BBC use of social networking, microblogs and other third party websites

This guidance note should be read in conjunction with BBC Editorial Guidelines and the BBC Online Editorial Guidelines.

In cases of doubt, further assistance can be sought from the duty Editorial Policy Adviser by telephoning 0370 333 4550 or BBC extension (02) 81819.

All Guidance Notes can be found on Gateway (BBC internal link) and on bbc.co.uk.

This guidance note relates to BBC use of social networking, microblogs and other third party websites. For guidance on personal use of social networking sites, blogs and microblogs, please see the guidance note on Personal use of social networking and other third party websites.

Introduction

This guidance is intended to help BBC producers implement the BBC Social Media strategy on social networking and microblogging sites. The strategy relies on the BBC engaging with users on the sites where they go, in the conversations they are having, off bbc.co.uk as much as on bbc.co.uk, in part so that users who may consume little or no BBC content can discover for themselves and enjoy more of what we have to offer.

It assumes that within this framework for engagement, a flexible approach is necessary, as social networking and microblogging sites continue to evolve and as we learn what approaches work best in different places.

The guidance complements the BBC Social Media strategy principles, including the following:

- With conversations, participate online; don't "broadcast" messages to users

- Don't bring the BBC into disrepute

- With moderation, only police where we have to; trust our users where we don't

- Be open and transparent in our social media dealings

1. Scope

This guidance is primarily designed to cover informal, non-contractual BBC presences on third party social networking and microblogging sites. These are most likely to be BBC-branded but they may simply be set up by the BBC to pursue our public purposes. The guidance is not primarily designed to cover formal, contractual BBC partnerships on social networking sites (e.g. *YouTube*), although some of the guidance will be relevant and useful in these circumstances.

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It is not intended to apply to sites which are set up and run by users to talk about BBC content or talent.

Where the BBC already has a formal partnership, producers should normally see if the available BBC channel fits their editorial purpose before creating their own site.

2. Hybrid sites

It should be clear to users whether the site they are interacting with is a BBC page run by the BBC for BBC purposes or whether this is a personal page run by an individual for their own purposes.

We should avoid creating or endorsing "hybrid" sites which contain elements of both and which are likely to cause confusion, editorial problems and brand damage. For example, a presenter's personal profile should not have a URL or username or avatar which contains a BBC brand or programme name.

A successful BBC microblog is likely to be personal in tone but it must not contain any personal views which would damage the BBC's reputation, for example over impartiality.

For guidance on personal sites of BBC staff and BBC talent, including blogs and microblogs, see the guidance note on Personal use of social networking and other third party websites.

3. Editorial Purpose

Discuss what you want to do first with the relevant Interactive Editor or senior editorial figure, and the relevant Head of Marketing.

• What is the editorial purpose? How does this fit in with your overall editorial and marketing strategy?

• Could you achieve the same effect or better on bbc.co.uk?

• Does the site appeal to a key demographic not available via bbc.co.uk? Is this the right site to engage with your audiences?

• Does anything similar already exist? If it does, would working with an existing presence be better for users and for the BBC?

• What commitment are you willing to make to the site? Do you have the resources you need to keep it refreshed and relevant? For how long?

• What is your exit strategy?

• How will you measure success? Try to set a target and a review point before you launch

- Is your overall investment in time and/or money likely to be worth the benefit the offshore presence is likely to deliver?

- The relevant Interactive Editor/senior editorial figure will nominate a named editorial owner for the page. They will be responsible for maintaining and refreshing it.

- The relevant Social Media representative for each Division will have overall responsibility for keeping a record of any informal, non-contractual pages/profiles/sites set up by their teams on third party social networking sites. Formal, contractual BBC partnerships may be dealt with separately.

4. Use of the BBC Brand

You can put the brand/logo of your network, programme or event on a third party site. This has the advantage of transparency. Remember that a BBC logo is intended to give the impression that this is a genuine, authorised, BBC presence so the nature of that presence should reflect credit on the brand.

- Any logos should, where possible, contain links back to the relevant page on BBC Online. If this cannot be done technically, the link should be as close as possible to the logo

- If you have a query about the correct use of the BBC's brands, ask the relevant Head of Marketing who may consult the Head of Brand Guardianship

If you do not use a logo, it should be clear to users that they are interacting with a BBC page run by the BBC.

