CHILD CARE
State Capacity Building Center

Social Media Strategies to Support Child Care Consumer Education Websites

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The Consumer Education Website Guide series aims to help state and territory staff develop effective, accessible, family-friendly consumer education websites. This series is designed to support the efforts of states and territories as they enhance their consumer education websites to help families understand the full range of child care options and resources available to them.

These guides share best practices and tips that state and territory staff can use to improve the user experience, make all information clear, and prepare for common accessibility barriers—such as limited English proficiency, limited literacy skills, and disability. They will help ensure that all families have easy access to accurate, understandable information as child care consumers.

Overview

Families and other stakeholders are using social media to stay informed and connect with organizations and each other. States and territories can leverage social media to strengthen their consumer education activities, drive traffic to their consumer education website, and add a new, more dynamic dimension to their family and stakeholder engagement efforts. To be successful and efficient, your social media strategy should be one part of your comprehensive communication and engagement plan.

A social media strategy requires a slightly different approach than other marketing initiatives. In the vast social media world, your message will compete with hundreds or thousands of messages to attract your target audience's attention. This guide aims to help you create a successful social media presence by presenting best practices and resources for planning, maintaining, and assessing an effective social media strategy that will engage your target audience and support the use and growth of your consumer education website.

This guide organizes material into the following key sections:

1. "Define Your Social Media Strategy"
2. "Develop a Management Process to Ensure Quality and Accountability"
3. "Build Content and Create Posts to Support Your Social Media Strategy"
4. "Ensure Accessibility in Your Social Media Posts"
5. "Review Metrics to Support Continuous Improvement"

1. Define Your Social Media Strategy

Social media should be one tool in your larger communication and engagement plan, which should include your consumer education website. Think about your overarching communication and consumer education website goals when developing social media activities to make sure they support your larger engagement efforts. As with any outreach effort, to achieve an effective social media presence, you must first do the following:

- Identify your target audience

- Set goals

- Select the right platforms

- Determine specific objectives to measure success

User research is conducted in the formative stages of designing content and web design prototypes. This ensures the team is building the right thing, at the right time, for the right people. Rapid prototyping (including pencil sketches) can help you refine ideas before developing higher-fidelity wireframes (more realistic content with a more povlished look) for usability testing exercises. In essence, user research informs design; then, usability tests help teams decide if they've built the right product with appropriate, usable features.

Identify Your Target Audience

To build an effective social media strategy, you must identify your target audience. Knowing your target audience will help you develop and post content that addresses the specific concerns, needs, and interests of a particular demographic. For your child care consumer education website, your primary audience includes parents and families. This audience may have specific segments, such as families with young children, families with school-age children, and families with children who have special needs. In addition to families, you may also want your social media presence to reach other stakeholders—such as providers, child care professionals, and advocates. Understanding how your target audience finds what's important to them will help you craft content that resonates with them. Likewise, this understanding will help you select the best platforms for reaching your specific audience.[1]

Set Goals

Goals are broad, general descriptions of what your social media strategy should achieve over time. Goal setting is an integral step in creating a successful social media strategy and should serve as a guidepost throughout the social media planning and management process. Below are some example goals that would support your consumer education website and guide your social media activities:

- Build awareness and credibility

- Strengthen engagement with key stakeholders

- Move traffic to your consumer education website

- Build partnerships[2]

Once you set your goals, use them to guide the development of your social media strategy, including selecting the right platform and determining how you will measure success.

1   Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2012). *CDC's guide to writing for social media*. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/guideforwriting.html

2   Child Care Aware of America. (2018). *Consumer education and engagement social media guide*. Retrieved from http://usa.childcareaware.org/families-programs/consumer-education-engagement/social-media-guide/

Select the Right Platform

Another step in defining your social media strategy includes selecting which social media platforms (for example, Facebook, Twitter, and so on) will best support your goals and help you reach your target audience.

People access information via social media in different ways, at different times of the day, and for different reasons. In seeking to meet the needs of different demographics, social media platforms engage audiences in varying ways and support different capabilities. The BUILD Initiative's Digital Communications Toolkit provides a description of each major social media platform, highlights each platform's unique features and benefits, and presents tips to leverage each platform's capabilities. This information may help you leverage the benefits of each platform and use them to effectively engage with your audience.

Understanding how your target audience may use or participate in different social media channels will help you determine which platform or combination of platforms may be the right fit for your social media efforts.

Determine Specific Objectives To Measure Success

Once broad goals are identified and you have selected your preferred platform, you should create more specific, short-term objectives to measure success and maintain momentum toward full goal achievement. Link these objectives to measurable outcomes by using a "SMART" (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely) approach.

Child Care Aware of America's *Consumer Education and Engagement Social Media Guide* provides a detailed table that presents key metrics for measuring specific social media objectives. Additionally, the National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement's (PFCE Center) *Consumer Engagement: Using Social Media to Engage Families* provides further guidance on how to set meaningful, realistic, and measurable goals and objectives. Taking the time to set SMART objectives tied to specific efforts upfront will make tracking and assessing your activities much easier and less time consuming (see section 5 of this guide, "Review Metrics to Support Continuous Improvement," for more information on assessing success).

