

# Best Practices for Managing and Moderating Community Social Media Groups

This article discusses reasons people join local community social media groups and provides best practices for those who manage and moderate those groups.



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Community social media groups have become important virtual gathering places for people. Moderating a community social media group is different in one significant aspect than moderating a group or page associated with a business or organization. Community groups are viewed as belonging to those who live in the community.

To properly moderate a community social media group, you must first understand peoples' motivations for joining. Reasons for joining a community social media group might include one or more of the following:

- **To share and receive information about local news and events.** Social media groups are a popular venue for members to inform each other about local news and events. Sixty-eight percent of adults are getting at least some news from social media platforms, with Facebook being the most popular source (Pew Research Center, 2018). Additionally, 59% of those who get their local news from an online forum are doing so through a social media interface such as a Facebook group (Pew Research Center, 2019).
- **To develop and maintain local social connections.** Social media groups offer a valuable and sometimes vital link to others in the community. One study of senior

citizens discovered that two of four primary motivations for using Facebook was for social bonding and social bridging (Jung and Sundar). Whether someone is a senior, homebound, stay-at-home parent, new to the community, or a long-time resident, a social media community group offers a platform for connecting with others when in-person interaction is not possible or feasible.

- **To look for, or research, local businesses or services.** Local community groups are often a first place to turn when looking for a local business or service to fulfill a need. With needs ranging from anything such as needing a tree removed to needing a caterer for a family reunion, social media community groups offer individuals a place to turn to gather suggestions from a large group of people.
- **To discuss issues.** Particularly for issues with a local impact, community groups may become the virtual version of the barber shop or hair salon of days past. For instance, members may want to discuss the impact of a new local regulation or candidates for office.
- **To promote businesses.** Small businesses often rely on those that support them to share information about, and experiences with, their business with their social networks. Social media community groups become one venue for today's word-of-mouth marketing. Likewise, business owners or employees themselves may take to community groups to promote and advertise their business, products, or services.

Understanding which of the previous motivations are the driving force behind a particular social media community group can assist with successful moderation of the group. The following are some best practices for managing and moderating a community social media group.

## 1. Establish Standards.

When a social media group is first created, guidelines on appropriate content, conduct, and language (at a minimum) should be published. Unfortunately, after a group is already established it can be difficult to implement guidelines or turn the tide of a negative group atmosphere. Some topics to address in guidelines include:

- Purpose of the group
- List of administrators



- Definition of spam or inappropriate content
- Definition of inappropriate conduct
- Standards for language or inappropriate words
- Geographic or location focus
- Grounds and process for group removal

## 2. Have Multiple Admins.

For very active social media community groups it can be helpful to have more than one group administrator. This allows admins to not always be online or checking on posts to the group. Additionally, should the situation arise that a group member needs to be reminded of community standards, this responsibility can be passed around so that the member doesn't feel that they're being targeted by one specific person.

## 3. Respect Members.

As a moderator, whether you personally like individual group members, agree or disagree with statements that they contribute to the group is irrelevant. All group members should be afforded the same opportunity to share and contribute to the group activity without feeling devalued. If a group member shares incorrect information or violates a group guideline or standard, as a moderator you need to address the situation respectfully. This may include directing the group member to the community guidelines for review or politely requesting they edit their post.

## 4. Engage Members.

For new community groups, moderators may want to take a more active role to develop engagement among members. Moderators may seed conversations by asking questions, posting polls, sharing experiences or pictures as relevant.

## 5. Don't Delete Posts or Comments.

Just as on a business's social media page, posts and comments should not be deleted or removed unless they are expressly going against community guidelines and the member posting had been reminded of community standards. For example, if a group member posts inaccurate information, negative comments, or attacks another group member, first rely on other community members to engage, provide correct information, or admonish the offender. Community members as a whole can influence the tone of a social media community group more so than a moderator.

## 6. Don't Remove Members (without good reason).

Removal of a group member should be done only after serious consideration and attempting to correct the offending individual's actions through reminders about community standards and warnings. For example, the groups guidelines may specify the number of infractions that will be tolerated and warnings that will be communicated prior to a member being removed.

An engaging and informative community social media group can be a valuable asset to both individual community members and the community as a whole. The role of group moderator is to ensure that members are able to post and share information and express their opinions while contributing to and building deeper community bonds.

## References and Resources

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## Authors

### Sarah Cornelisse

Senior Extension Associate, Agricultural Entrepreneurship and Business Management  
[sar243@psu.edu](mailto:sar243@psu.edu)  
 814-863-8645

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## extension.psu.edu

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