

Editorial Policy



Guidance Note

BBC use of social networking 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 0870 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 and other third party websites. For guidance on personal use of social networking sites or blogging formats 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 Share strategy on social networking 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. See [Internal BBC wiki](#).

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

The guidance complements the BBC Share Strategy principles, including the following

- With conversations, participate online; don't "broadcast" messages to users
- With moderation, only police where we have to; trust our users where we don't

1. Scope

This guidance is primarily designed to cover informal BBC presences on third party social networking 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 BBC partnerships on social networking sites eg *YouTube* and *Bebo* although some of the guidance will be relevant and useful in these circumstances.

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 always 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 private purposes.

We should avoid creating or endorsing “hybrid” sites which contain elements of both as this is likely to cause confusion, editorial problems and brand damage. For example, a presenter’s personal profile should not have a URL which contains a BBC brand or programme name.

For guidance on personal sites of BBC staff and BBC talent, see the guidance note on [Personal use of social networking and other third party website](#).

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 Group representative for each Division will have overall responsibility for keeping a record of any informal pages/profiles/sites set up by their teams on third party social networking sites

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 contain links back to the relevant page on bbc.co.uk
- 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 Group

New kinds of informal activity on third party sites will need to be discussed by the Social Media Group in FM&T. Interactive Editors/senior editorial figures should consult their Divisional Representative for more details. 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.co.uk. 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.co.uk.

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 eg 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 eg *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 “friends” comments 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 (eg 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 or social networking site to find contributors must be referred to the relevant Divisional representative or for independents to the commissioning editor.

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.co.uk](#) that users should be able to take an informed decision about what content they wish to consume before they do so. But as user expectations on third party sites are likely to be different, the threshold for requiring a content label is likely to be higher.

14. Linking Strategy

The BBC Share 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.co.uk](#). 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.co.uk](#). We can then encourage users to consume more BBC content on our site, for example by accessing long form video content on BBC iPlayer.

It is not an integral part of the Share strategy that we should routinely link from [bbc.co.uk](#) to any BBC presence on a social networking site. It is not our job to promote or advertise these sites from [bbc.co.uk](#) or on air. On air, we only trail BBC URLs. See [BBC Credits Guidelines](#)

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

15. 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.

The [Social Media Group wiki](#) contains 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.

16. 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.

17. Advertising

Users generally appear to accept that advertisements on areas of BBC branded social networking pages which are not under our editorial control (eg banner ads) are not our responsibility and are not connected with BBC content. But you should keep on 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.co.uk 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.

18. 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.

19. 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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