5. Content syndication

This guidance does not deal with what forms of content you can upload to your page/profile. For advice in this area, see the Syndication Guidelines. If in doubt, refer to Controller, Business Development, FM&T.

6. Social Media Representatives

New kinds of informal activity on third party sites will need to be discussed with the relevant Division's Social Media Representative. Interactive Editors/senior editorial figures should keep their Divisional Representatives informed of all relevant activity. One reason for this is to manage risk; another is to share valuable new experience across the Divisions.

7. Tone of voice

We should be sensitive to the expectations of existing users of the specific site. If we add a BBC presence, we are joining their site rather than the opposite. Users are likely to feel that they already have a significant stake in it. When adding an informal BBC presence, we should "go with the grain" and be sensitive to user customs and conventions to avoid giving the impression that the BBC is imposing itself on them and their space.

For example, we should respect the fact that users on site X are not our users; they are not bound by the same Terms of Use and House Rules as we apply on BBC Online. Attempts to enforce our standard community rules on third party sites may lead to resentment, criticism and in some cases outright hostility to the BBC's presence.

This is not to say that behaviour likely to cause extreme offence, for example racist insults, should be tolerated by the BBC on a BBC-branded space on a social networking site. It should not. Neither should behaviour which is clearly likely to put a child or teenager at substantial risk of significant harm. But where we do decide to intervene, we will normally need to do so with a light touch, sensitive to different expectations and a different context from BBC Online.

8. Level of engagement

Before the page/profile/site is launched, you will need to decide with the relevant Interactive Editor/senior editorial figure what level of engagement you want, what resources you will need to achieve it and over what period of time.

For example, a page which advertises forthcoming editions of a TV programme with clips and some background information will need regular refreshing. But you may want to offer a higher level of user engagement on the BBC-branded space.

For example,

• Will users be able to upload still, audio or video contributions? *See also **Legal and Rights Issues** below*

• Will users be able to add their own text comments?

If so,

• How do you plan to engage with the community? Will you offer a host presence, for example, to answer a question about when the next series is starting?

• How do you plan to protect the BBC brand? Will you need to consider some additional moderation?

• Do you have the necessary resources to do the job properly?

9. Presumption against taking over responsibility on third party sites

The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. We should never set out to duplicate measures of protection and intervention which the social networking site already takes e.g. against illegal or against harmful and offensive content, whether by using its own staff or by working with the community to alert them to breaches of the site's terms and conditions.

In practice, different social networking sites offer different models of intervention in different areas.

For example, the photo sharing site Flickr has worked with its users to moderate the most offensive images itself quite effectively. But it does not appear to offer its own user-facing mechanism for removing the most offensive user comments. Instead, Flickr gives the right to moderate and comment on user text comments to the Administrator of each Group. BBC producers have used this facility to actively host BBC Groups and to remove some comments.

So there are some circumstances where the BBC will need to plan and implement an additional "light touch" intervention, for example to remove comments which are likely to cause extreme offence. We will need to work out how this should be done, who will do it and when. Where necessary, Editorial Policy can advise on a suitable threshold for "light touch" intervention. Recent research suggests that this approach matches audience expectations.

One problem is that while social networking sites may publish clear rules of acceptable behaviour for their users, they are often very reluctant to share much information about how they intervene or to what level. If you are not familiar with how, for example, *MySpace*, *Facebook* and *Bebo* deal in practice with different forms of harmful and illegal content on their sites, ask the Central Communities Team in FM&T.

10. Friends

You may wish to make "friends" on a third party web page. But remember that approving a "friend" may make other users of a site think they are more trustworthy. Check all friends carefully before you approve them. Look at their profiles first. If you have any doubts about whether you should approve a friend, discuss it with your Interactive Editor/senior editorial figure.

Review comments of "friends" regularly and remove (or do not post) any which exceed the appropriate threshold.

If you want to update your list of "friends" with a regular newsletter, make sure they are happy to receive it. Only use the list for activities on the same site or you may be in breach of the Data Protection Act.

If you want to make "friends" with an organisation (e.g. a company or a political campaign), consult your Interactive Editor/senior editorial figure first. Remember that this is likely to give the impression that the BBC is endorsing the organisation.
Once accepted, some group "friends" have changed from an innocuous group into porn or gambling spammers, so these are worth keeping an eye on.