The table below provides some example goals and SMART objectives that may be relevant to a social media strategy for your consumer education website.

Table 1. Example Goals, Measures, and SMART Objectives for Consumer Education Related Social Media Efforts

Goal	Measure	SMART Objective	How You Measure
Building awareness	Reach	Following launch of new social media strategy (as promoted via word-of-mouth, email newsletter, and announcement at public advisory council meeting), increase the number of fans or followers by 15 percent by the end of the next quarter	The total number of fans and followers
Engaging with key stakeholders	Likes and reactions	By implementing a biweekly social media posting schedule, increase the number of user reactions by 15 percent across all social media platforms	The total number of times users reacted to a post

Goal	Measure	SMART Objective	How You Measure
Engaging with key stakeholders	Comments	By integrating a post that elicits user responses biweekly, increase the number of free-form responses by 15 percent	The total number of times users wrote a free-form response to a post in the designated comments section
Engaging with key stakeholders	Engagement rate	Increase the engagement rate from 2.5 percent to 3 percent on the consumer education website by using a strategy that encourages users to like, comment, or repost information on their own social media sites	The sum of all post engagements (likes, comments, and shares) divided by post reach; the number of engagements with a post out of the number of people the post was served to
Moving traffic to consumer education website	Link clicks	By highlighting a key section of our consumer education website each week, increase web traffic by 10 percent after 12 weeks	The number of times users clicked a link to your consumer education website that was embedded within a post
Moving traffic to consumer education website	Click-through rate	By highlighting a key section of our consumer education website each week, increase web traffic by 5 percent after 12 weeks	Total link clicks divided by post reach; the number of times users clicked a link embedded within a post out of the number of people who viewed the post

2. Develop a Management Process to Ensure Quality and Accountability

To make sure your social media posts are professional, effective, and timely, develop a formal process that sets staff expectations, outlines needed policies, and defines your social media management process.

This section describes essential elements to include in your social media management process, including the following:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Content approval and quality assurance processes
- Branding consistency
- Monitoring and moderation guidelines
- Other administrative concerns

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has developed "Social Media Policies" to guide its agency's social media work. This may be helpful to consider as you develop your own social media policies.

Note: Since much of social media posting includes content, your process for posting to social media platforms may parallel the content development process for your consumer education website. You can also include social media work as a subsection of that content development process. For more information on content evaluation and development processes and timelines, please see the Child Care State Capacity Building Center's (SCBC) *Top 10 Actions to Improve Website Content and Design: Questions and Answers from the "Ask Me Anything" Webinar*.

Roles and Responsibilities

Define roles and responsibilities for staff who write social media content to support an organized, consistent social media approach and more efficient workplan implementation. Setting targets on how much time staff should devote to their specific tasks can also be useful. Leveraging the tips and resources presented in this guide can help you gain efficiencies and run a social media strategy that conserves staff time and attention.

Some roles and responsibilities that are helpful to address include the following:

- Who will develop and post content?
- Who will conduct quality assurance reviews?
- Who will approve content?
- Who will create and maintain a schedule for social media posts and then post the messages?
- Who will maintain posts?
- Who will create and maintain protocols, policies, and procedures?
- Who will monitor online activity and engage with parents after you post?
- Who will review dashboards (progress reports) and analyze social media data?

Quality Assurance and Content Approval Processes

Content approval and quality assurance are critical steps in any publication process. These processes will act as your safety net to prevent errors and maintain post integrity. Be sure to include reviewing your moderator's responses to user comments (see the "Provide Moderator Response Standards" portion of this guide) in your quality assurance and content approval processes.

Quality Assurance

Spelling, grammatical, or factual errors in social media posts can be embarrassing, especially when a state or territory agency is the author and the public is the consumer. To avoid this, you may find it helpful to include a second-person review, or quality assurance review, for each post before it goes live to ensure quality. In addition to having a copy editor review your work to catch any grammatical or factual errors, you should run a quality assurance review to ensure that publication permissions and citation protocols are followed. It may also be helpful to define when you need to obtain permission to post certain content (such as imagery or success stories featuring people) and how to ensure confidentiality is maintained, where applicable.

Content Approval

Content approval may not be necessary for all posts; however, once your post is reviewed for quality assurance purposes, it may be beneficial to use an approval process for certain kinds of posts. For instance, you may want to have a senior staff person approve posts that could have any legal or political fallout or could lead to policy misunderstandings. This may include posts relating to news stories, requests for proposals or grant opportunities, and policy clarifications. The person who provides content approval should assess a post for appropriateness and alignment with consumer education website goals and larger agency or governmental policies.

Note: Quality assurance reviews and content approvals require time, so you should include them in your editorial calendar (see the "Use an Editorial Calendar" portion of this guide for more information).

