Social Media Guidelines for RWTH

Foreword

The way we communicate with one another is constantly changing; in just a few years, Web 2.0 has transformed the Internet and our behavior dramatically, with online communication a normal part of most people's lives nowadays. Numerous new communication channels and apps have been developed in social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, blogs). The key feature of social networks is communication and exchanges, with interaction at the fore. The boundaries between professional and private life are often more blurred in social media.
A social networking presence is a key feature of the communication channels of universities in general and RWTH in particular.

The University considers social media an important instrument for spreading information and sharing media content, obtaining opinions, and exchanging with target audiences. RWTH has a substantial and varied social networking presence, currently active on more than ten different platforms. In terms of target audience reach and relevance, Facebook is the most important network, with other platforms including Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Issuu, Slideshare, the career-oriented networks Xing and LinkedIn, and the short news service Sina Weibo for China.

Why Have Guidelines?

These guidelines are intended to provide security and guidance in dealing with social network activity and also to make employees aware of both the risks and opportunities of using such platforms. Further, they aim to strengthen and protect RWTH as a brand on social media. They should partly be considered guidelines and partly a set of rules and regulations and are intended to provide support for official social media activity. The guidelines are primarily aimed at employees publishing content on social networks on behalf of RWTH or a University institution.

Department 3.0 – Press and Communications manages and coordinates RWTH's social media activity on behalf of the Rectorate and will continue to expand its work in this area. Since the Internet and social networks are constantly changing, these guidelines will be continuously updated after consulting with the staff councils and coordinating with the university groups.

You can find the latest version on the Internet at
www.rwth-aachen.de/socialmedia

If you are interested in starting a social network presence on behalf of your institution or have any questions about these guidelines or social media in general, please contact the Social Media Team of Department 3.0 at:

@ **social@rwth-aachen.de**

Guidelines on Using Social Media

Before You Start: Define your objectives, target audiences, and the platforms that are suitable for these purposes. Take the time to listen to your audience and become aware of how community members interact with each other. In order to use social networks successfully and connect with your target audience, it is important to find the right tone and become familiar with the particular customs of the platform.

Form of Address: Users are mostly on social networks in a private context (except in business networks such as Xing and LinkedIn, where communication is more formal). As a rule, users are on first-name terms on social networking platforms.

Interaction: RWTH-related social media accounts are intended to encourage users to get actively involved, exchange information, comment on contributions, etc. Users should feel encouraged to rate the published content positively and forward posts, etc. to their friends on the network. Make sure you reply to messages and comments, stimulate discussions, encourage interaction, and design posts or contributions to be responsive.

Consistency: Social media channels should be used consistently and you should regularly check accounts for comments and contributions from other users. Keeping up to date is one of the key factors to being successful on social media. Administrators should be appointed for moderating and maintaining profiles and absence cover arrangements should also be in place.

Speed: Answer all inquiries promptly, i.e. within 24 hours on working days, if possible. Direct and fast interaction is an essential feature of these platforms. If an institution does not have enough time or staff available for these tasks, they should not pursue a social media presence.

Dealing With Criticism and Mistakes: If users criticize any content that you have posted, respond objectively and with reason, even if you feel that you yourself or your organizational unit are being treated unfairly, harshly, or emotionally.
Social media communication is generally extremely fast, thus mistakes can happen. You should admit your own mistakes and correct them; it is crucial to react promptly. You should not delete negative comments under any circumstances, unless they violate netiquette (see appendix) or are illegal. In case of doubt, please contact the Social Media Team of Department 3.0.

Transparency: Openly state your identity and your function. If you use an account affiliated with RWTH, it should not reflect your personal interests. Only use work accounts for official communication. Do not comment on contributions anonymously or using a pseudonym.

Respect: Common courtesy principles also apply to social media. Always be respectful toward others and avoid any form of discredit, provocation, or even insult. Stay objective yet friendly. Avoid stereotypes, enemy images, discrimination, irony, and sarcasm and also be careful when sharing content that seems funny to you but may not be seen as such by all users.

Content: Mind your spelling and grammar when writing your content, just like you do for other text forms. Planning contributions in advance helps the strategic orientation of the social media account activity. You should, however, also keep your ears open and respond to current developments. Users should always get value from your content. You should also consider the relevance of your contributions for your target audience. When selecting content, the standard principles for news that apply to editorial publications, such as recent news pieces, proximity, scope, etc., must be taken into account. Experience has shown that a mix of informative and entertaining content, is particularly effective, even more so when accompanied by a photo. Take all user content seriously, even if questions and comments sometimes seem as if they were formulated without much care or desire for a response. Try to help the individual as much as possible and provide them with the necessary information so they do not have to actively search for it themselves – this is exactly what social media demands.

