



Social Media & Personal Online Communication Policy

Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust 2020-25

1. Introduction & Scope

This policy governs how Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust (RPMT) uses social media to support the work of its museums. It also sets out its expectations of staff in their own use of social media and personal online communication when identifying as an employee of RPMT or re-using or referring to information that they could only access as an employee.

A wide definition of the term 'social media' is used in this document. This not only includes the commercial networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram that are commonly identified as social media, but also covers activities such as blogging and podcasting which are less reliant on proprietary platforms.

The term 'personal online communication' is used to cover staff posting on online platforms that are not usually considered social media, such as 'below the line' comments on news articles and message board contributions.

2. Related Policies

RPMT policies relating to social media and personal online communication include:

- Digital Policy
- IPR and Image Reproduction Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Digital Preservation Policy

3. Background & Purpose

This policy reflects the greater freedom to use social media that will be afforded to Royal Pavilion & Museums staff following the transfer of the service from Brighton & Hove City Council to RPMT. It also builds upon a 'Social Media Blueprint' which was produced following workshops conducted with around 40 members of museum staff and volunteers (see Appendix 1).

This blueprint identified three ways in which social media use can add value to the work of our museums:

- i. To have a voice and to be an active participant in different communities
- ii. To build audiences and to advertise
- iii. To tell stories about the collection

Using social media to successfully achieve these objectives will require planning, resourcing, training and a confident polyvocal approach to presenting the work of RPMT. The purpose of this policy is to provide the rules governing this approach, so that staff and trustees have a shared understanding of how we can safely and effectively discuss our work online.

4. RPMT managed accounts

Primary accounts

RPMT operates a primary social media account on all the platforms it engages with. These are usually named as a variant of the @brightonmuseums handle. These accounts adopt an informal yet informative tone of voice. As they may be used for emergency communications or to make formal statements, they need to remain trustworthy channels of information.

These accounts are managed by the Marketing and Digital teams within RPMT with access to these accounts restricted to a core group of staff.

These accounts are usually updated every day, with content prepared and produced according to a planned schedule.

Content contributions to this account are welcomed from all staff, volunteers and external collaborators, but some notice is usually required.

Satellite accounts

Staff may be permitted to run social media accounts under the RPMT banner relating to specific business areas, buildings or collections.

Before doing so they will be asked to submit a business case outlining the purpose of the account, identifying the audience they wish to engage with, what platforms they wish to use, and who will manage the account.

All RPMT social media accounts are expected to publish at least one update per week.

These accounts can be more playful and use differing tones of voice according to the audiences they are trying to reach and the aims of the account. However, they must follow RPMT's current Good Conduct for Social Media guidelines. Serious and repeated breaches of these guidelines will result in a halt to further posting, and the likely deletion of the account. (See section 6 below.)

'Unofficial' accounts purporting to represent RPMT's buildings, collections or other assets are not permitted. Staff managing such accounts will be instructed to delete them.

A full list of all social media accounts managed in the name of RPMT can be found at: brightonmuseums.org.uk/SocialMedia.

5. Staff personal accounts

RPMT staff manage their online presence in a variety of ways. Some may operate social media accounts that are solely for professional purposes; others may keep their personal profiles completely clear of content relating to their work. Most staff, however, are likely to have an online presence that blends the personal with the professional.

If staff are regularly posting content relating to their work, they should reference their position at RPMT in their profile biography. We also recommend including a statement to the effect that all opinions expressed on that account or platform should be considered personal rather than that of RPMT.

If staff do not wish to use their real name when discussing their work online, they should at least use a pseudonym or other means of indicating that their posts come from an individual so that they are not confused with an RMT satellite account.

RPMT does not consider 'self-promotion' to be an intrinsic problem with the use of staff accounts. It recognises that personal social media accounts can often be more effective than those under the RPMT banner, and that the perspectives and voices of individuals are vital to the online presence of RPMT. Staff use of social media is only likely to be considered a problem if it hinders other priorities in work time, or conflicts with RPMT's mission or the Museums' Association's Code of Ethics.

Staff using personal social media accounts and platforms to share their work at RPMT should make their line manager aware that they are doing this.