Branding Consistency

One of the key goals of your social media strategy is to strengthen awareness of your consumer education website. You can support this goal by ensuring that the brand elements of your consumer education website are reflected in the content of your posts. In time, properly curated posts that convey your consumer education website's brand will begin to resonate with stakeholders, cultivating brand recognition and credibility. The content and formatting of posts should align with your consumer education website branding guide, so families can make the connection between your social media presence and your consumer education website. See *Branding Your Consumer Education Website: A Guide for States and Territories* for more detailed information about branding consistency across communication platforms.

Monitoring and Moderation Guidelines

Once you start posting content, you will need to monitor user posts and comments for appropriateness and assess whether they require a response. Successful monitoring guidelines address each of the following elements.

Define Timeframes and Monitoring Frequency

For a new social media presence or a smaller social media audience, monitoring does not need to be a full-time job. To avoid missing key engagement opportunities with stakeholders, however, you should set and enforce a monitoring schedule. Choose a frequency for check ins (once, twice, or three times a day, depending on activity levels) and assign them to specific staff. If monitoring will be split between multiple staff members, consider splitting it by platform instead of by day. Having a consistent voice in the comments—and the historical knowledge of any ongoing conversations—can enhance the user experience and foster sustained engagement.

> **Useful Tip: Use a Social Media Monitoring Decision Tree for Easy Implementation**
>
> Monitoring guidelines can include or take the format of a decision tree. See this example from the Consortium for School Networking.

Monitoring guidelines can also address which tools you should use for daily monitoring activities. Most scheduling tools have monitoring capabilities. If you are not using a scheduling tool, you can also monitor account activity on the social media platforms themselves. An example of this is Facebook's notification center, where you can see messages, comments, shares, and mentions from your audience.

Use a Moderator Process

Use a moderator process to ensure that all user posts or comments are reviewed and approved before a larger audience can see them. This process should clarify who is responsible for moderation and when and how responses to comments should be reviewed and approved.

To expedite decision-making and protect the integrity of your social media presence, you should consider posting a comment policy that encourages respectful dialogue and lets users know which language and tactics will be considered inappropriate. These policies can be linked to a social media account in the biography section (Twitter, Instagram, or Pinterest) or written within the account details (Facebook). See the SmokefreeUS Facebook page for a good example of a page policy statement.

> **Useful Tip: How to Save Time with Preapproved Responses**
>
> Monitoring guidelines can also include preapproved, canned responses for common or predictable scenarios and questions submitted via comments (for example, user requests for more information, responses that thank users for their comments, and so on). These preapproved responses will save moderators time and promote consistency in the voice and tone of responses.

Comments should not be posted if they contain the following:

- Blatantly partisan political views

- Explicit commercial endorsements, solicitations, or advertisements

- Discriminatory, racist, offensive, obscene, inflammatory, unlawful, or otherwise objectionable statements, language, or content

Provide Moderator Response Standards

Determine when responding to user comments is appropriate and helpful and who is responsible for drafting responses. Responses must be professional and strength-based in tone and should reinforce your agency goals and mission. Similar to review requirements for posting content (see the "Content Approval and Quality Assurance Processes" portion of this guide for more information), moderator responses should be reviewed to ensure that they align with content protocol and are free of errors. Moderator response protocols should be included in your social media quality assurance and content approval processes.

To ensure consistency and empower the moderator to provide users with quick responses, monitoring guidelines should also answer the following questions:

- What is the moderator's tone? Social media interactions should be friendly and in plain language. Beyond those basics, consider a tone that will match your brand. Are there key phrases you would like the moderator to use? Should the monitor use "we" or "I" when answering questions?

- How should policy violations be addressed? Will users be notified that their comment or post violated page policies? Should comments be hidden (an option only available on Facebook) or deleted? Will violations be recorded internally for reference?

- What types of behavior will be ignored? If there is negative engagement on your posts that does not violate page policies, will it be ignored? At what point does negative engagement constitute escalation? Consider the volume of negative engagement and the topic area when determining what meets the criteria for escalation. For instance, any post that names members of staff or public officials, or threads with six or more negative comments, will be removed.

> **Useful Tip: Consider Automated Comment Responses During Nonbusiness Hours**
>
> On some platforms, you can set up automatic responses to direct (or inbox) messages. This is recommended to ensure user satisfaction outside of business hours. An automated response can include working hours, a link to helpful information, and information about when the user should expect a response (for example, within 24–48 hours). For more information about automatic responses on Facebook, visit the resource, "How Do I Turn Instant Replies On or Off for Messages to My Page?"

Other Administrative Considerations

Linking, Liking, Following, and Endorsing

Consider the value in liking or following a specific entity through your agency's social media account and what it may convey to your audience. In many cases, following an organization conveys endorsement of the entire entity, while retweeting or reposting content from another entity may only imply endorsement of the content that is being reposted. Review your state or agency linking policy for clarification. If you do not have a linking policy, it would be wise to develop one to guide your social media activity and ensure your social media presence is professional and supports your mission and goals.

Record Keeping

Clarify when posts can be deleted and how posts should be archived for reference and record keeping purposes. Determine where this information will be stored and whether social media posts need to be addressed in your agency's record retention policy.

3. Build Content and Create Posts to Support Your Social Media Strategy

Good content is the cornerstone of any successful social media strategy. A successful social media presence depends on dynamic, effective posts that appeal to your target audience and foster engagement. This section provides useful tips you can use to build social media content and craft effective posts.

