

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY ERJ 4.5.2

INTRODUCTION

Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+, YouTube and blogging represent a growing form of communication for not-for-profit organisations, allowing them to engage their members and the wider public more easily than ever before.

However, it is also an area in which rules and boundaries are constantly being tested. This policy acts in conjunction with Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust's Media Relations Policy in order to maximise our social media reach while protecting our public reputation.

PURPOSE

The Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust may choose to engage in social media such as:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Google+
- WordPress/Blogger
- YouTube/Vimeo
- iTunes/Podcasting

Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust seeks to encourage information and link-sharing amongst its membership, staff and volunteers, and seeks to utilise the expertise of its employees and volunteers in generating appropriate social media content.

At the same time, social media posts should be in keeping with the image that Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust wishes to present to the public, and posts made through its social media channels should not damage the organisation's reputation in any way.

Due to the fast-moving nature of social media and the constant development of new social media programs, it is important that this policy and its procedures be reviewed at regular intervals.

CORE POLICY

Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust's social media use shall be consistent with the following core values:

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- **Integrity:** Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust will not knowingly post incorrect, defamatory or misleading information about its own work, the work of other organisations, or individuals. In addition, it will post in accordance with the organisation's Copyright and Privacy policies.
- **Professionalism:** Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust's social media represents the organisation as a whole and should seek to maintain a professional and uniform tone. Staff and volunteers may, from time to time and as appropriate, post on behalf of Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust using its online profiles, but the impression should remain one of a singular organisation rather than a group of individuals.
- **Information Sharing:** Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust encourages the sharing and reposting of online information that is relevant, appropriate to its aims, and of interest to its members.

Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust should seek to grow its social media base and use this to engage with existing and potential members, donors and stakeholders. At the same time, a professional balance must be struck which avoids placing the organisation's reputation at risk.

AUTHORISATION

Chair

19th May 2014

Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust

Paul Robertson 28/2/2014 3:08 PM

Comment [1]:

SOCIAL MEDIA PROCEDURES ERJ 4.5.2

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Board shall nominate a **Communications Officer** to co-ordinate Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust’s social media management.

The **Communications Officer** will oversee expansion of social media and help to develop the Social Media Strategy in line with the organisation’s Media Relations Policy.

Staff and volunteers may, from time to time and where appropriate, post on behalf of Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust using the organisation’s online social media profiles. This is to be done only with the express knowledge and authorisation of the **Communications Officer**.

The **Communications Officer** has ultimate responsibility for:

- Ensuring that all posts are in keeping with Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust’s core Social Media Policy.
- Ensuring appropriate and timely action is taken to correct or remove inappropriate posts (including defamatory and/or illegal content) and in minimising the risk of a repeat incident.
- Ensuring that appropriate and timely action is taken in repairing relations with any persons or organisations offended by an inappropriate post.
- Moderating and monitoring public response to social media, such as blog comments and Facebook replies, to ensure that trolling and spamming does not occur, to remove offensive or inappropriate replies, or caution offensive posters, and to reply to any further requests for information generated by the post topic.

It is important to maintain the balance between encouraging discussion and information sharing, and maintaining a professional and appropriate online presence.

Delegation

Social media is often a 24/7 occupation; as such, such responsibilities as outlined above may be delegated by the **Communications Officer** to another appropriate staff member/volunteer.

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PROCESSES

Posting to social media

Before social media posts are made, volunteers and staff should ask themselves the following questions:

- Is the information I am posting, or reposting, likely to be of interest to Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust's members and stakeholders?
- Is the information in keeping with the interests of the organisation and its constituted aims?
- Could the post be construed as an attack on another individual, organisation or project?
- Would Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust's donors be happy to read the post?
- If there is a link attached to the post, does the link work, and have I read the information it links to and judged it to be an appropriate source?
- If reposting information, is the original poster an individual or organisation that Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust would be happy to associate itself with?
- Are the tone and the content of the post in keeping with other posts made by Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust? Does it maintain the organisation's overall tone?

If you are at all uncertain about whether the post is suitable, do not post it until you have discussed it with the [Communications Officer](#). A few moments spent checking can save the organisation big problems in the future.

Damage limitation

In the event of a damaging or misleading post being made, the [Communications Officer](#) should be notified as soon as possible, and the following actions should occur:

- The offending post should be removed.
- Where necessary an apology should be issued, either publicly or to the individual or organisation involved.
- The origin of the offending post should be explored and steps taken to prevent a similar incident occurring in the future.

