

# City of Portland

## Social Media Engagement

### Best Practices Guide

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#### Blogging

##### *Introduction*

A blog is an on-demand web publishing platform that allows for content to be produced and implemented by a user or group of users. Blogging is commonly accepted in the online community as a means to develop and showcase expertise; become a focal point for information; feed content out into the wider web; and circumvent traditional media for messaging and communications purposes.

##### *Best practices for deployment*

A blog should not be undertaken lightly, but instead as a commitment to ongoing communication with the web audience. The overarching commitment when beginning a blog is a regular, consistent posting schedule. As you develop an audience, you want to ensure that their expectations are met with regard to the quantity, quality and schedule of content. As each Agency considers a blog strategy, ensure that the posting schedule – whether once a month or multiple times per day – is an agreed-upon commitment. If a regular posting schedule is not realistic, given other Agency priorities, instead look to other communication channels that do not require as consistent updating.

Blogs are treated favorably by search engines, because of the robustness of their content and their frequent updating. Therefore, they are effective strategies to promote an overall web presence, and drive traffic into other areas of the Portland Online site.

Your blog can be developed and maintained by multiple content authors; it can also feature guest posts. Both are standard blogging practices. This also helps lessen the burden for any individual contributor. Typical blogging software includes the ability to create an editorial calendar, to ensure consistency of posting and the ability for multiple content authors to contribute on independent schedules. Software functionality would also include the ability to promote and review content before publishing.

Commenting is a standard and typical feature of blogs, where readers and other participants can add their voice to the blog. Moderated commenting should be allowed on Portland Online blogs, with the caveat that certain offensive, commercial, or political comments may be deleted, according to the final social media use policy defined by the City.

### *Recommended Usage*

The focus and purview of the blog should be clear and concise. If, for example, the goal is to connect the inner working of the agency with the public, state this plainly. Use a blog to delve further into higher-profile and more broadly-distributed campaigns, e.g. public awareness campaigns that are enacted in multiple channels can be overviewed, deconstructed, and discussed on a blog. The audience for a blog is one that will be highly interested in the specific topic, and will also include casually-interested parties as public awareness of specific individual blog topics at a given time (e.g. related to news coverage).

The City also must include specific disclosures to ensure that content is not discriminated against, and public forum status of any participation. See the Legal team for more specific guidance and language about disclosures that must be included on your blog.

### *Cost and Time Guidance*

Blog software should be evaluated in the context of other overarching Web site goals and priorities. There are free tools and platforms that can be implemented that fit with the City's overarching priority of using open source software. However, technical expertise and training are needed for content authors, editors/publishers, and for technical staff to evaluate and incorporate new features and functionality.

One to two hours per post is a reasonable estimate for content production, editing, and posting. An editorial calendar, and delayed publishing, can help streamline these efforts.

## *Relevant Links to Tools and Services*

<http://www.wordpress.org>: Wordpress is a popular open source blogging platform.

Whether this particular platform is used or not, it is a helpful resource for blogging best practices, user expectations, and technical considerations

<http://feedburner.com>: Maintains RSS feeds, automating the publishing and syndication of blog content

## Facebook

### *Introduction*

Facebook is a social network that was originally designed to keep individual users in close contact with their friends and family. As of 2009, that initial concept has expanded to include a larger circle of connections, including organizations that are relevant to the user. Gaining a Facebook Fan means that the user is personally interested in news and information from the organization. Updates that the organization provides appear in the aggregated “Feeds” that Facebook compiles for each user. In this way, information and status updates from the user’s circle of connections is collected for the user to review.

### *Best practices for deployment*

Facebook offers “Facebook Pages” for organizations. Individuals can “fan” a Page, similar to how they “friend” another individual. These fan-based “Pages” are designed to aggregate content, similar to an individual profile. Status updates, photo and link sharing, and comments/Likes are all allowed on Facebook Pages.

Pages also allow for much more control and optimization around the sharing functionality, based on the goals and needs of the organization. It is expected, however, that Fans should be able to comment on your posts. Remember to include all legal disclosures, as determined by the City Attorney.

Remember that posts to a bureau’s Page will appear in the News Feed and/or Home Feed of your users, so each post should be a complete and independent idea. Do not publish a series of status updates that each rely on the other for context or comprehension. Your status updates may appear out of order or out of context when read in aggregate with posts from other users in an individual’s Feed.

Pages also offer light analytics to measure and track engagement over time. Page administrators should periodically review these analytics to measure the impact of their efforts, and determine what type of content is most attractive for your Fans.