6. Good conduct guidelines

RPMT maintains good conduct guidelines for social media use. These are intended to be updated organically and collaboratively by RPMT staff. (See Appendix 2 for version as of 24/02/20.)

These guidelines are considered mandatory for primary and satellite RPMT accounts and recommended for staff accounts in so far as they fall within the scope of this policy.

7. Ethics & Privacy

There is growing public and museum sector concern about the ethical implications of using the proprietary social media platforms owned and operated by large tech companies. If RPMT considers the activities and values of these companies to be in breach of the Code of Ethics or its mission or values, it may choose to close its primary or satellite accounts at any time.

RPMT is also conscious of the fact that posting content on platforms such as Facebook or YouTube is inviting users to share their data with a third party company. In order to balance these privacy concerns with providing open access to its digitised collections and the knowledge and stories it can share, RPMT will work to ensure that these platforms are not the sole repositories or access points for the information it makes publicly available.

RPMT also recognises that some of its staff do not wish to use social media and may want to maintain a low profile online. While RPMT may encourage its staff to use social media, it will never place undue pressure on its employees to use these platforms or post online.

All use of social media by RPMT should comply with its Data Protection Policy and relevant data protection legislation.

Appendix 1

Royal Pavilion & Museums Brighton & Hove (RPM)

Social Media Blueprint

Dr Sophie Frost, Digital Fellow, One by One

School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester

January 2020

1. Purpose of this document

A blueprint is a guide for making something – it is a design or pattern that can be followed. This document is both anticipatory and aspirational. Rather than a set of instructions, it has been written in a spirit of collaboration, built through consensus with participating staff at Royal Pavilion & Museums Brighton & Hove (RPM).

Next spring, RPM will become an independent trust. Once this happens, the organisation will have more freedom over how it manages its online presence, especially with the use of social media. This document considers social media in its broadest sense: as both evergreen and ephemeral, including long-form content such as blogs, YouTube videos, podcasts and online articles that might be found on the museum's website or via an online forum such as MuseumCrush or Medium, through to more ephemeral and short-lived posts discoverable on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Both forms of content, albeit in different ways, invite comment, sharing, feedback and the development of networks, thus constituting *social* media. At this significant point in RPM's story, there is a need to develop a more coherent approach to personal online communication that represents the mission, vision and civic role of the museum service in Brighton and Hove.

Therefore, the aim of this document is to:

- Suggest the content and format of a clear set of guidelines for using social media which will be assessed and updated regularly as different online platforms and technologies evolve;
- Propose a blueprint approach for social media at RPM when communicating online.

2. Context

Since the beginning of the year, RPM have worked with Dr Sophie Frost, Digital Fellow on the One-by-One project led by the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester. One-by-One is a collaborative project exploring and developing digital literacy in museums. The specific project at RPM involves empowering employees in digital storytelling across RPM's five sites, an aspect of which is the development of a consensus-based social media blueprint.

Across the museums sector, online presence is increasingly becoming as important as off-line reality. In constructing a social media blueprint for the organisation as it approaches Trust, the Digital Team wish to reflect on the value of RPM's social media channels and those of its staff members, considering the online engagement of the institution as well as how it is represented by individual staff.

Between March and April 2019, all staff members – regardless of skill or interest in social media – were invited to attend a 90-minute Social Media Workshop so that they could have their say in building this social media blueprint for RPM. Four workshops were held in which approximately 40 staff members attended, where answers to the following question were considered:

What kind of approach to personal online communication do we need that captures the value of RPM's objects, stories and communities?

Everett R. Rogers's ideas around the 'diffusion of innovation' were of significance to these workshops, where he describes the adoption of an innovation as an intrinsically *social* process in which subjectively perceived information about a new idea is communicated from person to person (2003). Rogers states that when an innovation is adopted by a group, they at the same time acquire the rights to *re-invent* it. The consensus-led development of RPM's social media blueprint indicates the courage of staff to re-invent a bespoke approach to online communication, shaping it to fit the values of the organisation within the specific communities of Brighton and Hove.