Build a Social Media Content Library

Content creation is too often placed at the bottom of the to-do list in social media work. Content is the core of social media posts, and thinking of content creation as a preparation activity as well as a maintenance activity can set your efforts up for success. Though not every social media post can or should be planned, having a content library of high-quality, well-written, goal-aligned content to draw from is key to supporting a successful and sustainable social media plan.

Create a Variety of Content and Post Types

Content variety helps support a dynamic, fresh social media presence. The rule of thirds suggests you divide content into the following categories:

- One third of social media content should promote core messaging
- One third should focus on community building and branding
- One third should be reserved for timely posts and shares from other relevant sources

You can create posts for the first two categories—core messaging and community building—in advance and store them in a content library. Proactive content creation will support more efficient use of staff resources and ensure consistency across posts.

In addition to the rule of thirds, your social media content should be reusable, include images, and be written in action-oriented, plain language (more information on how to create effective posts is presented in the "Crafting Effective Posts" portion of this guide). As such, your content library should reflect a healthy mix of the following post elements to support ongoing, effective posting:

- **Post type:** Incorporate a variety of post types, including posts with links, image or video posts with and without links, and "real-time" content like Facebook or Instagram stories.
- **Media type:** Including a mix of videos, gifs, images, and text-only posts can add interest for the end-user.
- **Tone:** Including a mix of lighthearted content, inspirational content, and informative content can help maintain interest and keep posts fresh.
- **Intended use:** Some content can be framed for repeated use (with repost frequency depending on platform selection), while other pieces can feature time-specific references for single use.

Table 2, below, provides examples of social media posts that reflect a mix of content categories and post types. These illustrative examples were created by the authors of this guide.
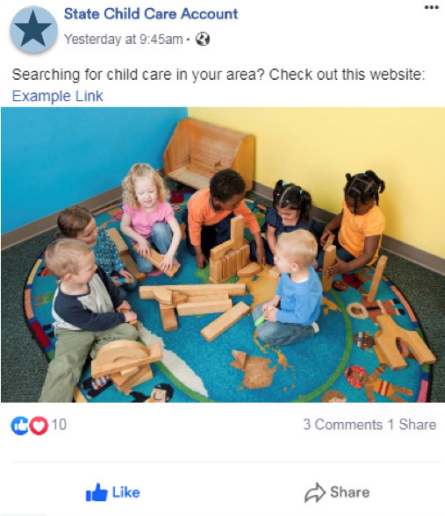
Table 2. Examples of Post Types

Category (rule of thirds)	Post Type	Example
Core messaging	**Mission posts:** Stating the purpose of your social media presence can go a long way. Posts that explicitly outline the goals of the account—for example, stating that "we want to help people quit smoking"—can encourage engagement from the appropriate target audience, build credibility, and reinforce core messaging. Use "Did You Know?" posts to promote key resources and tools.	
Core messaging	**Call to action posts:** When promoting a digital resource, posts that clearly explain a desired action can help increase web traffic.	

Category (rule of thirds)	Post Type	Example
Community building	**Polls:** You can use poll posts to ask questions that are relevant to the community and encourage engagement. Poll responses can inform content strategy and provide information that could be shared in follow-up posts.	
Community building	**Inspirational quotations:** Many users turn to social media for inspiration and positive, shareable content. Brand-aligned, appropriately attributed quotations can be used to draw an audience into content.	

Category (rule of thirds)	Post Type	Example
Timeliness	**Shares:** Sharing applicable content posted by partners can build credibility, convey thoughtful leadership, and fuel partnerships and collaboration.	
Timeliness	**Observance days:** Posts scheduled to recognize observance days that are relevant to your work can keep an editorial calendar relevant (for example, Week of the Young Child, holidays, and so on).	

Crafting Effective Posts

A successful social media presence depends on dynamic, effective posts that are easy to understand and will foster engagement. Success in social media can be tricky because the audience does not focus on a single product or webpage; rather, users browse large chunks of information and skim posts to determine where to focus their attention. If your social media content is too dense, long-winded, or complicated, you are unlikely to attract a reader.[3] Crafting effective posts is an art in which you can vary content and post types and incorporate well-written text.

Resources such as Child Care Aware of America's *Consumer Education and Engagement: Social Media Guide*, the PFCE Center's *Consumer Engagement: Using Social Media to Engage Families*, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *CDC's Guide to Writing for Social Media* provide specific recommendations for crafting effective posts for various social media channels. In addition, each platform also provides guidelines that present recommendations on character count, post elements, and visual requirements. Platform guidelines can be found on platform-owned FAQ and blog pages.