## *Recommended Usage*

Facebook should be used to share and distribute information that would be relevant to a personal interest. While it is difficult to determine the full scope of possible personal interests of the citizenry, each Agency's presence should start with an estimation of what would be personally interesting to its audience. News items; policy decisions; emergency communications; information with business implications; and City regulations might all reasonably be personally relevant to a Fan. However, internal process decisions; and full policies and procedures are better left on the City Web site (but should be linked to from these third party sites).

There are no specific character counts for Facebook, however status updates should generally be short (1-2 sentences), with appropriate links if more information is needed. Longer documents can be maintained as Notes, however take care not to duplicate documentation in multiple places. Link to the City Web site when possible.

Facebook also requires that all users only maintain one account, under their real identity. Facebook Pages (for organizations) are administered by one or more individuals. Therefore, individual administrators for a Facebook Page must login using their own individual Facebook account. Page administrators are listed on the Page, so administrators must take care to maintain appropriate public-facing information on their personal account. However, the Page can have its own organization-appropriate contact information set up to direct to a generic email address, e.g. [waterbureaupio@portland.or.us](mailto:waterbureaupio@portland.or.us).

## *Cost and Time Guidance*

Facebook is free to establish and use an account, but does require authorization from the City, based on the current social media use policy. Review this to determine specific needed authorizations. Also, the ongoing care and feeding of a Facebook account does require a sustained investment of time and a dedicated "account manager". An alternate strategy is to populate your Facebook status using automated feeds that read updates to certain sections of the Agency Web site, a Twitter account, or other resources.

If managed as a standalone channel, one to three hours per week is a reasonable budget. If automated through a feed, there is no incremental time needs above the initial account and feed set-up.

## *Relevant Links to Tools and Services*

<http://www.facebook.com>: Main interface for creating your account, posting updates, etc.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages>: Create your own Page within Facebook

## Twitter

### *Introduction*

Twitter allows real-time status updates of 140 characters to be published publicly. Users post short texts to their account, and all public posts are available for review, search, and following. As a microblogging platform, Twitter offers significant opportunity to demonstrate expertise and engage citizens around a subject, while requiring only a modest investment of time and effort. Twitter provides an excellent opportunity to extend the ecosystem of your Web presence beyond your site; make your site more discoverable; and drive highly qualified traffic to current news and information. It can also serve as an informal way to ask questions of an engaged audience.

### *Best practices for deployment*

Within government strictures, Follow other Twitter users that have been determined to fall within the Following guidelines determined by the City. Don't feel obligated to follow every user that follows you; reciprocity is not expected. Moreover, the City will establish neutral criteria for Following. However, it is appropriate to acknowledge new followers with a brief Direct Message (this can be automated). Do not include any self-promotional copy or links in these thank you notes.

Twitter handles (usernames) should be as short as reasonable to convey a sense of identity. Under the umbrella of the City government, the City should create a common naming convention for authorized City Agencies. Longer handles hamper the ability for other Twitter users to retweet your original message. Also, to encourage retweeting, your posts should be around 100 characters so that other Twitter users can add their own commentary and your handle to the retweet.

Twitter Lists are a way to consolidate and monitor multiple accounts. The main City Twitter account should have a list of all active City Twitter accounts, so that the citizenry can easily determine which Agencies are on Twitter, and what the handles are. This also serves to avoid confusion with other similarly-named accounts.

“Hashtags” allow for quick topical indexing on Twitter. Hashtags are created by placing a “#” character in front of the term to index, e.g. #portland, #oregon, #sustainability, #jobs, etc. Twitter users search on hashtags to discover content and authors that they want to follow, and also to follow topical threads. It is appropriate to search for existing hashtags to seed into your tweets.

Be authentic. Talk about your areas of expertise, and defer to experts within the City structure for questions outside of your area of expertise. Remember that the City will define Twitter as a limited public forum, and each Agency page should have the appropriate disclaimers on it.

Share and share alike. Frequent sharing of relevant content by other approved Twitter users will encourage other users to also share your content. Retweeting (re-posting someone else’s tweet) is a sign of endorsement, and also a critical traffic driver, because it is a linked from a trusted or respected authority. Agencies should retweet peer information, news items, or other links to content outside of the City’s Web site. Specific guidelines around content, and origin, should be finalized to determine what is appropriate to retweet for the City.