If the mistake seems set to grow, or to cause significant damage to the organisation's reputation, revert to the Media Relations Policy and the Our Community helpsheet: [What to do in a Media Crisis](#).

Moderating social media

The reputation of Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust's is first and foremost, and this involves maintaining a safe and friendly environment for its members.

From time to time social media forums may be hijacked by trolls or spammers, or attract people who attack other posters or the organisation aggressively. In order to maintain a pleasant environment for everybody, these posts need to be moderated.

Freedom of speech is to be encouraged, but if posts contain one or more of the following, it is time to act:

- Excessive or inappropriate use of swearing
- Defamatory, slanderous or aggressive attacks on Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust, other individuals, organisations, projects or public figures
- Breach of copyrighted material not within reasonable use, in the public domain, or available under Creative Commons license
- Breach of data protection or privacy laws
- Repetitive advertisements
- Topics which fall outside the realms of interest to members and stakeholders, and which do not appear to be within the context of a legitimate discussion or enquiry.

If a post appears only once:

- Remove the post as soon as possible
- If possible/appropriate, contact the poster privately to explain why you have removed the post and highlighting Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand Trust's posting guidelines.

If a poster continues to post inappropriate content, or if the post can be considered spam:

- Remove the post as soon as possible
- Ban or block the poster to prevent them from posting again.

Banning and blocking should be used as a last resort only, and only when it is clear that the poster intends to continue to contribute inappropriate content. However, if that is the case, action must be taken swiftly to maintain the welfare of other social media users.

The decision to block, ban and remove posts ultimately lies with the Communication Officer, but may, at their discretion, be delegated to responsible staff and volunteers.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- [What to do in a Media Crisis](#) (Our Community help sheet)
- Media Relations Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Copyright Policy

AUTHORISATION

Chair

19th May 2014

Edmund Rice Justice Aotearoa New Zealand TrustTrust

WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO A GOOD ORGANISATION:

WHAT TO DO IN A MEDIA CRISIS

Accidents happen and so do muck-ups, failures, gaffes, bungles, political controversies and many other embarrassments.

When the news breaks, you may find your group in the middle of a media flurry. What you want to avoid at all costs is this flurry turning into a full-blown media crisis that can cause long-term damage to your group and a loss of public confidence.

Whatever it is that has happened to your group – be it accident, muck-up, controversy or legal action – the first priority for your group is to fix it and to ensure there is no continuing danger or risk to the public or any chance of the same thing happening again. And you also need to deal with the media.

PREPARE FOR THE CRISIS

As well as preparing a risk management strategy it is a good idea for community groups to set up a "crisis communications plan". This will ensure that senior staff and volunteers, directors and board members know exactly what should happen should your group be faced with a media crisis.

This plan will ensure that your group has:

- An appointed spokesperson/s.
- A process where everyone in the organisation knows who to call should a major incident or media crisis develop.
- An established process where senior staff or directors can gather as much accurate information as quickly as possible.
- A process whereby accurate information can be provided to the media as soon as practicable.

So what happens when the media comes calling about something that has gone wrong and it involves your group?

DON'T RUN. DON'T HIDE.

The first reaction – and the worst – for most groups is to try to ignore the attention and hope the story will go away. Resist the temptation to circle the wagons or stick your head in the sand. It doesn't go away and as long as what's on display is your organisation's failings, you're risking the ongoing haemorrhaging of support for your group.

The reality is that your group will end up having to address the issue publicly. The longer it takes, the longer the media and the public believe you have something to hide.

The other reality is that the media will run a story. What you want as much as possible is to influence the nature of that story and ensure that what is run is accurate and fair. It is a bit rich to complain about not having your side of the story aired when you have refused to provide it.

The other theme that you want to stand out is that the incident is not acceptable and not normal and that your group is doing everything in its power to ensure that it's not repeated. Organisations that come out of a media crisis with their reputations intact are those that deal with the issue quickly, effectively, honestly – and just as importantly, are perceived to be doing exactly that.

So how does a small non-profit organisation with no money for public relations expertise deal with the situation?