Use Family-Friendly Language Techniques to Attract Your Target Audience

In social media channels, your message competes with hundreds or thousands of messages to attract your readers' attention. Any text that appears in your social media activity must immediately reach your audience. This is the cornerstone of a successful social media presence. Below are some proven writing principles that can help you craft effective posts and reach your intended audience:

- Use plain language. As with all of your consumer education website content, anything you write for social media should be written in plain language. Use active voice. Limit jargon. Keep sentences short and direct.
  - Use words that are short, simple, and commonly understood. Consult the "Federal Plain Language Guidelines" for more information and examples of plain language use.
- Use action-oriented messages with strengths-based language. For example, "You know what is best for your child. As you search for child care, look for a program that can support your child's needs, interests, and learning style."
- Use people-first language. People-first language identifies the individual before the situation they may be facing. When you use people-first language, you do not define a person by his or her circumstances. For instance, use "resources for children with special needs" rather than "special needs resources."
- Consider the literacy and reading level of your target audience.[4]

In addition, *CDC's Guide to Writing for Social Media* includes the recommendation that your social media messages be

- relevant, useful, and interesting;
- easy to understand and share; and
- friendly, conversational, and engaging.[5]

Review the resources cited above for specific guidance that you can use to strengthen your social media writing.

3   Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2012). CDC's guide to writing for social media. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/guideforwriting.html

4   National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. (2018). Consumer engagement: Using social media to engage families [Guide]. Retrieved from https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/consumer-engagement-using-social-media-engage-families

5   See footnote 4.

Be Mindful of Engagement

Be sure to promptly review comments for posts in which you have elicited user feedback. Quickly share results when you use a poll via social media. Similarly, review user comments thoughtfully, identify user quotes or questions, and elevate them by including them in follow-up posts. This will showcase your responsiveness and validate the importance of audience participation.

Community building and engagement techniques should be customized since every online community is unique. Think about your audience demographics, interests, and activity levels. Consider weekly community building activities (#FeatureFriday, Behind-the-Scenes or Q&A events, and so on) or move off-schedule to elevate relevant user content when it occurs in real time. A Govloop blog post, "How to Build an Active Community of Support on Facebook," has more information about building digital communities. The PFCE *Center's Consumer Engagement: Using Social Media to Engage Families* provides additional tips and resources for bolstering engagement via social media.

Create Content That Supports Goals and Performance Metrics

Results-oriented content can be achieved by taking measurement into consideration at the beginning of the content creation process. Choose content that could answer key questions or help clarify which post elements resonate best with your audience. For instance, are stock photos or illustrated icons more engaging? Does your audience click on link posts—or image posts with links included in the text?

As you build a following, think of your account followers, or social media audience, as a target demographic of their own. Once key questions are answered, the following tricks can help your content creation process double as a testing and measurement activity, informing content enhancements that are tailored to the followers of your account:

- **Leverage content categories for comparison:** If you are wondering how content X will perform in comparison to content Y, group content into those categories for easy comparative reporting. This can be done through file saving structures, tagging mechanisms (the ability to apply a label to a post within a social media scheduling tool, which is generally automated), or coding systems (a defined set of categories that posts can have, generally manually labeled or recorded through something like an Excel document).

- **Use link tracking:** Consider ways to track clicks on links included within posts to see if your audience is using them. A basic option is a link shortening tool, like Bitly, which will aggregate link click numbers. For more in-depth data, consider web analytics tools like Google Analytics (GA). GA links use a tagging structure called the Urchin Tracking Module (UTM). UTM code categories can be set—and recorded—during content creation to avoid confusion during posting and reporting. This tool requires source, medium, and campaign parameters in addition to a base URL, and it provides correct link structures for posting. Though UTMs are the most common type of campaign URL, other non-GA analytics tools have similar campaign URL functionalities. If you need help building a UTM URL for link tracking, visit Google's Campaign URL Builder tool. Additionally, SCBC's *Using Data to Inform Your Website: Questions and Answers from the "Ask Me Anything" Webinar* breaks down the key elements of UTMs and provides examples for reference.

Leverage Templates and Content Creation Tools

Design templates can simplify the content creation process and help content managers more efficiently create posts from the mix of content you have created. There are several tools available that allow for easy, template-based design—even without formal graphic design training. Canva (which offers both free and paid plans) is one option, and Adobe Spark (with similar free options) also has a design tool. There are also several sites where you can find free stock photos from the public domain. One such site is Pixabay, and another is Unsplash; users can also search to find relevant images for social media graphics.

Use an Editorial Calendar

Managing your social media activities does not have to be time-consuming. Being proactive will help you complete your social media tasks effectively. Using a social media calendar will help you organize your efforts and campaigns across multiple platforms, plan posts for important events and holidays, and ensure a mix of content types and posting times that will keep your posts engaging and fresh.

An editorial calendar is a schedule that maps out the types of content that will be posted and specifies when posting should occur. It should align with your consumer education priorities and goals and reflect key seasonal events that are tied to consumer education (for example, Week of the Young Child, back-to-school) and other content elements that are important to your target audience. An editorial calendar can take the guesswork out of the day-to-day implementation of a social media strategy and facilitate a thoughtful strategy that is tied to goals. Editorial calendars should specify themes, timeframes, and posting volume for each platform (for example, Facebook, Twitter) and channel (for example, via individual accounts or pages on a platform). They may also specify what day of the week and time of day that posts should go live and can support you in maintaining an ideal mix of content (such as core messaging, community building, and time-sensitive information) or supplementing additional marketing efforts happening outside of social media (such as printed materials). The following sections provide helpful tips for building an editorial calendar that bridges the gap between strategy and tactical implementation.

