughtful response, **respond as quickly as possible** and consider **taking your response a step further** by using the posters name in your reply. Type the @ symbol and then begin typing their name. For example, your response to someone sharing the butterfly video might be: *@John Smith, thanks for this great video! We really enjoyed it and we are happy to hear the butterfly has found a refuge in your beautiful yard! You can learn more about the endangered silverspot and the work we do to protect it at: www.website.com. Let us know if you see any more of these rare beauties and keep the awesome videos coming!*

6) Consult this useful flowchart from Rignite and refer to their material on social media workflow/crisis response <http://bit.ly/18DFCup>:

Scenario 3: You receive requests to ‘like’, re-tweet, follow, or otherwise promote a person, agency, cause, or group.

1) If they are an advocacy/politically-minded group: If you receive a request in the form of a direct message (Twitter or Facebook) from an advocate or advocacy group, respond to them by thanking them for reaching out to us. Politely respond that we are a government agency and that our policy is to inform the public with sound science rather than take sides on an issue. If they post on the wall, delete the post in order to maintain a neutral tone on the Service page.

2) If they are an individual with an interest in our issues or a Friends group: If you receive a request in the form of a direct message (Twitter or Facebook) from an individual member of the public, consider following, or liking them. **Be sure to:**

- Research the kind of tweets and posts they do. Get an idea of their social media influence and the tone of their messages.
- Re-tweet with caution! Be aware that re-tweeting is viewed by some as an endorsement of a message.

3) If they are a media outlet: If you receive a request in the form of a direct message (Twitter or Facebook) from a media outlet, consider following them or liking their Page. **Be sure to:**

- Do your research. Who is their audience? What issues do they cover? Have they covered stories on the Service? Are they aligned with certain advocacy or political groups?
- If research reveals this to be a neutral media outlet or one that portrays government/Service work favorably, direct message them with a thank you and explore potential ways to use this media outlet to promote the Service.

4) If they are a brand: If you receive a request in the form of a direct message (Twitter or Facebook) from a brand or other for-profit entity, respond to them by thanking them for reaching out to us. Politely respond that we are a government agency and that it violates our policy to endorse or otherwise promote the sale of goods or services. If they post on your wall, that is in violation of our Comment Policy. Delete the post.

5) If they are another agency: If you receive a request in the form of a direct message (Twitter or Facebook) from another agency, consider following, or liking them. Research who they are, their mission, who else they follow, and who follows them. If their issues and mission seem in alignment with ours, direct message them with a thank you and explore potential ways to collaborate with a new partner.