



A checklist for building trust on social media

As part of the Trusting News project, 14 newsrooms tested social media strategies designed to build trust. Across the strategies, successful posts anticipated users' needs, moods and motivations. Here is a checklist of strategies and factors to consider in your newsroom as you decide how to interact with your audience on social media.

TELL THE STORY OF WHAT YOU DO

- Explicitly state what gives your brand or your staff members credibility, and point out their expertise.
- When you share content, include what about that content provides value to users. Demonstrate your commitment, expertise, values, etc.
- Write in a way that demonstrates your relationship to your community. Focus not on why you're great but on what you do for the user.
- Include language that shows what you hope your stories help people do.

HOST MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS

- What does your audience want to talk about? Tap into their outrage, pride, nostalgia or excitement.
- Everyone's an expert in their own experience. Look for opportunities to invite conversation around experiences.
- Give users something specific to react to, not just a general topic or issue.
- Find issues that are easy to have an opinion on, and use those to train your users to talk to you.
- Questions that are personal or especially controversial work best if your users already are used to talking to you. Earn the right to ask those questions. Don't start there.
- Stay involved in the conversations you host. Validate comments and respond to questions.
- To prioritize and value conversations, try posing questions without a link attached.
- Sometimes the best conversation happens on users' shares, not on your original post. Follow the shares.
- If you pose a question, try getting right to the point. Don't use two paragraphs setting up the question.

BE A HUMAN: INVITE AND VALUE INTERACTION WITH USERS

- Make time to fact-check comments and prevent false statements from going unchallenged.
- Admonish or ban trolls. It respects the participation of the more constructive commenters.
- Write informally, with humanity or personality. Acknowledge your users' emotions or values.
- Invite people to get to know your journalists as people or neighbors.
- Ask for your community's help in your reporting process.
- Take users behind the scenes or explain your storytelling approaches.
- Make it easy for people to get in touch with you, and make it clear that you encourage that interaction. Sometimes trust begins with good customer service.
- Find a way to share and validate quality reader responses, and you're likely to get more of them.

ENCOURAGE USERS TO SHARE YOUR CONTENT

- Shares are often high when information is seen as being in the public interest.
- Shares are often high on "good news." Consider writing in a way that emphasizes that angle.
- Some users value being a source of information for their friends. Emphasize when you have news people will be eager to hear or practical information that will be especially useful.
- Users like to share things that are consistent with their values. It reinforces their social media persona.
- Try suggesting specific types of friends users might want to share with, in terms of demographics, interests, opinions, etc. Inviting users to tag friends can be an effective way to encouraging sharing.

Questions? Ideas for further work on trust? Tips to share from your work? Contact project lead Joy Mayer at joy@joymayer.com.