

News: Social media guidance



(The principles behind this guidance note are drawn from revised BBC-wide social media thinking and editorial policy guidance. This version 12 July 2011)

There are three main kinds of social media activity we are concerned with:

- 1. Your own personal activity, done for your friends and contacts, but not under or in the name of BBC News**
- 2. Activity for core news (eg breaking news), programmes or genres carried out officially in the name of BBC News**
- 3. Activity of editors, presenters, correspondents or reporters carried out as part of official BBC News output.**

Each has different guidance, so please read this whole document carefully.

1. Your own personal activity, done for your friends and contacts, but not under or in the name of BBC News

- a. You are not discouraged from doing any of this, but as a BBC member of staff - and especially as someone who works in News - there are particular considerations to bear in mind. They can all be summarised as: 'Don't do anything stupid'.
- b. Remember that even though you are acting in your own personal capacity, you are on show to your friends and anyone else who sees what you write, as a representative of the BBC. If you are editorial staff, it doesn't make much difference whether or not you identify yourself as someone who works for the BBC.
- c. You are allowed to say that you work for the BBC, and you can discuss the BBC and your work publicly. But your name/title should not contain BBC in any form. And you should make clear that the views expressed are personal, and not those of the BBC.
- d. You shouldn't state your political preferences or say anything that compromises your impartiality. Don't sound off about things in an openly partisan way. Don't be seduced by the informality of social media into bringing the BBC into disrepute. Don't criticise your colleagues. Don't reveal confidential BBC information. Don't surreptitiously sanitise Wikipedia pages about the BBC.
- e. If you want to start a blog where you feel conflicts of interests are possible, you should discuss it first with your line manager; he or she won't unreasonably stop you, but will want to discuss potential risks. If you already have a blog like this, you should have already had this conversation. If you haven't, then make sure you do.
- f. BBC editorial guidance on this area is here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/page/guidance-blogs-personal-summary>

2. Activity for core news (eg breaking news), programmes or genres carried out officially in the name of BBC News

- a. This can be a good thing to do, especially if you are going to engage better with your audience or even extend your reach.
- b. The golden rule for our core news, programme or genre activity is that whatever is published – on Twitter, Facebook or anywhere else - **MUST HAVE A SECOND PAIR OF EYES PRIOR TO PUBLICATION**. A second check might well avoid you saying or linking to something unwise which could land you, or the BBC, in trouble. While there's recognition that staffing levels can get in the way of this, especially small teams in overseas offices, every effort should nonetheless be made to ensure this practice is adhered to unless there are urgent live deadlines.
- c. Before you consider starting this activity, carefully think through the editorial purpose. Don't just do it because other programmes or website areas have done it, or because you think it's what everyone does these days.
- d. And think about practicalities - who is going to do it, how much time will it take? Who will be the author, who the second pair of eyes? Can this be fitted into your schedules? Can you do it justice? Will you still want to be doing it in two months' time?
- e. Discuss it with your editor, who needs to know in advance of anything you are proposing to do.
- f. Make a note of any login names and passwords, and also any other service that you set up to automate the activity (eg: forwards it from Twitter to Facebook). Share those details with members of your team, making sure they are stored safely: if you move to do a different job or are off sick, someone else will have to take over.
- g. All accounts need to be cleared by your editor, social media editor/

representative and by the Social Media Editor for News. They need to be entered on a register held by the Head of Editorial Compliance & Accountability. They'll need details via email of what you are doing, how it's being second-checked, and the key contacts.

h. BBC accounts should look and feel consistent - there are separate instructions available for how to do this.

i. BBC editorial guidance on this area is here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/page/guidance-blogs-bbc-full>

3. Activity of editors, presenters, correspondents or reporters carried out as part of official BBC News output.

a. Currently, there are limited official individual BBC News accounts on Twitter (like Stephanie Flanders @BBCStephanie). A full list is here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/help-12438390>

b. The crucial thing to remember is that as they're official BBC News output, all tweets need to be consistent with this, reflecting and focusing on areas relevant to the role or specialism, and avoiding personal interests or unrelated issues.

c. There is a particular compliance procedure for these accounts, which involves a senior editor or assistant editor being sent the tweets automatically after they go out.

d. Full guidance is in a separate note "News official tweeter guidance July 2011".

e. Everything else done by individuals who work for BBC News is done in their own name - it is not owned by the BBC, may not normally be linked to or trailed by the BBC as official output, and should not purport to come from the BBC. It comes under the existing social media guidelines (referred to in 1, above).

f. If you are interested in joining, or adding someone to the list of official tweeters, please get in touch with the Social Media Editor for News.