Tweet content updates and new information on your own Agency site as part of your regular content development process. The principle goal for Twitter is to contribute positively to a community of sharing information and news. Therefore, self-promotional is considered positive when it is in the context of sharing new information.

### *Recommended Usage*

There are two important content components that you should include in your Twitter account:

1. **Unique tweets and Agency-specific information:** this information is the added value that you can provide, with your own unique point of view, into the Twitter conversation (these can also be retweeted by other Agencies or bureaus). Some examples:
  - a. **New report or conclusion posted**, e.g. “2010 forecasting for city of #Portland population now available at <URL>”

- b. **Answers to questions that you can speak to, because you have expertise**, e.g. “City Council meeting agenda will include open discussion around green spaces on 12/15/09. Details at <URL>”
- c. **Administrative announcements**, e.g. “Offices closed for Memorial Day next week, so see us soon for any permitting needs”
- d. **Unique web content on your own site**, e.g. “Survey on Portland 2050 draft report up and ready for YOUR comments at <URL>”

**2. Sharing/retweeting information of wider interest to the community:** this information increases your authority and contribution to the Twitter ecosystem, and establishes your topic expertise around the areas of interest to your specific constituency. Some examples:

- a. **Breaking news and emergency information**, e.g. “Water leak forces shut down of water main. Expected to be resolved by 3 PM today. Stay tuned for details.”
- b. **Recent articles or blog posts about Portland**, e.g. “Forbes names Portland one of the best cities to retire to: <URL>”
- c. **Tips, and tricks about working with the City and its partners**, e.g. “Learn about the ins and outs of home ownership for FREE. Details at <URL>”
- d. **Retweets from other people about all of the above**, e.g. “RT @GREENinPDX: TONIGHT! - Show your gratitude to Portland orgs using technology for good <http://bit.ly/2maa2> <http://bit.ly/3BeaUW> #pdx”

### *Sample Verbiage*

Remember that Twitter allows for 140 characters, but ideal length is 100-120 characters to allow for retweeting. Abbreviations are appropriate, as is integrating hashtags into post content. Use URL shorteners to reduce the character count of links.

### *Cost and Time Guidance*

Twitter is free to establish and use an account, but does require authorization from the City, based on the current social media use policy. Review this to determine specific needed authorizations. Nearly all of the ancillary tools to help manage Twitter accounts are also free to establish and use. However, the ongoing care and feeding of a Twitter account does require a sustained investment of time and a dedicated “account manager”. More than one

person can be authorized to post from a single Twitter account through the use of a Twitter client, if needed.

Two to five hours per week is a reasonable budget to manage your Twitter account. By using a Twitter client, you can schedule tweets to post in the future, in order to maintain a consistent publishing schedule without a real-time presence.

### *Relevant Links to Tools and Services*

<http://www.twitter.com>: Main interface for creating your account, posting updates, etc.

<http://search.twitter.com>: Search interface to view tweets based on hashtags or keywords.

<http://www.hootsuite.com>: Browser-based Twitter client that allows for multiple account management, integrated search, integrated URL shortening with analytics, and multiple users on one Twitter account.

<http://www.seesmic.com>: Desktop-based Twitter client that allows for multiple account management, integrated search, integrated URL shortening, and integration with Facebook.

<http://bit.ly>, <http://su.pr>: URL shorteners that offers analytics (after registration)

## Social Seeding

### *Introduction*

Social seeding is the process of seeding conversations across the Web in social venues, including blogs, message boards and forums (the specific venues that are appropriate depend on the bureau objectives for engagement). The content of the seeding activity will depend on the particular group, but in general, social venues represent a substantial opportunity to build awareness and action with groups predisposed to be receptive audiences to your messaging.

Each of these individual communities has its own set of community rules and standards, and users that flout either the formal rules or the commonly accepted community standards run the risk of being banned from participating. Therefore it's important to know and understand the community by reviewing existing content before joining the conversation.

### *Best practices for deployment*

While there are thousands of relevant blogs, message boards and forums that have an interest in the City of Portland and its Agencies, you will get the most leverage by making a concerted investment in a few communities, where you can build a reputation as a valued contributor. Select 2-3 communities to start with, and as time and efforts allow, add additional venues, but maintain a consistent presence in each outlet.

Authenticity is paramount. When posting on behalf of the City, in your official capacity, use your real identity, and disclose your working relationship as a City employee. This will increase your credibility and authority as an expert in your topic area. When possible in profile information and posts, direct users to where they can find more information or ask questions (this establishes that the external site is not a primary monitored vehicle for City employees).

