

Auckland Council Social Media Guidelines

Part one: guidelines for using social media



Auckland
Council

Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau



Disclaimer: The Social Media Guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Social Media Policy.

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Auckland Council Social Media Guidelines



Better in than out

Social media is one of those game-changing things that on first encounter can leave you excited or puzzled or maybe even both!

However you feel about it, one thing is for sure. It touches all of us, even those who don't use it. Why's that? Because Auckland Council's customers use social media to share information and opinions on things they care about, including the things that we do or influence.

We take great pride in being of service to our customers. So it's important that we take part in the conversations about our community. This will help us better understand what Aucklanders are talking about and care about, and also allow us to provide the information they want more effectively.

Why we wrote this guide

We want to make sure that you feel free to use social media confidently and responsibly – in both your personal life and in your work capacity.

We've kept the guidelines deliberately simple. In fact, there are just eight of them. They're based on our values: teamwork, respect, innovation, service, accountability, pride and supported by the formal Social Media Policy. It's important that you read and understand the policy, particularly those sections that apply to you.

These are the first guidelines we've created on social media. They will undoubtedly evolve over time and we're seeking your feedback on how we can make it clearer and more useful to you. (We're continuing to learn every day too!)

If you have feedback, email the Brand and Channel Communications team socialmedia@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz, we welcome your feedback.

What is social media?

Any internet-based tool that can be used to publish and share information and opinions counts as social media. The number of these tools is huge, and chances are you already use at least some of them. Examples include:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- Pinterest
- Blogs, often created on free tools like Wordpress and Tumblr
- Any websites which allow comment (such as news sites)
- Personal websites (especially when they allow visitor comments and feedback)
- Wikis such as Wikipedia
- Yammer
- Instagram.

Who the guidelines apply to

Everyone who works at, for, or with Auckland Council. That includes:

- Employees
- Contractors/consultants
- Casual employees
- Agency temporary employees
- Secondees and volunteers
- Employees of the CCOs that have adopted these guidelines
- Sponsors and co-funders of council-funded programmes and events.

Who the policy applies to

Specific sections of the policy may or may not apply to you, depending on your role and accountabilities. It's your responsibility to read the policy and make sure you understand how it affects you. If you're not clear on how or where it applies to you, email the Brand and Channel Communications team socialmedia@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

When the guidelines and policy apply

While it may be tempting to think the guidelines and policy should only apply when you're at work or posting on an official Auckland Council website, blog or other social media site, in fact they apply any time that someone else might reasonably assume you're speaking in your Auckland Council role.

See section 2 of **Auckland Council Social Media Policy** for further clarity.

What's the opportunity?

Taking part in the social media conversations about Auckland, and Auckland Council, will help us:

- respond faster to our customers' concerns
- be more accessible when people want to be heard or have an influence over our decisions
- reduce the cost of serving our customers
- see what matters most to our communities
- reduce the risk and impact of negative comments and bad publicity.

The five things we stand by in social media

- Social media is a good thing.
- Social media is for everyone and no one should be discouraged from taking part in it.
- The lines between personal comment and comment as an employee of your workplace can easily get blurred.
- If other people think you're speaking as an Auckland Council representative, you are – even if you think you're not.
- Once something is said online, it's public and can't be unsaid.

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The eight guidelines

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Be credible. Be accurate, fair and thorough. Don't state anything that you're not completely sure is true. Consider whether you are the right person to answer the question – if you are unsure, pass to a subject matter expert.

1

Be open. Disclose your position as an Auckland Council representative when speaking on council matters in a professional capacity. Clarify your position with a disclaimer.

2

Be human. Social media is a conversation among people. Be friendly and real. Remember, too, that people will sometimes say things you might not like. That's their privilege. Welcome every comment as a contribution that helps us provide better service.

3

Be responsive. Keep in mind that a customer's expectations may be different from yours. For you, replying the next day may be reasonable, but the customer might regard that as too slow. You can manage expectations by letting the person know you've got their query or comment, and when you'll get back to them with an answer.

4

Be part of a team. Notice what others in the organisation are saying and align yourself with council policy. If you're not clear what policy is, go to the person who can clarify it for you. Also keep in mind that being part of a team means that you shouldn't be posting offensive comments about your colleagues – even as a joke!