2.1 What did the workshops consist of?

During the social media workshops, we:

- Brainstormed the current and potential role of social media at RPM;
- Worked through a series of recent scenarios where the organisation had been required to respond quickly and coherently to social media attention;
- Mapped areas of staff digital expertise, skills, networks and partnerships that may be unknown to the organisation;
- Had a collective discussion about the future of social media at RPM.

2.2 Who were the participants?

Attendees to the workshops were from a variety of departments; some were paid, others were volunteers. They were of mixed ages and had varying levels of digital confidence. While some participants engaged with social media daily, others described themselves as “observers, not users.” Many expressed how they used different platforms for different things while others claimed minimal understanding of the purpose of several online channels.

There was a prevailing sense of fear around how to effectively utilise social media in a way that would be appropriate while not compromising the privacy or ethical values of the organisation or any of its staff. The feeling that “we could do more” resonated with many and there was a consensus that there was little consistency in RPM’s approach. As a result, many intimated a lack of confidence in accurately representing the organisation via social media.

2.3 What was the perceived value of social media at RPM?

For RPM, social media can be thought of as a space that enables three principal things:

1. *To have a voice and to be an active participant in different communities:* during the workshops, participants described how social media enables the museum service to have a voice and to be “active in the community” and “part of a network.” Further, it provides the possibility of “positioning ourselves politically” as risk-taking and provocative by “enabling different voices to speak” and “widening discussions.” Social media is perceived as both a way of “communicating our relevance in society and in the community” whilst enabling a form of “critical friendship” with other networks, organisations, groups and individuals online.

2. *To build audiences and to advertise:* while being part of existing communities is an integral element of RPM's social media, so is its perceived capacity to build new communities and to increase footfall. It is recognised as a way of "engaging people with what we do behind the scenes" and its "informal and accessible" nature is seen as capable of "breaking down a wall," reaching out to diverse and unknown audiences and of "sharing the collection with those who don't come."

3. *To tell stories about the collection:* staff foresaw the storytelling possibilities of social media: how it can provide a forum for "telling stories about the collection, history and staff" whilst "celebrating and sharing" the work of the organisation. It can be used a valuable source of "research and information gathering," and at the same time recognised as a medium for "immediate and democratic content generation," enabling a practice of equality within its processes.

3. Social media guidelines

All staff who attended the social media workshops agreed that the creation of a simple 10-point policy for social media usage would be valuable; a document that advises on how to generate interesting and consistent social media content for RPM.

Such a guide needs to include advice on the following:

- Difficult and unpredictable issues e.g. online trolls and how we should monitor and respond to these;
- Image embargoes and copyright;
- Privacy and confidentiality – the development of some 'what's appropriate?' questions that strike a balance for the individual and the institution and that ensure the security of all staff;
- Quality control – e.g. should we use emojis? Should we take different approaches on different social media platforms?
- Timing and frequency of posting;
- How to cultivate a balance of events, exhibitions and paid on-site activity with speaking more broadly to different communities about free activity and nurturing conversation and dialogue;
- Measuring performance and success.

There also needs to be a style guide, which should include:

- A more thought-through and structured approach to online content generation;

- An explanation of the kind of voice and language that should be expressed in all social media output;
- A comprehensive description of how individual employees are expected to express themselves when representing the museum service.

The blueprint laid out below will respond to several of these requirements.

3.1 Privacy and confidentiality

Amongst staff there was a strong feeling that issues of privacy, ethics and confidentiality need to be carefully considered when developing a social media approach at RPM. It was expressed that staff should have a choice whether to opt-in or opt-out of whether they use social media on behalf of the organisation.

Those who wanted to 'opt-in' requested the following:

- The need for more time to be less reactive, and to respond in a more sensible way to online comments, particularly challenging ones;
- That safety must come first and this needs to be supported by leadership.

4. A Social Media Blueprint for RPM

Constructed through the consensus-led approach of the social media workshops, the following affirmations and interventions for RPM's online profile following transition to trust have been suggested by RPM staff. The affirmations are a series of *statements* that determine the desired trajectory of social media at RPM; a set of intentions for the future. The interventions are a series of *actions* that could assist in making the affirmations possible, offering potential pathways for enabling the desired tone of voice, plurality of voices, spirit of co-production, skills sharing and curatorial strategy that the affirmations express.