Be helpful. Helping other users by providing advice, answering questions, and adding your own point of view builds your reputation as a trusted source. When you answer questions about how the City is run, or its priorities, your views will be authoritative and carry weight within the community.

## *Recommended Usage*

Determine the set of topics that you would feel comfortable participating with, based on your own interests and expertise, and your Agency's foci. While there are numerous venues, advise from a trusted person that represents an official voice is valued in a number of communities, including general Portland sites, topic area venues (e.g. sustainability blogs, or transportation forums, or urban planning sites).

Participate in venues that have neither the largest or smallest number of active participants. The largest outlets have many conversations, so it's difficult to break through with significant share of voice. The active middle (for blogs, from 20-1,000 daily readers; for forums 3-30 new posts per day) provides fertile ground for a receptive readership, and also a reasonable potential share of voice for regular contributors.

It is easier and more effective to participate in existing threads/conversations/post comments than to create new strings. In this way, you can monitor the conversation about a topic to date, and respond to specific questions or comments in previous posts. Starting conversation threads is also effective, but will require more failed topic threads in order to hit upon salient topics to the community.

As a member of the community, think about what you would like to read about. Do you want to hear first-person recaps of working with the City? How-tos or overviews of resources and structure? Wider industry news? Your interests will also be the interests of the wider community. Your conversation should be rich in keyword density relevant to content you have on your own site; in addition, you should mention keywords frequently, and, where appropriate, link off of the forum to your own site.

Please note that forums with a political focus can be difficult to navigate appropriately. While campaign and employment law is beyond the scope of this document, in general you should be aware that campaigning can happen in any of these external forums. Take care to receive clear guidance and instruction about using City resources appropriately.

When reaching out to bloggers to promote information from the City, make sure to take the time to know a bit about the blogger's interests, activities, and past coverage of the topic. Don't write formally, as in a press release. Be professionally casual, and get to the point quickly. Use bullet points, and point the blogger to image or video assets on your own site for their use. Make it easy for the blogger to write up your point of view quickly.

## *Sample Verbiage*

### **Sample e-mail to blogger:**

Hi Sara,

I saw that you have covered the Portland 2050 process previously, and wanted to make sure you knew that we have a whole series of events scheduled over the coming weeks. The plan is in draft form, and we want to make sure that we hear from all of the voices in our community during this phase. Here is a list of all of the upcoming events: <URL>.

Any help you could offer in spreading the word and getting participation in these events would be great. Also, we've set up an online forum in case people can't attend. That's located here: <URL>, and anyone can add their thoughts through the end of February.

Thanks for your help!

### **Sample Forum Post**

The most helpful resource for real estate research is from the City of Portland itself: <http://www.portlandmaps.com>.

It's an incredibly robust tool that shows parks, businesses, and property details for every property in the city limits. If you're trying to get a handle on neighborhoods, or even specific properties, this will help you immensely.

Hope it helps!

## *Cost and Time Guidance*

Participation in any of these venues is free for the user. Plan to spend 15-60 minutes per week in each venue where you have a presence to stay up-to-date on recent conversations, and add your own comments and posts.

## *Relevant Links to Tools and Services*

<http://www.technorati.com>: Technorati ranks blogs by topical authority and popularity. Search their site to find blogs that discuss relevant topics. Consider venues that are outside of the top 100 most popular sites in a topic for relevant niches.

<http://www.postrank.com>: PostRank determines bloggers that are topic influencers, and allows you to follow the most influential conversations on a topic.

<http://ww.alltop.com>: Alltop is a curated blog roll that determines the best blogs around a given topic by expert curation.

<http://groups.google.com>: Google Groups is a comprehensive topic-based message board system.

<http://groups.yahoo.com>: Yahoo Groups is a comprehensive topic-based message board system.

<http://www.dmoz.org/>: The Open Directory Project is a message board search engine.

<http://www.boardtracker.com/>: BoardTracker is a discussion group search engine.

<http://www.topix.com>: An additional general topic-based message board system. Search for specific forums within the Topix environment.

<http://techrigy.com>: Techrigy is a social media monitoring tool that offers a free version to monitor conversation volume based on keywords. You can find out where the most active conversations are happening with this tool.

Also, many newspapers, magazine and other specialty sites have community forums as part of their regular Web site, e.g:

The Oregonian: <http://www.oregonlive.com>

Willamette Week: <http://wweek.com/>