

# Social Networking Policy

October 2010

## What is social media?

Social media, for the purposes of this policy refers to internet-based tools used for publishing, sharing and discussing information and opinions.

It includes (but is not limited to) the following specific technologies:

- Personal blogs – WordPress, etc
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Facebook
- YouTube
- MySpace
- Personal websites
- Digg
- Bebo
- Wikipedia

## Who does this policy apply to?

This social networking policy applies to all staff and contractors (collectively referred to as the staff) of Northland Regional Council (NRC) participating in social media - creating or contributing to blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds, or any other kind of social media.

## Use of social media at work

Every staff member has an opportunity to express and communicate online in many ways, and we encourage an online presence.

The use of Council assets (computers, internet access, email, mobile phones, etc) for engaging in social media is permitted as long as your use:

- directly relates to the nature of your work at the Regional Council;
- is reasonable and does not impact on your productivity and ability to carry out your primary duties;
- does not negatively impact on our Council computer systems; and
- does not contain defamatory, confidential, sensitive or inaccurate information about the Regional Council, its staff or our citizens.

Use of Internet facilities for social media is also subject to the [Acceptable Use Policy](#). Please note that this policy does not permit use of the internet for streaming of downloadable video / audio (eg. YouTube) - online video and audio has a significant cost implication for the Council.

Internet use is monitored and reported on a monthly basis. Disciplinary action may be taken if your use of social media networks falls outside the permitted use as described above.

## Principles for online participation

These principles apply to your online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected of you as an employee of the Regional Council. Remember, you should participate online in the same way as you would with other media.

### **Transparency in every social media engagement**

If you are participating in social media in a work capacity, you must identify yourself as a staff member of Northland Regional Council.

Every Facebook page, Twitter account (or other social networking forum/page/site/account) that is hosted on behalf of the Council should make this fact clear to the online community.

### **Protection of our customers' privacy**

This means that we will be careful regarding any Personally Identifiable Information (PII) that we collect, including how we collect, store, use, or share the data. This information shall be pursuant to applicable privacy policies, laws and IT policies.

You must respect copyrights, trademarks, rights of publicity, and other third-party rights in the online social media space, including with regard to user-generated content (UGC). If you are in doubt regarding the copyright of this type of content please seek advice from the Community Relations department. [webteam@nrc.govt.nz](mailto:webteam@nrc.govt.nz)

### **Responsibility in our use of technology**

We will not use or align the Council with any organisations or web sites that use excessive tracking software, adware, malware or spyware. We will advise staff of these organisations and sites as they come to our attention.

## Off-Limits material

It is forbidden to use social media to publish information about:

### ***Intellectual property, confidential information or customer data***

Our intellectual property, confidential information and customer data are strictly forbidden from being posted on any online forum except through the Council's Community Relations department.

### ***Online recommendations***

Some sites, such as LinkedIn, allow members to "recommend" current or former employees and contractors. As a Council employee, staff must not provide employee or contractor recommendations for reasons of Council liability and to ensure a consistent approach. All recommendations or references should be referred to the Human Resources Manager: [askHR@nrc.govt.nz](mailto:askHR@nrc.govt.nz)

### ***Financial information***

Any online communication regarding the Council's financial data is strictly forbidden except through the NRC Community Relations department.

### ***Company-sensitive matters***

Any online communication regarding confidential, sensitive or personal information such as staff issues, strategic decisions or embargoed announcements is forbidden. If in doubt, seek clarification from the Council's Community Relations department.

## Complaints

If any staff member becomes aware of social networking activity that is inaccurate, defamatory or breaches our policy principles, please contact the Community Relations department: [webteam@nrc.govt.nz](mailto:webteam@nrc.govt.nz)

## Resources and further information

If you want to find out how to appropriately use social media in your area of the Council, please contact the Community Relations department for further information.  
[webteam@nrc.govt.nz](mailto:webteam@nrc.govt.nz)

**The policy was last reviewed by:**  
*Jason Dawson, General Manager – Community Relations*  
*October 2010*

## **Guidelines for work-related use of social media**

Like with traditional media, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to effectively manage the Council's reputation online. The following guidelines will help you decide when to engage and participate in the thousands of online conversations that mention us every day.