Visibility, Messages, and Comments: Facebook pages should be visible for everyone, even if they are not logged into Facebook. You can adjust this option in the settings. The message and comment functions should be activated as key opportunities for exchange and interaction in the network.

Central Coordination and Decentralized Accounts: All organizational units can set up their own pages and accounts and the University greatly encourages this. The central channels of RWTH, however, are to be used for publishing key University decisions, announcing central events, posting about awards, etc. Anyone maintaining a social media account on behalf of an organizational unit is responsible for the published content and must have the consent of the management of said unit. In order to coherently represent RWTH, the Department of Press and Communications coordinates all social media activity for the University. The names of new accounts and their administrators must be registered at **www.rwth-aachen.de/socialmedia/ registrierung**. Please follow the central RWTH accounts to make your connection to the University clear. The central and related accounts ideally support each other by citing one another's content and sharing it.

Using the RWTH Name and Logo: When setting up a social media account for an organizational unit, the name of the channel must clearly identify it as belonging to RWTH. Names should be short and snappy, e.g. on Twitter: @RWTHteachingblog or @RWTHFaculty4. So-called vanity domains, e.g. on Facebook: www.facebook.de/rwth.elektrotechnik, make it easier for users to find a page and increase brand recognition. In principle, private channels are generally not allowed to use the RWTH name and logo. The unit must be recognized as such and cannot be confused with one of RWTH's central social media accounts. Please also adhere to the RWTH corporate design specifications for social media.

Talk to Us! If one of your posts requires an official response from the University or if sharing it could be useful for RWTH, we would appreciate it if you contacted Department 3.0 – Press and Communications – your first port of call for all questions concerning social media.

Social media meetings are being held as an opportunity for employees representing RWTH or one of its institutions on social media to discuss their experiences and provide input. If you would like to join, please register at social@rwth-aachen.de.

Legal Notice/Confidentiality and Data Protection

Legal requirements, such as personal rights, copyright, and trademark rights, must also be observed when using social networks. The majority of the texts, images, videos, and music available on the Internet are copyright-protected. Company and business secrets must also be protected. Please make sure that your social media activity does not damage the brand of RWTH or your organizational unit. In order to avoid misunderstandings, you should refrain from expressing your personal opinions when using social media for official purposes.

According to the current legal regulations in Germany, social networks are required to provide an imprint (contact details published in accordance with the website's legal notice requirements). You can also provide a link to the imprint of your institution's website. Please find out about the terms of use and the guidelines of each platform before you set up a page.

Do not post any content that is confidential or subject to data protection rules. Please make it clear that the information provided on the social media channels of your institution is not legally binding. Since social media accounts are not secure, do not request any sensitive data (e.g. private telephone numbers, student ID numbers). You must always bear in mind that all the information you post can be shared with a potential audience of millions and will probably stay online forever. As a general rule: do not post anything that you would not say in another form in the public domain.

Further training courses on the topic of social media and on legal aspects are regularly planned in the continuing education program for employees. These courses are published via the mailing list and in the further training database.

RWTH Netiquette on Facebook

Welcome to the RWTH Facebook page! We use our Facebook page for open and plentiful interaction with our users. We look forward to your questions, comments, and opinions and to a constructive and critical interaction with our posts.

In order to ensure that all interaction on these pages is pleasant and friendly, please observe the following rules.

Objective Style: We strongly encourage you to write in an objective way, using a polite and respectful tone.

No Insults: Insults, offensive comments, and personal attacks are unnecessary and will be removed.

No Inappropriate Contributions: We will delete contributions that are discriminatory, anti-constitutional, demagogic, illegal, pornographic, extremist, racist, vulgar, disparaging, or otherwise inappropriate without any justification.

Neutral: RWTH is ideologically neutral and does not offer a platform for spreading political or religious messages.

No Advertising, No Spam: We do not tolerate spam, advertising, commercial content, or other offers from third parties.

No Off-Topic Discussions: We will not tolerate individuals using our page to hold their own discussions; comments should solely refer to the relevant post.

Contributions in German or English: Most of our Facebook page users understand German or English. To avoid excluding other users from the conversation, you should write all posts and comments in either German or English.

Data Protection: For data protection reasons and to protect your privacy, we delete confidential data, such as addresses, telephone numbers, student ID numbers, etc.

Liability: We accept no responsibility for any liability for comments and links posted by users.

General Standards: Please also note the general standards of the Facebook community and the terms of use.

Thank you!

Notes on Our Facebook Information

RWTH makes every effort to answer inquiries via Facebook as quickly as possible. The information provided here is given to the best of our knowledge and belief, however, please note that this information is not legally binding. For further details, please contact the appropriate university institution.