

St. Joseph, Missouri Police Department



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I. Policy

Social media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the department and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention and related objectives. This policy identifies potential uses that may be explored or expanded upon as deemed reasonable by administrative and supervisory personnel. The department also recognizes the role that social media plays in the personal lives of some department personnel and the effect such personal use can have on departmental personnel in their official capacities. As such, this policy provides precautionary information, as well as prohibitions related to the use of social media by department personnel.

The St. Joseph Police Department endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration and information exchange, streamline processes and foster productivity. This policy establishes the department's position on the utility and management of social media and provides guidance on its management, administration and oversight. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media; rather social media in general, as advances in technology will occur and new tools will emerge.

II. Definitions

- A. Blog** - A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions or comments. The term is short for "Web log."
- B. Page** - The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed and managed by an individual or individuals with Administrator rights.
- C. Post** - Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.
- D. Profile** - Information that a user provides about themselves on a social networking site.
- E. Social Media** - A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking

sites (Facebook), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs and news sites (Digg, Reddit).

- F. Social Networks** - Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information and socialize with others using a range of technologies.
- G. Speech** - Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.
- H. Web 2.0** - The second generation of the World Wide Web focused on shareable, user-generated content, rather than static web pages. Some use this term interchangeably with social media.
- I. Wiki** - Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

III. Procedure

A. On-The-Job Use

1. Department-Sanctioned Presence

a. Determine strategy

- 1)** Where possible, each social media page shall include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website.
- 2)** Where possible, the page(s) should link to the department's official website.
- 3)** Social media page(s) shall be designed for the target audience, such as youth or potential police recruits.

b. Procedures

- 1)** All department social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Chief of Police or their designee, and shall be administered by the office of the P.I.O. and the Information Services Committee.
- 2)** Where possible, social media sites or pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the department and shall have department contact information prominently displayed.
- 3)** Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations and policies, including all information technology and records management policies.
 - a)** Content is subject to public records laws. Relevant records retention schedules apply to social media content.
 - b)** Content must be managed, stored and retrieved to comply with open records laws and e-discovery laws and policies.
- 4)** Where possible, social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the department.
 - a)** Pages shall clearly indicate that posted comment will be monitored and that the department reserves the right to

remove obscenities, off-topic comments and personal attacks.

- b)** Pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.

c. Department-Sanctioned Use

- 1)** Department personnel representing the department via social media outlets shall do the following:
 - a)** Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
 - b)** Identify themselves as a member of the department.
 - c)** Refrain from making statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions.
 - d)** Refrain from posting, transmitting, or otherwise disseminating confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without express written permission.
 - e)** Refrain from conducting political activities or private business.
- 2)** Using personally owned devices to manage the department's social media activities, or in the course of official duties, is prohibited without express written permission.
- 3)** Department personnel shall observe and abide by all copyright, trademark and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.

2. Potential Uses

- a.** Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about:
 - 1)** Missing persons;
 - 2)** Wanted persons;
 - 3)** Gang participation;
 - 4)** Crimes perpetrated online (i.e. cyberbullying, cyberstalking); and
 - 5)** Photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.
- b.** Social media can be used for community outreach and engagement by:
 - 1)** Providing crime prevention tips;
 - 2)** Offering online reporting opportunities;
 - 3)** Sharing crime maps and data; and
 - 4)** Soliciting tips about unsolved crimes (Crimestoppers).
- c.** Social media can be used to make time-sensitive notifications related to:
 - 1)** Road closures;
 - 2)** Special events;

- 3) Weather emergencies; and
 - 4) Missing or endangered persons.
- d. Persons seeking employment and volunteer positions use the Internet to search for opportunities and social media can be a valuable recruitment mechanism.
- 1) The department has an obligation to include Internet-based content when conducting background investigations of job applicants.
 - 2) Searches should be conducted by a non-decision maker. Information pertaining to protected classes shall be filtered out prior to sharing any information found online with decision makers.
 - 3) Persons authorized to search Internet-based content should be deemed as holding a sensitive position.
 - 4) Search methods shall not involve techniques that are a violation of existing law.
 - 5) Vetting techniques shall be applied uniformly to all applicants.
 - 6) Every effort must be made to validate Internet-based information considered during the hiring process.

B. Personal Use

1. Precautions and Prohibitions

- a. Department personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair working relationships within the department, for which loyalty and confidentiality are important, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among coworkers, or negatively affect the public perception of the department.
- b. As public employees, department personnel are cautioned that speech on or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties—that is, that owes its existence to the employee’s professional duties and responsibilities—is NOT protected speech under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the department. Department personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their position, as well as the department.
- c. Department personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without prior written permission of the Chief or their designee.
- d. For safety and security reasons, department personnel are cautioned not to disclose their employment with the department, and shall not post information pertaining to any other member of the department without said member’s permission. As such, department personnel shall not do the following without prior written approval of the Chief of Police:

- 1) Display department logos, uniforms, or similarly identifying items on personal web pages.
 - 2) Post personal photographs or provide similar means of personal recognition that may cause them to be identified as a police officer with the department. Officers who are, or who may reasonably be expected to work in undercover operations, shall not post any form of visual or personal identification. Department members who wish to post such information shall request permission from the Chief of Police in writing, preferably by email, prior to doing so.
- e. When using social media, department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain.
 - f. Engaging in prohibited speech may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an officer's testimony in subsequent criminal proceedings. Department personnel who are sanctioned in such a manner are subject to discipline, up to, and including, termination of their position with the department.
 - g. Department personnel may not divulge information gained by reason of their authority; make any statements, speeches, appearances, or endorsements; or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of the department without prior written authorization to do so.
 - h. Department personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for:
 - 1) Publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group or organization (defamation);
 - 2) Publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone (without their permission) that has not been previously revealed to the public, is not of legitimate public concern and would be offensive to a reasonable person;
 - 3) Using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes (without their permission) for an exploitative purpose; or
 - 4) Publishing the creative work of another, trademarks or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.
 - i. Department personnel should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.
 - j. Department personnel should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the department at any time without prior notice.
 - k. Reporting violations—any employee becoming aware of, or having knowledge of, a posting or any website or web page in violation of the

provisions of this policy, should notify their supervisor immediately for follow-up action.

Chris Connally, Chief of Police

Date