### **When to use social media**

Unlike traditional media, social media provides tools for two-way conversation that others are able to see and join in if they wish. This provides an opportunity to build relationships and rapport with not just the person you're talking with, but potentially a whole community of people. This provides both potential benefits and risks that need to be managed.

Other key differences to consider are:

- remember that social media lives in a 24/7 world - it requires significantly higher levels of resourcing and time that must be considered before you engage. For example, responses and comments to your postings should be actioned as soon as practical. Therefore before you engage, you must consider resources.
- the tone tends to be more personal, less corporate and less formal.
- you have little control over the use of your content once it's been posted – regardless of whether you edit it or delete it. Your contributions may be accessible and traceable forever, and by anybody in the world, so a little bit of extra care is needed.
- you often need to agree to a social media provider's terms of service before you can use their product or platform.

### **Consider the benefits of engaging with social media**

Social media tools enable us to:

- take advantage of the large audiences already using social media networks.
- reach new audiences.
- demonstrate an open culture and provide a personal face to the organisation online.
- communicate faster and be more flexible.
- use the power of video and images to tell stories about the issues we are involved in.
- make our key messages visible in existing social networks.
- get feedback, opinions and ideas from a different segment of our community.

### **Consider the risks and implications of engaging with social media**

Social media is vast. There are many types of social media tools, from video and photo sharing tools, to literally millions of blogs, wikis, discussion forums and micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter. There are also risks associated with engaging with social media, from resourcing issues and time commitment, to potentially provoking a contentious issue.

## Ask yourself a couple of questions

Here are some tests to apply in making decisions about whether staff should engage:

- what is the effort?
  - what is the ongoing commitment likely to be? Once you post one comment, you might become engaged in a lengthy online conversation or debate. Social media etiquette means that you shouldn't post a comment then hide under a rock - this could impact negatively on the Council's reputation as an organisation. So, if you're going to engage think about how much of your time it could potentially consume posting, monitoring and responding to comments
  - is it targeting a priority audience for your programme/project?
- is it worth the effort? (benefits vs costs including resourcing)
- will the contribution enflame rather than clarify the situation?

If you wish to discuss this issue in more detail for your area of the Council, please contact the Community Relations team. [webteam@nrc.govt.nz](mailto:webteam@nrc.govt.nz)

## How to engage online

The Council respects the rights of its staff, representatives and partners to use blogs and other social media tools not only as a form of self-expression, but also as a means to further the Council's business.

However, it is important that all are aware of the implications of engaging in social media and online conversations that reference the Council and/or the staff member's relationship with the Council.

The following **9 principles** guide how Online Spokespeople should represent the Council in an online, official capacity when they are speaking **"on behalf of the Regional Council:"**

1. **Be an authorised Online Spokesperson.** All spokespeople who wish to officially represent the Council online must complete social media training first and seek the permission of the General Manager – Community Relations.
2. **Follow our Media Policy and all other Council policies.** The **Media Policy** sets out expected behaviours for dealing with the media. As a representative of the Council you must act with honesty and integrity in all matters. This commitment is true for all forms of social media. In addition, several other policies govern your behaviour as a Council spokesperson in the social media space, including the Acceptable Use Policy.
3. **Be mindful that you are representing the Council.** As a Council representative, it is important that you be professional and honest in all of your communications. Be respectful of all individuals, races, religions and cultures; how you conduct yourself in the online social media space not only reflects on you – it is a direct reflection on the Council.

4. **Fully disclose you work for the Council.** The Council requires all staff, partners and representatives who are communicating on behalf of the Council to always disclose their name and their connection. It is not acceptable to use false names or deceive people. State your relationship with the Council from the outset, e.g., “Hi, I’m Fred and I work for the Council...” Remember to be honest and be smart. It takes a long time to earn trust online but only takes a moment to destroy it.

This disclosure is equally important for any vendor/partner/third party who is representing the Council online. They must disclose that they work “with the Council.