> ### Useful Tip: Use a Schedule Tool
> There are many social media scheduling tools available that will allow you to schedule content for publication in advance. Key factors to consider when choosing one are platform and price point. Hootsuite, a popular choice for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter scheduling, offers a free plan (with a limited number of accounts and posts) as well as tiers of paid options. Tailwind is a popular tool for Pinterest scheduling and also offers a free plan. Iconosquare offers robust Instagram scheduling and analytics capabilities for a free trial period. There are many other tools on the market as well, and Facebook offers free native scheduling options, which can be helpful for budget-conscious operations.

Create a Posting Schedule

> ### Useful Tip: Use an Editorial Calendar Template
> Free Microsoft Excel templates are available to help you get started and learn how to set up an editorial calendar.

You want to post material when families are most likely to see them. This will optimize your chances of connecting with your target audience. Child Care Aware of America's *Consumer Education and Engagement Social Media Guide* provides recommendations, based on social media trends, about when and how often you should post to each type of social media platform. To ensure your social media work is firmly rooted in social media trends and the needs of your target audience, create a posting schedule to guide your work. A posting schedule can provide structure to help you follow strategically identified, consistent rules about how frequently to post; for example, on which days of the week or at which times of day will you post?

- **Frequency of posts:** Child Care Aware of America's social media guide provides recommendations for how frequently you should post to each platform. These recommendations, coupled with considerations about your staff availability and account-specific trends, can help you determine how often to post. This article, "How Often Should You Post on Social Media," also provides some considerations about post frequency by platform.
- **Day of week:** Determine when the target audience is most active on the platform in question. Many secondary sources report on social media data, and it can be difficult to sift through conflicting information. Each platform (Twitter, Facebook, and

Instagram) generates its own data analytics to help you better understand audience activity. As such, one approach is to simply review the data analytics for each platform to determine which days of the week garner the most audience activity. Another approach is "guess and check"—for a set period, post on a variety of days; then determine which days have the best performance for continued scheduling by assessing your social media metrics.

- **Time of day:** Identify core hour blocks for optimal posting. These may be standard working hours, weekend hours, morning hours, or afternoon hours. You can identify, test, and confirm that these blocks are effective by using the same approach outlined for "day of week" in the previous bullet.

Useful Tip: Promote Your Efforts

There are many ways to promote your consumer education efforts and encourage stakeholders to like or follow your page and stay connected:

- Highlight your social media efforts at public meetings and family engagement events or interagency meetings with partners.

- Promote your efforts via email communications (for example, incorporate taglines and links into staff signatures), email newsletters, and print materials.

- Encourage monitors or licensing staff to tell programs and providers about your social media presence. Encourage them to inform parents.

- Add links to your social media account on parent education materials (print, online, or electronic).

- Consider using a specific hashtag in your post to link to a larger social media topic. A hashtag is a tag used on social media that allows users to find material with a specific theme or content. Social media users can also use hashtags to connect their posts to a specific topic. A hashtag starts with the pound symbol (#) and is followed by a keyword with no space in between (for example, #qualitychildcare). When you include a hashtag in a post, your post will show up in lists of other posts that use the same hashtag.

- Leverage partners. Identify partners who already have a social media following with segments of your target audience. Partners may be able to amplify your efforts through cross-posting and tagging. Child Care Aware of America's *Consumer Education and Engagement Social Media Guide* provides helpful tips on building partnerships to extend your social media reach.

Scheduling content in advance can help you organize your efforts, thereby reducing posting errors, ensuring consistency, and streamlining workflows within a social media management team. This scheduling process can be customized to fit the needs of a team and should aim to answer process questions like the following:

- How much content should be scheduled at a time? Some social media teams find it easier to bulk schedule for several months in advance, adding in timely content later, while some find that weekly scheduling is more manageable and allows for better responsiveness.

- How far in advance should content be scheduled? Based on your team's bandwidth and the amount of content you would like to post, determine how far into your calendar you should plan for posts (for example, a quarterly calendar, a monthly calendar, and so on).

Schedule Varied Content to Keep Posts Dynamic

Planning your editorial calendar can feel overwhelming, especially when your social media strategy covers a large content library with a diverse mix of content. A layered approach to calendar development can ensure that posts are adequately spaced to avoid repetition and maximize content value for your target audience. Here are some strategies to keep in mind to help vary the type of posts and content you schedule.

- First, block off slots for seasonal, observance, or trend-focused content that is time dependent. This can include partnership or campaign content.

- Second, choose the social media platform for core messaging content from the content mix.

- Third, sprinkle in relevant and engaging content that adds direct value for your audience or establishes credibility as an information source. Ensure that these posts break up core messaging content.

Once you determine these key elements, capture them in your editorial calendar. Think about how much information you would like to include in an editorial calendar and what time span you would like it to cover. In many cases, multiple people will need access to the editorial calendar. Free tools like Google Docs and Microsoft Teams can help with this issue. Confluence and Smartsheet are also helpful, although they have only limited free trial periods.