11. Working with the community

We should take care not to give users the impression that we are interested in setting up a fully interactive profile or page if that page is then neglected or abandoned after it has achieved a one-off short term purpose. This is particularly

true if a community of interest has formed around the page or profile. It may be possible to hand a limited-life BBC page or profile over to the community which has grown around it, after a broadcast-led engagement has come to an end. This needs thinking about before the page is created. It may then become necessary to remove some or all of the BBC branding. It may also be useful to add a disclaimer to the effect that this site was created by the BBC but is now being run by the community.

*See also **Site Closure** below*

12. Advertising for contributors

Any proposal to use a chat room, message board, microblog or social networking site to find contributors must be referred to the relevant Divisional representative or for independents to the commissioning editor. Each Division will decide the level at which referrals must be made and may do so according to the particular circumstances, taking account of the experience of the BBC person who wishes to make the request, the sensitivity of the subject matter and the medium to be used.

The proposed wording of all written adverts must be referred to the same person.
The main reason for this is that there are risks in advertising for contributors whether using posters or personal adverts in newspapers, specialist publications, or the internet. The people who reply are self-selecting and may seek to appear regularly as "serial guests". We need to screen out those who are unsuitable or dishonest and those prone to exaggeration.

We should only advertise for contributors to factual and factual entertainment programmes as a last resort when other research methods have been exhausted.
When we do use adverts, we must word them carefully to avoid bringing the BBC into disrepute.

It may be appropriate for entertainment programmes to advertise for contestants and audiences. Even then all appropriate checks should be made to screen out unsuitable or untruthful contributors.

See also Editorial Guidelines, Section 3 – Advertising for Contributors*.*

13. Content Labelling

Very strong BBC content, or very strong user generated content inspired by a BBC call to action, may require a short content label. This applies the same principle as on BBC Online that users should be able to take an informed decision about what content they wish to consume before they do so.

14. Blogs and microblogs

BBC blogs should be published on BBC Online, and only after discussion with your Divisional Social Media representative. See s.3 and s.6 above.

The BBC does not have its own microblogging platform, so this guidance applies to BBC use of microblogging, for example on *Twitter*. Divisional representatives will advise. See s.3 and s.6 above.

You may wish to consider forwarding or "retweeting" a selection of a person's microblog entries/posts or "tweets". This is very unlikely to be a problem when you are "retweeting" a colleague's BBC "tweet" or a BBC headline. But in some cases, you will need to consider the risk that "retweeting" of third party content by the BBC may appear to be an endorsement of the original author's point of view.

It may not be enough to write on your BBC microblog's biography page that "retweeting" does not signify endorsement, particularly if the views expressed are about politics or a matter of controversial public policy. Instead you should consider adding your own comment to the "tweet" you have selected, making it clear why you are forwarding it and where you are speaking in your own voice and where you are quoting someone else's.

For personal use of blogs and microblogs, see guidance on personal use of social networking and other third party websites including blogs, microblogs and personal web-space.

15. Linking Strategy

The BBC Social Media strategy relies on the BBC engaging with users on the sites where they go, in the conversations they are having, as well as on BBC Online. This is partly so that users who may consume little or no BBC content can discover for themselves more of what we have to offer. So we should always link back to BBC Online. We can then encourage users to consume more BBC content on our site, for example by accessing long form video content on BBC iPlayer.

Links to social networking or microblogging sites should be clearly editorially justifiable, as with any other external link.

On air, we only trail BBC URLs. *See BBC Credits Guidelines.*

On occasion, it may be appropriate to mention on air that there is a BBC presence on a social networking or microblogging site. But we must avoid undue prominence and there would need to be a strong editorial justification for doing so; this would require an active editorial presence from that programme on the site and the editorial justification should be pertinent to that broadcast. For example, it may be appropriate for a BBC political correspondent to mention their *Twitter* feed connected to their BBC work during their coverage of a Party Conference. There could be one mention during their weekly programme covering that Party Conference or two mentions during a week of daily programmes covering it. If in any doubt, refer to Editorial Policy first.

Presenters of live chat shows, music and entertainment shows may sometimes refer on air, where editorially justifiable, to their personal microblogging accounts. This is where the account is used as a personal tool by the presenter; it should not be used as a normal or official means of contacting the programme but it can be used to

gather instant feedback by the presenter. Presenters should not give out specific urls of their personal accounts on air.