4.1 Affirmations

1. *RPM's tone of voice is...* risk-taking, accepting, responsive, collaborative, trusting, boundary-breaking, brave, unapologetic, responsible, empowering, forward-thinking, celebratory, inclusive, diverse, community-involving, multi-voiced, conversational, humorous, historical, playful, and co-produced by both staff and audiences.
2. *RPM is a collective made up of many individual voices.* The organisation can present itself as 'multi-voiced' by adopting some of the following tactics:
 - Embracing several online personalities at any one time (because individuality is not a competition);
 - Being consistently conversational and welcoming, with the emphasis on having a conversation and inviting people to participate physically and virtually in the museum's collections;
 - Communicating in confident, passionate and personal ways, thus reflecting the pride of the staff who work within the organisation and of the collections at their behest.
 - Leadership recognising (and celebrating) distinct staff identities on social media, as they reflect the diversity of the organisation itself.
3. *RPM embraces co-production at all levels.* It consistently asks itself: "what is our philosophy on this?" When difficult or unexpected situations arise, RPM is prepared to engage quickly and consistently in deep conversations with all stakeholders in a cross-organisational way.
4. *RPM runs on-the-job digital skills sharing opportunities.* Whilst all staff recognise the importance of social media, not everyone feels confident in using every platform or piece of technology. A variety of tactics might be adopted to address this:
 - Regular skills-sharing opportunities;
 - Social media being recognised in a more formal way as part of people's job role (if they've opted-in);
 - More elastic workplans so that staff can schedule time to post on social media;
 - A skills bank that is regularly updated;
 - Staff working together more frequently to create dynamic and engaging online content based on their specific skillsets and interests;
 - Constant feedback and reassessment opportunities;
 - The inclusion of volunteers in social media content generation.
5. *RPM has a commitment to curating exciting, engaging and informative online content.* New evergreen content, in the form of podcasts, videos, 'takeover'

days (see below) or blog posts are vital to maintaining the forward-thinking profile of the institution. Online evergreen content is generated as a cultural output in its own right.

4.2 Interventions

The following could assist in realising the affirmations outlined above:

1. **Takeover Days** where a guest voice (or voices) take control of RPM's social media platforms. This could be, for example, a local community or interest group, an artist or activist;
2. **The appointment of 'social media champions,'** whereby a core group of staff are trained to promote and create social media opportunities and evergreen content on behalf of the organisation;
3. **Regular skills sharing opportunities** for all staff, dependent on their ideas and needs;
4. **A creative strategy for online content generation** so that it becomes a strand of programming in its own right. Dr Lauren Vargas's Content Management Playbook for museums may provide a useful template for developing this;
5. **One staff member or volunteer allocated to cover every event or exhibition on social media** (this would also be a workforce development opportunity);
6. **A strong online identity for each museum site**, supported by an array of staff voices. This requires a site-specific social media account for every location and the evolution of a 'house style' for each that feels natural and appropriate;
7. **RPM's Press office acts as the central location/portal** where staff photos are sent and stored;
8. **An open-minded approach to staff self-promotion**, whereby such activities are appreciated as helping certain things get off the ground, adding vibrancy and personality and contributing to the sense that there are a team of voices at RPM who care.

5. Conclusion

These affirmations and interventions have been created with a spirit of openness, risk-taking, collaboration and community in mind – all of which are perceived by staff and volunteers as fundamental to the future of RPM following transition to trust. This blueprint is committed to *polyvocality*; to enabling multiple voices from across the museum and its communities to speak and to be heard.

Written by consensus through the involvement of many passionate and dedicated museum people, the blueprint prototypes a potential future for RPM's online profile. That said, it is a guide which in no way wishes to destabilize the real-world experience of visiting museums themselves, but rather to support, enhance and re-invent them for a 21st century audience.

