



GUIDE

ON USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

WHY THIS GUIDE WAS DEVELOPED?

This guide is intended for candidates who are running in the 2014 school board elections to help them use social media to promote their election campaign. This guide complements the Website www.electionsscolaires2014.com which encompasses all the aspects that a candidate should know before using social media.

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA?

Popular examples of social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube) allow you to follow people and organizations with whom you would like to connect or because you have a common interest. Also, people or organizations may follow you with or without your consent depending on the media and personal settings used. Social media allow you to post messages, photos and videos that will be accessible to people who follow you.

These sites have become an indispensable tool allowing you to engage in discussions with other social media users, generate reactions, questions and answers, to know how they feel and, most of all, to share the content posted in their respective networks.

All content is visible and accessible to members of a community of interest based on your profiles. That is why social media are more public in nature and provide an invaluable opportunity for candidates to “network” in their community.

GETTING STARTED

Whether you are a follower or just starting into the world of social media, this guide was designed to help you make informed social media choices and keep your private life separate from your professional life. It will also help you create your profiles and, especially, make effective use of social media, in compliance with relevant rules. It is one thing to use social media as a tool, but it does not, by any means, replace the usual practices such as, among others, door-to-door campaigning and “kitchen table talks”. It should be perceived as an interesting and powerful complement, especially if campaign budget is limited.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA

There is a wide variety of social media currently available, but in Québec, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) are widely used. YouTube is mainly used for accessing videos, while [Flickr](#) and [Instagram](#), which are used mainly to share images, are growing in popularity among users. [LinkedIn](#), a social networking site designed specifically for the business community, may be another interesting option. Sometimes though, it is important to explore some of the more popular social media sites so as to fully understand their dynamics and characteristics before choosing one in particular.

FOR WHAT PURPOSES?

As you can see, the choice of social media also depends on your target audiences and how to reach them.

Twitter is a microblogging service that enables users to send short 140-character messages including spaces. It is not a forum for debate, but rather the best way to share news and information items. However, it is important to think before putting anything online or in a message.

Facebook is the largest social networking site, making it a popular tool to share events related to your personal life, to post photos and videos, as well as to send invitations to social events. Facebook may be an interesting option.

Each media has its own dynamic, meaning that messages must be adapted to each platform. As such, avoid “cutting and pasting” from one media to another.

HOW ABOUT A BLOG?

A blog is certainly the best means to share and discuss ideas. It enables users to write short articles typically displayed in reverse chronological order and filed by category or keywords. There are a number of free blogging tools, including WordPress, for those wishing to set up a personal campaign blog. At first glance, maintaining a blog can seem like a daunting task, but posting a few articles a week can captivate a wide and regular audience. You may also develop a multi-author blog and prepare content beforehand. An active blog is a good means to improve its visibility in search engine listings.

STEPS TO CREATE YOUR PROFILES

1. IDENTIFY AREAS OF INTEREST

Think of individuals (or organizations) with whom it would be important to establish a connection throughout the campaign and who can influence you or on whom you can be influential. This may include, among others, the media, a journalist, a recreational association, a blogger in the community, a parents' association or an elected official. Choosing those who have the greatest influence will allow you to monitor what they are saying and even invite them to follow you.

Social media monitoring process

Set up a monitoring process to easily track what people are saying about you and to find topics of interest. A few useful tools are listed below, and others may be found using search engines. Keywords can be used not only in searches, but also in written messages.

Search engines

- » Google or any other search engine may be used to make more refined searches: news, images, social media, etc.
- » Socialmention is a social media search and analysis platform that aggregates user-generated content into a single comprehensive site.
- » Tweetdeck or Netvibes are applications that can be downloaded to your desktop for real-time tracking of your areas of interest and for management of your emails and Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts. They also enable you to track real-time conversations, on one page, while using various monitoring processes and keywords.

2. CREATE YOUR IDENTITY

a. If you already have a personal profile

In the case of Facebook or any other social networking websites, it is strongly recommended that you create new “corporate” profiles to keep your professional life separate from your private life, but it is your choice. For many users, mixing the two does not appear to cause great problems. However, during an election campaign, question the relevance of making current and past information about your close friends and immediate family accessible to strangers. In fact, there are filters to protect more sensitive information, but you do not always necessarily have the time to use them.

You must also think post campaign. Whether you are elected or not, people will continue to follow you through social media. It is important to build online networking capital. It may, therefore, be prudent to create a “corporate profile” dedicated to the elections which, in the event of a victory, would become your “elected commissioner” page. However, it is important to continue updating it on a regular basis.

b. If you do not have a profile

In the case of Facebook or any other social networking websites, you can create profiles of your choice focused on your status of candidate and which may be kept in the event of a victory. If not elected, you may decide to close your accounts.

c. Photos and personal information

It is important to have a professional appearance and to create your Internet persona (Internet identity). Consider carefully: What information or image do you want to have on the Internet? You can also include photos and videos.