5

Be of service. Remember you are here to help our customers as a representative of Auckland Council. If what you're posting isn't helping or informing a customer, perhaps you shouldn't be posting it.

6

Be accountable. As with everything we do, social media is governed by certain legal and ethical requirements. Read the Social Media Policy before diving into social media. Be aware that any official information request via a social media channel has the same status as if it were made by any other channel, and should be treated the same way. (See FAQs for more information.) And always remember that money spent on social media comes out of ratepayers' pockets. Social media is enjoyable, but it's serious too.

7

Be professional. If you manage a blog, Twitter feed or other social networking tool, post content and check messages regularly. Don't say or do anything you wouldn't want your mother to see. Don't pick fights online, especially with people who are confrontational.

8

Look before you tweet

Things to think about before setting up a social media profile

We encourage you to use social media to promote the activities you are responsible for, and to serve council customers better. Sometimes, that could mean setting up a social media page from scratch – a new Facebook page to promote a project, for example. But please, make sure you follow the due process.

Before you leap in, it's important to do your homework.

Here are some questions to help guide your thinking.

- **Does a suitable channel already exist among Auckland Council accounts?**

This is not only the first question to ask yourself, but also the most important! We owe it to our customers to use our resources wisely, and that means no doubling up of effort.

Auckland Council social media accounts that already have large followings are:

- www.facebook.com/aklcouncil
- www.twitter.com/aklcouncil
- www.youtube.com/aklcouncil

- **Have you established a clear business case?**

You must complete a proposal (see page 7 of the Social Media Policy) and get the go-ahead from the Brand and Channel Communications team before creating a social media profile. Talk to them early, because their job is to support you in achieving what you want through social media. They can put you in touch with others in council who are doing or planning similar things, steer you towards useful resources to help develop your strategy, and more.

- **What do you want to achieve?**

Using social media just for the sake of it is wasteful. Be clear on what results you want from using it and ask if social media will help achieve them. Common business aims include driving people to a website, providing advice, creating a community support group of people with shared interests, getting feedback, or even encouraging people to visit somewhere in person.

- **Who's your audience?**

Know who you are trying to engage. If you are trying to engage a local group of teenagers, a Facebook group may be more effective than Twitter. If they are digital savvy media people, Twitter may be useful. Remember, some channels will be more appropriate than others.

- **Are you prepared to 'raise a child'?**

Because you don't have to pay for a Facebook page or Twitter account and so on, social media can easily look like it's free. Don't be fooled! Once you create a social media page, you have to keep updating it – regularly and possibly for a long time. It's a serious commitment, and if you don't have the time, budget, resources, or inclination to do it, then stay clear.

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- **Are you prepared to build followers?**

Even Lady Gaga took a while to hit the big time in social media. Your social media efforts will take longer, count on it! You'll start off with zero followers and build slowly from there. It takes commitment and effort – and some insight to learn how to go about it.

- **Do you have something to say?**

It's not enough to be willing to update your social media channel – you also need to have something to say. Have you got enough content, or will there be enough news, to allow you to post fresh content regularly?

- **Can you write?**

You don't have to be Shakespeare, but you do need to be a competent writer, with good grammar and reasonable spelling (and the willingness to use a dictionary!). Be aware that social media can also pose particular challenges, such as the ability to write a message in as little as 140 characters, and sound judgement when commenting on council matters. Also, refer to Our Voice, the written communications style guide for tips on effective writing.

- **Are you being realistic?**

Social media is a useful tool, but not a silver bullet. Use it as part of an overall communications strategy, and plan your total strategy well.

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Checklist to help you use social media

Once you've decided to use social media, this checklist will guide you through how to think and act when using social media.

Used well, social media can help Auckland Council to grow its reputation as a customer-focused organisation. Used badly, it can quickly undo a lot of hard work that many people have done over a long time.

Before you join a social media conversation in your official Auckland Council role, always consider the possible impact of what you say. Remember, the Social Media Policy is a subset of the employee Code of Conduct, and you are bound by the Code of Conduct. These principles are a guide for how to think and act on social media.

