

# Winnipeg Free Press Social Media Policy

The social media landscape that surrounds us is not the same one our newsroom first dipped a toe, err tweet, into years ago. Much has changed – and in many cases – not for the better.

But for better and worse, it remains a place to connect with readers, to gather information, to provide updates in real-time, to build our audience, to experiment and to promote our journalism.

The goal of this social media policy is to provide our newsroom with guidance to ensure what we do on social media serves our goals while avoiding the pitfalls that can create headaches for you and your colleagues – and potentially major problems for our brand.

Social media salvation efforts all too often are messy and divisive for newsrooms. A key distinction of this policy from those you might have seen from other media outlets: Rather than relying on hard and fast rules that too often end up creating more and potentially bigger problems, we will instead be putting our trust in guardrails.

These guardrails were developed by a working group of Free Press colleagues and were designed to recognize the personality, creativity and voice you bring to your social media interactions.

But when you add them all up, there is one overriding goal: Ensuring that our strength as a trusted independent source for information is never compromised.

Our guardrails:

- **You are us:** No matter where and when you post, you are tied to the Winnipeg Free Press, regardless of what role you have in the newsroom or your department, and regardless of whether you openly associate yourself with the Free Press on your account.
- **There's no going back:** Assume anything you write online will become public and be associated with your work and the Free Press. Assume anything posted will be available in perpetuity, even if you delete it (because, in the age of screenshots, it easily could). This also applies to anonymous/burner accounts.
- **Taking sides can hurt our reporting efforts:** Unless you are a columnist, be mindful that anything that appears to take sides on issues where objectivity is central to our coverage can hurt the reporting efforts of your colleagues.
- **Don't go off-brand:** Our strength is a well-established reputation for accuracy, integrity, neutrality and fairness. Let's ensure we protect that in our social media dealings.

- **Our respectful workplace policy applies on the Internet.** Badmouthing colleagues, pointing blame at people in other roles, and disrespectful comments about the Free Press all have consequences that go far beyond an ill-considered tweet.

Don't point out or make fun of errors by your colleagues. And don't share conversations, confidential plans, or decision-making discussions in our newsroom.

- **Would you say it aloud in the office?** Before posting, consider how it would sound if you were saying it to your colleagues or your editor. If it doesn't pass that test, don't push send.
- **Keep it civil:** Social media is always one tweet away from a tire fire. Please bear that in mind, especially when interacting with readers. Professionalism and respect are always better cards to play than anger and contempt.
- **Post when you're sure**, rather than trying to be first. In general, the Free Press prefers accuracy over speed on our website and on all social channels.
- **Verify everything** you see on social media before reposting or reporting elsewhere. Ensure an account is real (especially in the case of celebrities or significant figures) before breaking news based on social media posts.
- **Don't post rumours or allegations** we wouldn't publish in print.
- **Correct swiftly:** In the event a correction is needed to something posted on social, we should edit the post and be transparent by acknowledging the error. If the platform doesn't allow editing, delete the post and acknowledge the error. Don't ever allow a social post with an error to continue circulating.
- The Free Press' primary goal on social media is to **drive readers to our website** and the print edition. As such, try to break news on the website, and point readers to our website for more information.

Remember our website and institutional channels have a larger reach than your own social channels. If you have a scoop, filing a This Just In blurb – which is automatically tweeted on @WinnipegNews – gets your news immediately to an audience of hundreds of thousands.

- **When in doubt, ask:** If you are unsure of how best to proceed or how to respond, editors are always available to offer guidance.
- **If these guardrails fail:** In the event there is a conflict or concerns raised about social media postings, I will turn to a review committee for guidance. That committee will look into the matter, hear all sides and make recommendations. That committee will consist of Jill Wilson, Niigaan Sinclair and Wendy Sawatzky.