- » Choose your profile name. Normally, include your given name and surname, as well as a mention of the school board election campaign.
- » Use the same photo that shows a full front view of the face for all your different profiles.
- » In profiles using photos as wallpaper, such as Facebook or a blog, choose a photo that is appropriate for your status of commissioner.

- » Include professional and personal background information (skills, experience, motivations as a candidate seeking office, concerns, issues, dreams) that makes you the perfect candidate.

- » Producing a video could also generate an invaluable benefit. However, keep it short (one minute). Videos that are too long are rarely viewed.

- » Publish a netiquette¹ which specifies the rules of conduct that apply when communicating over the Internet and enables Internet users to know what constitutes acceptable behaviour and what does not. This will allow you to filter inappropriate comments.

¹ Is a set of social conventions governing the behaviour of Internet users, particularly during exchanges in forums or through emails that we expect of participants in the network (Office québécois de la langue française).

UPDATE YOUR PROFILES

In social media, content is critical. Original, regular and pertinent content will not only attract your audience, but will ensure an interest, as well as a strong commitment. To do so, the content must be prepared beforehand and monitored for elements of interest and positive reactions from your audience.

Here are a few tips

- a.** Draw up a posting plan and prepare “posts¹” beforehand.
- b.** Post on a regular basis, but without inundating the networks—focus on quality, not quantity:
 - » Facebook: post no more than two or three news items a week.
 - » Twitter: consider alternating original content and information.
 - » LinkedIn: Add content to the news feed, as well as create and participate in interest groups (public or private). Assess this option and adjust presence accordingly.

¹ Messages, articles or comments

- c.** Monitor statistical information on traffic patterns to optimize your social media presence. LinkedIn is certainly used more during working hours, while Facebook is often used outside working hours and on weekends. Check regularly patterns of use among your followers.

- d.** Remain attuned to comments, news and other events that could foster the sharing of content and discussion. Preparing content does not mean losing spontaneity, on the contrary.

- e.** Remember that the more photos and videos you use in your messages, the more attention you will attract and generate sharing.

- f.** However, you must obtain permission to use certain photos if other people are shown in the photo.

- g.** Some subjects dealt with in social media are more sensitive than others (e.g. religion). Avoid, when possible, controversial issues, unless it is your intention.

- h.** Measure and improve your performance. Tools exist to monitor patterns of use. There are also applications that formulate recommendations designed to improve your performance and demonstrate results. Try Twitter with Tweetreach or your Facebook page with LikeAlyzer.

HOW TO RESPOND TO COMMENTS RECEIVED

Fundamentally, your profiles should be accessible in order to allow people to provide their comments, spontaneously or connected to your messages. In general, positive comments need not be answered. However, it may happen that people both criticize and attack you. It is extremely important that you determine and post the acceptable boundaries in advance in your profile (netiquette). This will allow you not only to arbitrarily remove disturbing comments, but also legitimately remove demeaning, racist, homophobic or sexist comments. To help you build your comment management policy or netiquette, please refer to the site [Observatoire des médias sociaux en relations publiques](#) (in French only).

General tips and useful information

Think before responding, remember that everything is public and that there will be a trace.

Respond within a reasonable time frame—24 hours is too long.

If a comment poses a risk to your reputation, respond within the hour in order to avoid escalation.

Please remember you may invite someone to continue a conversation in private (chat, email, telephone or in person).

In an environment where the notions of confidentiality are evolving, it is important that Internet users be aware of those notions before including personal information (e.g. about students) in the comments posted.

Be genuine and honest, people prefer someone who admits he made a mistake, apologizes and moves on.

HOW TO CREATE STIMULATING PROFILES DURING AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN

There is no recipe for creating stimulating profiles during an election campaign. However, here are a few helpful suggestions:

Be your own “journalist” and not a publicist

Imagine that you are a journalist and that you are covering your own campaign. In other words, tell your story and avoid using social media for publicity or marketing reasons.

Think before, during and after

Attract and hold the interest of the members of the community by planning activities or events where they will be invited to engage in discussions and to express their concerns. Take photos and provide follow-up.

Make it a habit to include photos

By far, the most shared documents in the social media networks are those accompanied by photos and videos. It is better to post a short text with a photo than a lengthy one (may discourage your readers). Also, if you make videos, keep them short. Five captivating one-minute videos are more effective than a five-minute video.

Be positive and stay informed

It will be to your advantage to adopt a positive and open attitude towards your community. Negativity is not appreciated. Show people with whom you are engaging in conversation that you are really listening. Even if they do not always agree with what you are saying, people will recognize your openness and respect for what others have to say.

OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA

Other social media networks allow you to see what other people are writing about topics you find relevant or even what they are saying about you. Exercise judgment in deciding whether or not to engage in the discussion. Check the credibility of the individual or organization, the reaction of others, the sharing of information, and so on. Also, where errors are found, should the erroneous information be corrected or modified? However, one thing is certain, it is important to be transparent and to specify that your position is that of an electoral candidate.