- **Decide that there is a crisis.** The successful handling of a crisis can be decided in the first hours or days. By recognising early in the peace that you actually have a crisis on your hands, you can start to rectify it. The sooner you take action, the better your chances of coming out with your reputation intact.
- **Understand who the media represent.** While "the media" is chasing you for details, the people who are going to be most interested in reading or listening to your response will be "the public" – and that means your members, donors, supporters, businesses, sponsors, potential supporters etc. Frame your responses with the real audience in mind.
- **Decide who will be the spokesperson or public face.** Where possible ensure it is the highest-ranking person (CEO, chairman/director) who has the important mix of authority and access to all the latest information. You also need to have someone who is accessible and available to journalists. You need to stay on top of a crisis, not create a vacuum where yours is the only voice not being heard.
- **Release as much as you can as quickly as you can.** Sometimes you will be responding to an incident, such as someone getting injured, or a fraud, or a complaint of wrongdoing by an employee, but other times there may be serious and unfounded allegations. The more information you can release that puts the incident in context and puts your side of the story across, the better. And the quicker the better. The sooner you respond and show that you are acting in a sincere, honest and reliable manner, the sooner your voice is listened to and trusted.
- **Avoid the Bart Simpson defence.** What you emphatically do not do is give the Bart Simpson defence – "I didn't do it, nobody saw me do it, you can't prove a thing."
- **Say only what you know to be true.** If you don't know the answer, don't guess at it. Be honest and stick to only confirmed information you know to be accurate and correct. If necessary, tell the reporter you don't know but will check it out and get back to them. Better to provide a correct answer than to flail around and guess incorrectly.
- **Remember that first impressions count.** No matter how much they try not to, the media will come with some sort of preconceived idea which normally boils down to whether you or your organisation are sinners or saints (in this particular incident or generally). Your attitude, openness and commitment to resolving the issue is important in ensuring they leave with a positive impression.

- **Work out what you can legally release.** If there are legal issues that come into play, be aware of where the line is drawn on what you can say. Also be aware that many legal advisers will advise you to say nothing at all and that is advice that should be challenged. You have to publicly address the issue, it is only the manner or amount of information that is up for discussion.
- **Avoid speculation or answering hypothetical questions.** Try to stick to the facts and what did happen, not what might have done. You can fend questions off by saying things such as "I don't want to speculate on that" or "I would prefer not to deal in hypotheticals. What we do know is"
- **Challenge information you know to be wrong.** Don't leave wrong facts out there. If something is running that's wrong, let others know before it becomes common knowledge. Let the media organisation know the information is wrong and let other organisations know so they don't repeat it. Wrong facts left unchallenged are often more damaging than the truth.
- **Show concern.** You are a community group. Your main mission is to care/service/support the community so you need to be mindful of the feelings as well as the issues. If someone has been badly affected or hurt, mentally or physically, by an action of your group, express your concern and demonstrate your compassion.
- **Don't bother blaming the media.** If there is something wrong, point it out. If you have a different view, point it out. But avoid personal slanging matches. If it is a serious issue you want to be seen to be treating it seriously and dealing with it, not wasting time blaming the media for bringing to light an incident involving your group.
- **Ban the words "no comment".** Forever. Even if you keep repeating the same information you have released. Say: "All I can say is ..." or say "I can't provide that information until I have all the details ..." or "I can't answer that until I have a full report" or "I am happy to try to answer those questions once I have spoken to the right people ..." You never see seasoned media performers respond "No comment". The reason is that it sounds as though you know the answer but don't want to provide it.
- **Don't run from the cameras.** The one piece of vision you are absolutely guaranteed to see on television that night is the vision of someone running from the media, or shielding their face, or slamming the door in their face. Again, it makes you look like someone who has something to hide. If you have nothing new to add, say that.
- **Stay calm.** It's important you stay calm under pressure or swap places with someone who can. Anger makes good vision for TV stations and bad news for community groups. Avoid it.
- **Consider bringing the media into your organisation.** Hold frequent media briefings rather than have reporters camped on the nature strip. It lets them show how you are dealing with the crisis and the difficulties and problems that you face. And that you're human. And that you have nothing to hide.
- **Talk in common, easily understood language.** Avoid jargon. Speak in a manner that ensures people can actually understand the message you are trying to portray.

WHAT IF THE STORY IS JUST PLAIN WRONG?

It makes it even more important to react when the story is wrong or malicious. And this does happen. It may not get into print, it may not get on TV but it may cause you some pain dealing with unfounded allegations.

The British Red Cross was recently tainted by allegations that it had overstated the sum raised for Iraqi Kurds in 1991. It hadn't, but that wasn't going to be enough. "We had to very rapidly clarify our position and committed ourselves to carrying out a thorough investigation," the organisation said afterwards. "Our supporters are essential to us and it is vital that they remain confident in us."

And that is one of the most important aspects of a media crisis. Community groups rely on their credibility. That's what brings in donations, support, members. It is imperative to come out of any crisis with that credibility and standing intact.

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