

Parentkind

Bringing together home & school

Social Media

Whether or not you're a fan, social media is here to stay and can help your PTA raise its profile and stay in touch with your members. Here is our guide to help you make the most of this valuable tool.

What is social media?

The term social media covers a broad range of web and mobile technologies including internet forums, weblogs and podcasts. What makes social media different from more traditional forms of technology, such as your PTA or school website, is it allows for a two way discussion - between organisations, communities and individuals - helping your PTA to build a relationship with its members.

What can social media offer your PTA?

1. Push messages to your members

Once a member signs up to stay in touch with your PTA through social media, you have an open door for communication and can push out your messages - you don't have to wait for them to visit your website before you can talk to them. With most of your members being busy parents, the fact that social media is accessible on mobile devices means you can communicate with them wherever they are on a daily basis.

2. Start a conversation

Social media is all about online conversations so not only will your PTA be able to push out messages but your members will be able to respond! The most successful PTAs are those that build a strong network amongst their members and certainly social media can help you reach out to and engage with a large number of members. It will also support your members to talk to each other.

3. Data protection

Okay so this is the boring bit, but one of the reasons why Parentkind likes social media is that it helps overcome the data protection issues involved in your PTA gathering and managing endless lists of parent email addresses. The individual member subscribes and continues to manage their involvement, and can easily unsubscribe if that's what they want to do without your PTA having to collect a single piece of data.

Which social media channels are PTAs using?

There are a lot of PTAs already using Facebook and Twitter. Both are very well established forms of social media with huge numbers of users.

Facebook would allow your PTA to develop a web presence as either an open or closed group or as a 'page'. The access offered by each of these varies and needs to be compared to understand what is right for your PTA. You can use Facebook to post events and invite attendees, post pictures, chat with supporters as well as make links with other organisations and people using Facebook in your local community.

Twitter is a 'microblog' where updates are famed for being limited to no more than 140 characters. Twitter offers less functionality than Facebook - it's more like texting in a public forum but it does allow you to quickly connect to, and communicate with, PTA members as well as other local organisations.

Concerns

There's no getting away from it - there are concerns about using social media, particularly about protecting the privacy of users. Think carefully about how you want to use social media and consider the different options available so that your PTA gets the level of control that it wants before getting started.

Talk to the school and explain how you are planning to use social media and set out some basic rules in a social media policy for your PTA.

Social Media Policy Document

It is important to have a strict policy document that details the rules for using and posting on your social media. Below is an example of a Facebook policy document:

This <group/page> is open to all parents and staff of <school name>. It is to be used for discussing fundraising, social events and meetings connected to the school. Please use the page in a positive manner.

Although the PTA regularly participates in the discussion we do not monitor every Facebook posting. The PTA reserves the right to remove any posting

Or

This is a moderated page/group and the PTA and the PTA reserves the right to remove any posting

Or

This is an unmoderated page/group and the PTA takes no responsibility for the content here.

We have created a simple list of do's and don'ts to help you use this resource correctly.

Please do the following:

- Use good judgment - Regardless of your privacy settings, assume that all of the information you have shared on your facebook is public information.

- Be respectful - You cannot see a smile or understand nuances of speech on social media. Please keep the tone of discussion positive and respectful.
- Be responsible and ethical - Unless you are specifically authorised to speak on behalf of the school as a spokesperson, you should state that the views expressed in your postings, etc. are your own. Any issue or concerns you have with the school should be raised directly
- Correct any mistakes- Be sure to correct any mistake you make immediately, and make it clear what you've done to fix it.

Don't share the following:

- Confidential information - If it seems confidential, it probably is. Online "conversations" are never private.
- Private and personal information - To ensure your safety, be careful about the type and amount of personal information you provide. Avoid talking about personal schedules or situations. NEVER give out or transmit personal information of students, parents, or colleagues. Always respect the privacy of the school community members.
- Images - It is not acceptable to post pictures of students without the expressed consent of their parents. You may use photos and video that are available on the school's website with the headteachers permission.
- Other sites - Link to other sites may provide useful and interesting content. Don't blindly repost a link without looking at the content first you never know what could be there!

Posts will be removed if they are:

- personal attacks (posts deemed libellous, profane, defamatory, disparaging, hateful, harassing, threatening, or obscene)
- break the law
- fraudulent, deceptive or misleading

Check it out

Parentkind has both a Facebook and Twitter presence. Both are linked to lots of PTAs giving you a quick and easy way to see how other PTAs are already using social media. Simply click on the link and check out the Parentkind Facebook pages we've liked or look at the PTAs we are following on Twitter.

Top tips

- Find your social media expert - there's bound to be one amongst your members so get them involved to set your PTA up on social media.
- Post, post, post... the more active your PTA is on social media, the more likely you are to attract followers.
- Use social media to link to local businesses to get them involved with your PTA - social media is a great way to highlight and thank local businesses for any support they give to your PTA.

Reviewed: Reviewed prior to January 2016