4. Ensure Accessibility in Your Social Media Posts

Creating digital content that is accessible to all users, regardless of ability, is mandated by law for many U.S. government resources and is considered a best practice even outside of regulated environments. When developing consumer education websites and related social media content, states and territories should create content that is accessible to all families. Please see SCBC's *Designing Websites That Are Accessible for All Families* for additional guidance on how to ensure your consumer education website is accessible to all families.

These Digital.gov guidelines are a good place to start when it comes to learning about social media accessibility techniques. The tips outlined within this section can further help a social media management team create and publish accessible content across platforms.

Alt-Text

Alt-text, or alternative text, is a word or phrase that is inserted into coding language on digital resources. On websites, alt-text provides information about the nature and content of an image when users cannot view it. On all digital platforms, it is read by screen readers in place of images. Different social media platforms have different capabilities when it comes to alt-text inclusion, and scheduling tools like Hootsuite can often provide additional capabilities and workarounds.

Captions

Captions can be used to communicate—via text—the core message behind a social media post. Thinking about caption creation from an accessibility perspective is an easy way to ensure that your social media content adds value for all users. This blog post from Hootsuite has tips for writing inclusive captions, including things like link and hashtag placement, use of caps lock, and clear calls to action for links. The following guiding questions can also help with writing accessible captions:

- Does this caption make sense without the image or video? Read the caption without the context that is provided by the image. Is part of the image referenced (for example, "this quote" or "this image") without explanation? Is a sentence or thought started in the image and finished in the caption (or vice versa)? To be accessible, captions should be complete thoughts and act as independent delivery mechanisms for messaging.

- What is the core message behind the post? As a final check, consider the core message behind the post without considering different post components. Next, compare the written portions of the post with the core message you have determined. Are all necessary pieces reflected?

Cross-Posting Accessible Material

In our evolving digital landscape, new platforms, tools, and tactics emerge with frequency. For social media platforms in particular, updates are common, discrete, and hard to keep track of. In cases where new platforms or platform features do not appear to offer accessibility tools, cross-posting can help ensure that high-quality digital information is available to all. Cross-posting simply means delivering the same content via multiple media; at least one medium should be accessible to screen readers, providing a reasonable alternative for users who are unable to access content though the original avenue.

5. Review Metrics to Support Continuous Improvement

Marketers are often asked to report the results (or, in other words, the return) of their efforts. This applies to your social media work as well. You want to make sure you are using your limited resources wisely. How are your efforts paying off? Which activities have helped you successfully meet your consumer education goals, and which ones have not? The answers to these questions will help you tailor your efforts and sustain continuous improvement of your social media strategy. Incredible amounts of social media performance data are available to measure and assess your efforts.

Previous sections of this guide described how to set goals and measurable objectives. Once you start your social media efforts, you must track your progress and review your performance metrics. An overview of the kinds of performance data that are available from each social media platform—including a breakdown of engagement metrics—is provided in Child Care Aware of America's *Consumer Education and Engagement Social Media Guide*. The guide also provides recommendations for analyzing data once they are gathered, such as how to look for trends and effectively account for outside influences. This section will supplement that information by highlighting additional tools and tactics for collecting data and emphasizing tips for keeping reporting focused on continuous improvement, particularly for the goal of moving traffic to your consumer education website.

Social Media Measurement Tools

Although data are available for export from native social media platforms, data storage and visualization can be challenging. The following tools, mentioned in the "Use an Editorial Calendar" portion of this guide, can supplement or replace native analytics for smoother data analysis processes.

Note: You can use dozens of tools for these purposes, but we provide only a sample here to help states and territories get started:

- **Hootsuite:** Hootsuite's automatic dashboards can deliver digestible information and save valuable time. Hootsuite analytics are particularly useful for Facebook and Twitter and offer tagging capabilities for customized report segmentation. Hootsuite offers a free version.
- **Iconosquare:** An industry leader in Instagram analytics, Iconosquare can provide historical data that are missing from the Instagram platform itself. You can also schedule email deliveries of reports to prioritize analytics check-ins. Icononsquare offers a free trial period.
- **Tailwind:** Tailwind analytics provide valuable Pinterest performance data, including a breakdown by Pinterest board and a record of published posts. Tailwind offers a free version.

Web Traffic Measurement Tools

Social media performance data are important to evaluation and reporting and are paramount in continuous improvement. Connecting social media to other pieces of your digital strategy plan, however, can greatly improve outcomes for your larger goals. According to the latest Sharaholic Data Reports, in 2017, 25.6 percent of all referral traffic to websites was from social media. When set up appropriately, web traffic measurement tools can give your social media management team valuable insight as they pursue referral traffic to the consumer education website.

Google Analytics (GA) is a free tool that states and territories can use to track web-referral traffic from their social media channels. While other web analytics tools are available, GA is one of the most frequently used and is available for free. If your site doesn't currently have this tool installed, Google has created a guide for getting started. SCBC's *Guide for Measuring Web Traffic and Engagement* introduces digital analytics to audiences with limited experience in digital strategy and goes into more detail about GA and similar metrics tools.