5. **Keep records.** It is critical that we keep records of our interactions in the online social media space and monitor the activities of those we engage with. Because online conversations are often quick and immediate, it is important for you to keep track of them when you’re officially representing the Council. Remember that online Council statements can be held to the same legal standards as traditional media communications. Keep records of any online dialogue about the Council and send a copy to [webteam@nrc.govt.nz](mailto:webteam@nrc.govt.nz)
6. **When in doubt, do not post.** Staff, partners and representatives are personally responsible for their words and actions, wherever they are. As an online spokesperson, you must ensure that your posts are completely accurate and not misleading, and that they do not reveal sensitive or confidential information about the Council, our citizens or staff. Use sound judgment and common sense, and if there is any doubt, **do not post it.** If you ever feel unsure about how to respond to a post, send the link to [webteam@nrc.govt.nz](mailto:webteam@nrc.govt.nz)
7. **Give credit where credit is due - respect others’ rights.** Do not claim ownership or credit of something that is not yours. If you are using another party’s content, make certain that they are credited for it in your post and they approve of you using their content. Do not use the copyrights, trademarks, publicity rights, or other rights of others without the necessary permissions of the holder(s).
8. **Be responsible to your work.** We understand that staff, partners and representatives engage in social media activities at work for legitimate purposes and that these activities may be helpful for Regional Council business. However, we encourage everyone to exercise sound judgment and common sense to prevent online social media sites from becoming a distraction at work.
9. **Know that the Internet is permanent.** Once information is published online, it is essentially a permanent record, even if you “remove/delete” it later or attempt to make it anonymous. If your complete thought and its context cannot be squeezed into a short word bite (such as Twitter), provide a link to an online space where the message can be expressed completely and accurately – like our website: [www.nrc.govt.nz](http://www.nrc.govt.nz)

# Guidelines for personal use of social media

There's a big difference in speaking "on behalf of the Regional Council" and speaking "about" the Council.

This set of **5 principles** refers to those **personal or unofficial online activities** where you might refer to the Council.

1. **Adhere to the Media Policy and other applicable policies.** All Council staff, from the Chief Executive to summer students are subject to the Council's policies in every public setting. In addition, legislation such as the Privacy Act and LOGIMA govern the disclosure of information through your professional activities online.
2. **You are responsible for your actions.** Anything you post that can potentially damage the Council's image will ultimately be your responsibility. We do encourage you to participate in the social media space, but urge you to do so properly, exercising sound judgment and common sense. Stop and think first. Think about it this way – would you be prepared to defend and prove a negative post about a person on Facebook or Twitter in court? Would you be happy to see your name and our Council associated with your posting in the newspaper?
3. **Be an "advocate" for compliments and criticism.** Even if you are not an official online spokesperson for the Council, you are one of our most important advocates for monitoring the social media landscape. If you come across positive or negative remarks about the Council or its activities online that you believe are important, consider sharing them by forwarding them to [webteam@nrc.govt.nz](mailto:webteam@nrc.govt.nz)
4. **Let the subject matter experts respond to negative posts.** You may come across negative or critical posts about the Council or its activities, or see third parties trying to spark negative conversations. Unless you are an authorised spokesperson, avoid the temptation to react yourself. Pass the post(s) along to subject-matter spokespersons who will respond to such comments, at [webteam@nrc.govt.nz](mailto:webteam@nrc.govt.nz)
5. **Be conscious when mixing your business and personal lives.** Online, your personal and business personas are likely to intersect. The Council respects the free speech rights of its staff, partners and representatives, but you must remember that customers, colleagues and supervisors often have access to the online content you post. Keep this in mind when publishing information online even if you think that it can only be seen by friends and family (remember that information originally intended just for friends and family can be forwarded on).

Remember **never** disclose sensitive and confidential information from the Regional Council (including confidential, public excluded reports and/or commercially sensitive information), and be aware that taking public positions online that are contrary to the Regional Council's interests might lead to disciplinary action.

**These guidelines were last reviewed by:**  
Jason Dawson, General Manager – Community Relations  
October 2010