16. Teens

Some social networking sites attract a significant proportion of teenagers. This makes these sites a very attractive place for the BBC to engage with this hard-to reach age group, which routinely consumes little or no BBC content.

Teenagers clearly do run risks on social networking sites, particularly some 13-15 year olds whose technical knowledge may run ahead of their social skills. They may be at risk from being bullied or from publishing sensitive personal information on their profiles or from treating anonymous online "friends" as if they were real friends and becoming targets for online "grooming".

Where a BBC brand or site is targeting teenagers, particularly 13-15 year olds, on a social networking site:

• The site should be suitable for the likely audience for the relevant BBC brand or programming

• BBC content and user generated content inspired by a BBC call to action should be suitable for the likely audience on the site

If you are in doubt about the suitability of the site to engage with younger teenagers, it may be worth asking whether it operates within the Home Office Task Force Good Practice Guidance on Social Networking, which is designed to protect children and young people online.

Divisional Social Media Representatives can offer more information about the likely audience for specific social networking sites. The Central Communities Team in FM&T may also be able to offer advice.

17. Children

We should be sensitive to the minimum age requirements on different social networking sites – often set at 13. These are intended to prevent users below the minimum age from registering for full membership and then being able to publish online. But they also give a clear indication from the site owner about what the owner considers to be a suitable minimum age for casual visitors, even though the site owner may not be able to enforce this.

We should check minimum ages carefully. If we were to post BBC content specifically designed for 6-12 year olds on a site whose stated minimum age is 13, we would run the risk of appearing to encourage visits by 6-12 year olds to a site where contact and content rules and standards are designed to suit teenagers but not children. This might also give the impression that we were encouraging 6-12 year olds to lie about their age in order to interact with that content.

Once uploaded, content clearly unsuitable for 6-12 year olds could very easily be placed right next to BBC content specifically designed for children – and we would in effect have encouraged 6-12 year olds to go there to see it.

18. Advertising

Users generally appear to accept that advertisements on areas of BBC-branded social networking pages which are not under our editorial control (e.g. banner ads) are not our responsibility and are not connected with BBC content. But you should keep an eye on the full range of advertisements which appear on BBC-branded pages and you should alert your Interactive Executive/senior editorial figure immediately if clearly inappropriate advertisements for example involving pornography appear on the same pages. For the time being, we should not allow BBC Online video content uploaded by the BBC to contain pre-roll, mid-roll or post-roll advertising if the advertisements are visible from within the UK.

19. Legal and Rights issues

Before we upload BBC material or invite users to upload their user generated content to a page on a social networking site, we should make sure that we are aware of, and comfortable with, the site's own terms and conditions. This is because by uploading our content, it is likely that we are agreeing to be bound by its terms.

For example,

• We need to make sure we have the necessary rights to any content we put on third party sites - not only to ensure we do not breach our agreements with rights holders but also because we are likely to be liable to the site itself if we post uncleared material

• Some sites' terms and conditions covering uploaded content only allow "personal" reuse and do not allow any "commercial" reuse of content or envisage any reuse on radio or TV. If you want to reuse uploaded content on radio or TV, you should first consult Legal and Business Affairs to get the necessary consents

• Some sites' terms and conditions state that the site is for personal use only and not for "commercial" use - we should be aware that if we use such a site to promote BBC content, we may technically be in breach

• Some sites will take a pretty broad licence to use BBC content and the BBC trademark; while this may be a necessary risk, BBC content and BBC brands should only be posted for as long as is necessary and be removed once they have achieved their purposes on the site.

In some cases, the BBC has managed to add additional bespoke terms to an informal arrangement, to mitigate risk and facilitate our use of the content. Legal and Business Affairs in FM&T can advise.

20. Site Closure

It is important to have a clear plan from the start about how long the association between the BBC and the site/profile/page will last. Our presence may be tactical, we may wish to hand the space over to the community or it may be sensible to announce closure to its users and then shut the space down. It is incumbent on the person responsible for our presence to maintain the site or to arrange an exit.
Above all, we should not leave the site BBC branded but neglected, carrying the risk to the brand without exercising any editorial control.

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