Here are some key terms that you should understand when reviewing social media performance data:

- **Landing page:** The landing page is not the same as a website's home page. The landing page is the first that users visit on your site. It can be any page within your larger consumer education website. Rather than the title of the page, performance metrics typically show the URL path for the page. In part, this is because you can use tagged URLs to track campaigns and other metrics, as mentioned in the "Create Content That Supports Goals and Performance Metrics" portion of this guide.

- **Users:** People who come to your site.

- **New users:** People who likely have not visited your site before (this number can be slightly inflated if people change devices or clear their cookies).

- **Sessions:** How many visits someone made to your site.

Moving Beyond Reports: Putting Findings Into Action

Making measurement activities actionable is a challenge for many social media managers, but this part of the process can add significant value to reporting tasks. The following tips can create a culture of continuous improvement within a social media team.

- **Define responsibilities and timelines:** Identify who will be responsible for reviewing social media performance data and how often he or she should review metrics to optimize assessment. This will ensure you stay on top of emerging trends and keep a pulse on how your social media work is doing. Set yourself up for success by scheduling metrics reviews as recurring items in your calendar, and recognize that metrics review must be integrated into your routine. SCBC's *Using Data to Inform Your Website: Questions and Answers from the "Ask Me Anything" Webinar* provides guidance on how to set timelines for reviewing metrics and offers other useful tips on web analytics.

- **Keep the right context:** Do not analyze your social performance metrics in isolation. Tie them directly to your review of consumer education website metrics. Social media efforts should be integrated into your larger digital communications plan, which includes your consumer education website. Your data analytics work should be integrated and connected to further your overarching mission.

- **Go back to the goal:** When reviewing the significance of any findings, tying them back to your stated goals is essential. Section 1 of this guide, "Define Your Social Media Strategy," discussed setting goals and measurable objectives and explained how they can map back to the purpose of your social media presence. Including this and other goals in analyses, reports, and presentations can add necessary context to your findings. What should you consider a success? How does actual performance compare with expected performance? Impactful measurement seeks to tell a story by connecting data to goals.

- **Present questions and answers:** Although some aspects of automated reporting may help you answer many anticipated questions (for example, why was there a spike in impressions—such as likes or shares—on this day, or why did this post receive the most likes?), but it can also help you pose questions. High-quality, impactful reporting should lead to further investigation, testing, and insights. Reports should highlight places where continued monitoring or intentional testing efforts could inform future strategies.

- **Include recommendations:** Including recommendations in every analytical report on social media data creates a thoughtful, reflective space in the reporting process. You can then discuss recommendations that could inform future activities or tactics.

How to Address Constraints

For some states and territories, use of social media may be constrained by existing state or agency-level policies.

For some states, social media use is not permitted. In these instances, think about leveraging the social media presence of partners and stakeholders to drive traffic to your consumer education website. Here are some suggestions for partners and stakeholders who you may want to consider working with in support of your social media strategy:

- Subcontractors that support aspects of your work but are not constrained by the same policies on social media use
- Advisory councils and participating stakeholders
- Early childhood coalitions
- Professional development systems
- Programs and providers
- Parent groups or education coalitions

Child Care Aware of *America's Consumer Education and Engagement Social Media Guide* provides helpful tips on building partnerships, which you can use to help build awareness for your consumer education website.

In other cases, although social media use is allowed, the child care office or agency must use the larger departmental social media account, which covers a broad range topics (for example, public health, child welfare, and child care). In these instances, work with the social media administrator so that they may use Google Analytics to help them break out the data for different initiatives. Also, ask if you can create more targeted social media accounts to better meet families' informational needs.

- **View data reporting as part of continuous improvement:** Review and discuss performance findings and reports at appropriate team meetings. Make sure that supporting continuous improvement planning is a recurring agenda item. Think about bringing people together with reports to fuel discussions and brainstorm strategies for change. During review meetings, discuss any trends in performance, determine why changes may have occurred to help identify successful outreach strategies, and determine how you can use this information to improve your strategies.

Resources

SCBC Resources

- Consumer Education Webinar Series (2019): This web page shares resources from each national webinar and "Ask Me Anything" session.

- *Designing Websites That Are Accessible to All Families* (2019): This guide offers best practices, strategies, and examples for state and territory staff to consider as they work to ensure their consumer education websites are accessible to people with disabilities.

- *Guide for Increasing Search Engine Optimization* (2019): This guide presents tools and resources you can use to make sure search engines can easily locate content that is relevant to users' needs.

- *Guide for Measuring Web Traffic and Engagement* (2019): This guide offers best practices, strategies, and guidance for states and territories on the importance of digital analytics to information technology teams and web or digital marketing vendors, and it includes approaches that experts from those types of teams can use.

- *Using Data to Inform Your Website: Questions and Answers from the "Ask Me Anything" Webinar* (2019): This document provides additional information on the importance of web analytics, including how to automate your analytics and how often you should evaluate web traffic data.

Other Resources

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