Social Media Guidelines and Tips

Provided by the Division of Strategic Communication and Engagement

This document provides guidelines and suggestions for creating and managing social media accounts that represent an area of the university. Contact the Division of Strategic Communication and Engagement if you have specific questions regarding your accounts.

1. **Represent the Azusa Pacific Brand**
   The most important thing to keep in mind is that your social account represents Azusa Pacific and should therefore be in line with the university's overarching brand. Whether posting images, videos, or text, it should have the "feel" and "voice" of APU, and be tailored to your specific audience. Be sure to show support of university leadership. You can review the institutional APU Facebook page as an example: facebook.com/azusapacific.

   When setting up your accounts, strive to use "Azusa Pacific"* in the name if possible, such as "@azusapacificadmissions." If using "Azusa Pacific" is too long with your department/office name, use "APU," but be sure to spell out the university's name in the description or "about" section. This provides credibility while also supporting the overarching APU brand.

   * There have been instances with APU departmental accounts where a password is lost or the account manager has left the university, leaving the department without access to the account and the ability to claim the username. In these cases, there is an easy fix: simply add a character such as a ".", "_", or "-" between the words (e.g., @azusa.pacific.admissions). This allows you to reclaim essentially the same username for your department without altering the essence of the name.

2. **Stay Mission Focused**
   Keep in mind the university's Four Cornerstones and mission, and think about the following brand elements with anything posted—does it reflect one or more of the following traits related to our mission and personality?
   - Christ-centered
   - Compassionate and Welcoming Community
   - Determined and Accomplished Leader

- Transformational and Forward Thinker

3. **Establish an Objective for Engaging Content**
People are constantly flooded with content on social media. Most users follow hundreds or even thousands of accounts, so in order to make your account stand out, it's essential to establish an objective and post relevant and engaging content. Each post should be purposeful. Before each post, consider why you're posting it, how it's relevant to your audience/how they will benefit from it, and what elements you're using to make it engaging and informative. Posting about events in your area, stories from your students and faculty, and major achievements (such as grants or publications) are great ways to engage your audience.

4. **Create a Content Schedule**
The best way to grow your audience and engagement levels is to post consistently. That doesn't mean you need to post multiple times every day. For most APU accounts, it's best to post 2-3 times per week during the school year and at least once a week during the summer and other school breaks. This might sound like a lot, but it's easy to do if you create a content schedule and plan series for regular posting.

You can build a content schedule using Google Calendar, Canva, or a number of other free or paid tools. Aim to plan out your content 3-4 weeks in advance (or more if possible). If you know that your area will host events in the near future, plan to take photos at those events that can be posted on social that day or the next.

Series are another way to post consistently. The main APU social accounts have several series including *Faculty Fridays*, *Staff Saturdays*, *Student Spotlights*, and *Alumni Features*. The first two allow us to highlight our amazing faculty and staff each week, playing on alliteration while ensuring we have posts each week on Fridays and Saturdays during the school year. While the latter two are not regularly scheduled on the same day each week, we consistently post these stories of our exceptional students and alumni. Series for your area don't need to involve attached stories and could be more simple, such as a weekly Bible verse or "Throwback Thursday" (sharing photos from your area from past years).

Important considerations for your content calendar are the best days and times of day to post. While each platform has its own times for optimal engagement, the general consensus is that it's best to post on weekdays from 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Users are generally less active on social media on weekends, and on weeknights after 6 p.m., so you will see lower engagement if you post during those times.

5. **Tailor Content for Each Platform**
   There are numerous social media platforms that our current and prospective students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community are active on. APU has institutional accounts on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, X (Twitter), and Threads. You can create accounts on all or some of these platforms, but be aware of the type of content that is best suited for each and the audiences you're more likely to reach.

   - **Instagram:** This is the most-used platform by current and prospective students. Instagram was originally designed for just sharing photos and videos in posts. The platform has since added stories (vertical images and videos that last for only 24 hours) and reels (15-60-second vertical videos). Most content on Instagram should be fun and lighthearted. Instagram also offers a great feature called collaborative posts where you can share posts on multiple accounts (e.g., Azusa Pacific and Azusa Pacific Admissions). If you have a big event for your area and would like to collaborate with the main APU account (@azusapacific), email nfoster@apu.edu as far in advance as you can.
   - **Facebook:** This is the most-used platform by older alumni. You can share photos, videos, and short-/long-form text posts on Facebook. Keep in mind, if you are trying to reach a younger audience of current and prospective students, this is not the platform. Content on Facebook can be fun or serious.
   - **LinkedIn:** This is the second-most-used platform by alumni. LinkedIn is used for professional social networking. While you can post photos and videos on LinkedIn, it's better suited for text and links to relevant articles or important information. LinkedIn is also not a platform to reach current or prospective students.
   - **TikTok:** This is the second-most-used platform by current and prospective students. TikTok is limited to vertical videos that can range from 3 seconds

