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## *Help Board Members Become Thoughtful Social Media Users*

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**In social media channels, your board members will be seen as speaking for your association, whether they mean to or not. To create a social-savvy board, set ground rules and offer training to demonstrate best practices and responsible use of social platforms.**

Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Instagram: Your board members are likely using at least some of these social media platforms in their personal lives. But in today's world, social media is no longer just personal; it's often an extension of an individual's professional life.

While board members might use social media well on your organization's behalf—engaging members, promoting upcoming conferences and events, or supporting advocacy initiatives—these same platforms involve an element of risk.

"I don't think board members truly understand that they can never really take off their board hat" when using social media, says Laura Otten, Ph.D., director of the Nonprofit Center at LaSalle University. "No matter what a board member does in their personal time, it can be linked back to the organization. That should be a wake-up call for associations to have policies and conversations outlining appropriate and inappropriate [social media] use."

To create a social-savvy board, you need to start with some foundational rules. An obvious one is to explicitly state that board members cannot share confidential or privileged information to social networks.

Some associations have social media policies in place for full-time staff that can be adapted for the board. If starting from scratch, Otten recommends applying the best practices described in the Society for Human Resource Management's ***Social Media Handbook***.



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**— Laura Otten, Ph.D.**

“What it really comes down to is creating a set of policies that get boards in a mindset of thinking critically about the content they post,” Otten says. “I believe you need a different policy for each form of social media. It needs to be particular to that platform and updated routinely as the social media landscape evolves.”

Otten suggests running training sessions or scenario-based exercises to help board members put your social media policies into practice. “One of the best things that I heard a board do was a Twitter training,” she says. “Not because they necessarily wanted board members to be tweeting, but because they wanted everyone to be aware of its functions, opportunities, and risks.”

The training led to conversation about important issues like political speech and online advocacy.

“Usually, it’s a conversation where board members suddenly become aware of issues, they hadn’t considered to be wrong, harmful, or unethical,” Otten says. “And that conversation to get to the policy is just as important as the policy itself.”

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