Appendix 2

Social media good practice guidelines (as of 24 February 2020)

These rules have been written in response to some of the questions raised by staff during the Social Media Blueprint workshops conducted in 2019. They have also been inspired by the Rules of the Road developed by the Smithsonian Museum as part of a sample social media policy for its Museum on Main Street programme: <https://museumonmainstreet.org/sites/default/files/sample%20social%20media%20policy.pdf>

These guidelines should be considered **mandatory** for RPMT accounts and **recommended** for staff personal accounts, in so far as staff are self-identifying as an employee of RPMT or are re-using or referring to information they could only know as an employee. They should be read and understood alongside RPMT's Social Media & Personal Online Communication policy.

Guidelines

Respect Privacy

Not everyone wants to be featured on social media. RPMT will never insist that a member of staff should post under their own name or have their photograph published online. If you are naming colleagues on social media, make sure they are aware of this -- ideally by tagging them if they have an account on that platform.

Remember that photographs of people are considered personal data. If you are photographing a member of the public, make sure you obtain and record consent before using the image.

As a rule of thumb, photographs of crowds or other images where individuals are not clearly identifiable are usually ok to use. But photographs focused on one or two people should require their permission.

Respect copyright

Some of the works in RPM's collections are protected by copyright, usually belonging to the artist or their estate. If in doubt, ask the curator or a member of the digital team for advice before photographing or publishing the work.

Remember that creators have a moral right to be credited for their works too. If someone gives you permission to use an image or a piece of text they have created, make sure your post credits them in the way they have specified. You should also not crop or edit creators' images with overlaid banners unless they agree.

If you are creating text or images for social media during your working day, note that copyright in these works belongs to RPMT. While RPMT is unlikely to object to you using these words and pictures on personal posts, you should be prepared to make these assets available to the wider organisation.

Respect confidentiality

Confidentiality clauses are a part of everyday business. Press embargos, the wishes of lenders not to be named, and the details of commercially sensitive information should all be respected.

Treat conversations with work colleagues as confidential by default. Even if a friend tells you a fascinating story in a crowded room, don't assume that openness translates to that story being retold online.

Don't embarrass your colleagues

If you are frustrated with issues at work or disagree with opinions expressed on RPMT's channels, keep the discussion internal within the organisation. It is very easy to post expressions of anger online but raising these frustrations internally will ensure that you understand the full situation before prematurely expressing an opinion. Even if you still disagree, raising these disputes in public is unlikely to improve relations with your colleagues.

Online debate about professional issues is welcome, providing it is conducted respectfully and staff take clear ownership of their opinions.

Be sensitive

It's hard not to communicate online without offending someone at some point. We should never try to avoid disagreements with others, but there are some obvious subjects and uses of language which will always upset some people.

- Swearing
- Light-hearted treatment of human remains
- Irrelevant contributions to hashtags about serious issues (eg natural disasters)

Racist, sexist, homophobic comments, or any language that denigrates a group in society should never be used.

Avoid arguments

Arguments are rife online, and even mildly provocative content can receive ill-tempered responses. You may wish to respond to reasonable criticism or comment from members of the public, but do not get locked into ongoing debate. If the discussion needs to be continued, take it off publicly visible platforms.

Complaints about the services provided by RPMT should receive an initial publicly visible response and then moved to email or telephone.

Abusive comments are increasingly common and can often arrive in targeted attacks at accounts. 'Don't feed the trolls' is sound advice, and abusive comments should be initially ignored with the user blocked or reported if the abuse is continually repeated.

Threats to people, buildings or the collections should always be reported to the security team and may be referred to the police.

Be ethical

Every time we invite our online users to follow us on Facebook or watch a You Tube video, we are suggesting that they share data about their online activities with large corporations with questionable ethics.

If we have valuable content to share for the public good, proprietary social media platforms should never be the sole place of access. Open self-managed channels such as our website should always be the primary point of access for good quality content.

Be evergreen

Timeline based platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter may be good for responsive posts and grabbing immediate reach, but this content is unlikely to be seen after 48 hours. Evergreen content like blog posts, YouTube videos and podcasts can remain discoverable for many years after they are posted and make a useful contribution to the knowledge economy.