- **Always follow the Auckland Council Code of Conduct.** The Social Media Policy is a subset of the Code of Conduct which provides a powerful guide for how to talk with our customers. Follow its principles of honesty, integrity and respect towards others, and you will rarely go wrong.
- **Speak only on issues you're authorised to speak on.** Every workplace needs official spokespeople or subject matter experts for certain issues. Be mindful of the council's Media Policy and respect it.
- **Remember that you're representing Auckland Council.** That means every post must be consistent with our values of pride, accountability, service, innovation, respect, and teamwork.
- **Always be open about your connection with Auckland Council.** If you're saying something on behalf of Auckland Council, give your name and title or role. For example: "Hi, I'm John and I work for Auckland Council...". This openness also applies if you work for a company that could be seen to represent Auckland Council, such as parks maintenance.
- **Keep records.** Online conversations are subject to the same legal, ethical, and professional standards as any other communication. Where communications present a potential risk to council, take a screenshot and send to your team leader.
- **If in doubt, do not post.** You are personally responsible for what you say and do. Don't post anything that you're not 100% sure is true and accurate. Do not reveal confidential or time sensitive information or documents, and don't gossip. If in doubt, don't post it. If you're not sure how to respond to a post, ask your supervisor or the Brand and Channel Communications team.
- **Give credit where it's due.** It's fine to quote others online and even copy and paste small selections of their copy as long as you credit them and don't claim authorship yourself. Images (photos, logos, illustrations, etc.) are different. Unless they are explicitly offered for free use, always assume that they are subject to copyright and NOT AVAILABLE without permission.
- **Once it's said, it can't be unsaid.** It's hard to stress this enough. Once you've published something online, it is part of a permanent public record, even if you 'remove/delete' it later or try to make it anonymous. You may be able to remove that cute kitten tattoo from your left ankle, but you can never, ever undo an online post. Don't post anything you wouldn't want to see on the front page of the NZ Herald.



Appendix:

FAQs



How do I know which posts I can reply to and which ones I can't?

Refer to the Response Guidelines in The Social Media Policy. If in doubt, go to your team leader and if you don't get a clear answer there, go to the Brand and Channel communications team.

Does the Social Media Policy mean I can't express my personal opinions about Auckland Council or anything it's doing?

No, it doesn't mean that. But you need to be mindful of how others will see you when you post any comment relating to Auckland Council. If you're using your personal social media profile and other people wouldn't associate you with Auckland Council, you're as entitled as anyone to express your opinions. But if others might reasonably assume you're speaking in an Auckland Council role, or might know that you work at Auckland Council or one of its associated organisations you become bound by the guidelines of the Social Media Policy.

A useful guiding principle is: do not do anything online in a professional capacity that could embarrass or compromise Auckland Council

Does that mean I can't create a personal blog, say, that includes my comments and opinions on Auckland Council activities?

You're free to do that, subject to confidentiality obligations and the Social Media Policy and the Code of Conduct. You should also identify yourself as an employee of Auckland Council (or one of its suppliers) and include a disclaimer on your site along the lines of: "The opinions expressed in this blog are my own views and not those of Auckland Council."

Should I use my real name when I create a social media profile?

Yes. Using a pseudonym reduces the credibility of your online contributions.

Doesn't using my real name make me vulnerable to things like identity theft?

No. But other than your name, do not post any personal information online that you do not want the public to see.

What if I see a comment about Auckland Council on a social networking site that I know is wrong or I think is offensive? Should I respond?

We encourage you to not respond to any post unless you are the Subject Matter Expert on the subject. If you think the post justifies a response, send a link to the Brand and Channel Communications team and, if you can, also take a screenshot of the post and include that in your email to socialmedia@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

Who are the subject matter experts?

If you don't know who the subject matter experts are, contact the Auckland Council Brand and Channel Communications team.

Do I have legal obligations around information requests via social media?

Yes you do. Any request for information that meets the eligibility requirements of the Local Government Official Information Act should be considered an official request, even if it comes via social media.

How should I handle such a request?

- i) A simple request answerable with readily available information: go ahead and answer, on the same channel where the request was raised if possible, to close the loop.
- ii) A more complicated request: It might take time to get the information the enquirer needs, or the response may turn out to contain personal information that cannot be shared online. Ask the enquirer for an email address and forward the request, plus their email address, to officialinformation@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

For more information, refer to the Ombudsman report '**Official information requests made by twitter and facebook.**'