to 10 minutes long. Shorter videos of 15-30 seconds are best for optimal engagement through TikTok's algorithm. Content should be fun and entertaining. This is not the platform for serious posts, sharing important information, or reaching older audiences.

- **X (Twitter):** While the number of active X/Twitter users has drastically declined in recent years, it's still the platform where news breaks. Like LinkedIn, you can post photos and videos, but the platform is best suited for sharing information or links to upcoming events. Keep in mind that X/Twitter posts are limited to 280 characters, so you must keep the copy short and to the point.
- **Threads:** Meta launched Threads as a direct competitor to X/Twitter. While the user base is currently much smaller than that of other platforms, it can still be used as a good way to reach your audience. Content can include photos, videos, text, and links. Keep in mind that Threads limits you to 500 characters per post.
- **Other:** Snapchat, Pinterest, Reddit, Tumblr, and BlueSky are just a few examples of other social media platforms. APU does not run institutional accounts on these platforms, nor do we recommend that any departments/offices run accounts on these platforms, as they are generally used for content that is not relevant or appropriate for the university.

6. **Use High-Quality Photos, Videos, and Graphics**
As users scroll through their social media feed, they are much more likely to engage with (like, comment on, or reshare) a post that has high-quality photos, videos, or graphics. Don't worry if you don't have access to an expensive DSLR camera. Most modern phones take good photos and videos. Be sure to clean off your phone's camera lens before taking photos or videos. Take a variety of landscape (horizontal) and portrait (vertical) shots. Most platforms can use either landscape or portrait orientations, but phones are optimized for square images and vertical videos. Take more photos and videos than you think you'll need. It's advisable to have a selection to choose from, to make sure you can choose the best shots. Be sure to edit your photos before posting to make sure they have good lighting and are cropped to focus on the subject.

If your area is having a big event that would be good to feature on the main APU accounts, email nfoster@apu.edu and Strategic Communication and Engagement will send a student photographer to take pictures.

Graphics are a good way to promote events or share important information with your audience, but users are very likely to scroll by a graphic on their feed if it is not engaging or is too busy. Keep text to a minimum on graphics and make the text big so your audience can easily read it without having to zoom in. Use bullet points instead of full sentences and never use full paragraphs. If you need to include lots of information, it's best to put that in the copy (caption) under the graphic or include a link.

7. **Connect with Your Audience**
   With APU social media accounts, we strive to be true and authentic to who we are as a university, and engage regularly with our audience. When your followers comment positively on your posts, comment back and connect with them. Many current and prospective students will turn to social media to find answers to their questions. Offer a space to help them find answers and connect them with relevant resources.

   If you receive negative comments on your posts, reach out to Nathan Foster (nfoster@apu.edu), public relations manager, and the Strategic Communication and Engagement Team can help provide a strategy for responding appropriately. Sometimes it's best to encourage people to contact you via email so you can work with them to resolve the situation "offline," rather than trying to resolve it in a public forum, unless it's a brief answer that may benefit many people.

8. **Listen to Students**
   Current and prospective students are your biggest audience on social media. This means your main demographics are people from 16-25 years old. This age group is incredibly active on social media and is keenly aware of current trends. If you have student workers or students you interact with regularly, ask them what they think of your content, what you're doing well, what they think you could be doing better to produce content that's more engaging for other students, and if there are any major trends that you could jump on. Use your own judgment to evaluate whether their suggestions are appropriate for your account.

9. **Get Feedback**

   If you're ever unsure if a post is appropriate or fitting for an account that represents APU, run it by a few people for review/approval before posting, and review it using the brand elements listed above. If you're still unsure, err on the side of not posting.

10. **Drive Your Audience to the APU Website**

    It's important that we keep all APU webpages up to date so that the social media accounts are a complement to the website. When possible, drive users back to your area's webpage for complete information about your department/office, information on an event, etc.

Questions? Contact Nathan Foster, public relations manager, at nfoster@apu.edu.