

Guidelines for Church Websites, Social Media, and Mobile Resources

For Church Departments, Corporate Entities, and Area Offices

Last Updated: February 2013

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Preface

As the Internet becomes a primary method of communication, there is an increased opportunity to reach a wider audience through Church websites, social media, and mobile resources. These channels enable viewers to be more aware of Church content, to share that content with friends and family, and to maintain closer contact with the Church and its leaders. Other benefits may also come to the Church as it incorporates emerging Internet technologies. For instance, use of social media improves search result rankings, making it easier for individuals to find the information they are searching for on Church-sponsored websites. Social media resources include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest, Instagram, wikis, blogs, and others.

Adhering to the principles presented in these guidelines will promote effective and consistent use of Church-sponsored communication resources. This document is not intended to respond to every possible scenario; rather, it is intended to define appropriate uses of Church web technologies. As new web technologies are developed and implemented, Church departments and entities will benefit from following the guidelines in this document.

Scope of These Guidelines

These guidelines are limited to external or publicly accessible website, social media, and mobile resources. Also, the guidelines in this document are not intended to address the needs of Church-affiliated schools, such as Brigham Young University.

Church-Affiliated Departments and Entities

As Church-affiliated departments and entities implement Internet technologies in accordance with these guidelines, they must also follow the guidance of their administrative leaders and comply with legal requirements, Church intellectual property, visual identity, and data privacy standards, and information security policies.

Areas, Temples, and Missions

Authorized Church websites now include area websites. Area websites provide a way to share approved information of local interest. These websites and other social media resources are under the direction of the Area Presidency. The area should regularly review its web-related resources Correlation Intellectual Property.

Area Presidencies must also comply with legal requirements, Church intellectual property, visual identity, and data privacy standards and information security policies.

Temples and missions are not authorized to create publicly accessible websites, social media resources, or mobile applications or to initiate any other presence on the Internet (see *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* [2010], 21.1.22). However, Church headquarters will occasionally develop websites, social media, and mobile resources for new temples and visitors' centers and other Church events to inform and develop good relationships with local communities.

Purpose for the Internet

The Communication Services Committee has indicated that the Lord's purpose for the Internet is to (1) hasten the work of helping individuals and families learn, live, and share the restored gospel of Jesus Christ; (2) gather those not of our faith into the kingdom of God to receive the ordinances of exaltation; and (3) help members of the Church follow the example of the Savior in serving and strengthening others.

Governance and Oversight

All Church websites, social media, and mobile resources require approval from the requesting executive council, Area Presidency, or equivalent organization. During conceptual or early design stages, departments, areas, and councils are to submit the "Request for Church Website, Social Media, or Mobile Application" form to Correlation Intellectual Property. The Publishing Services Partner (PSP)

typically submits this request on behalf of the initiating department in coordination with web, social media, and mobile advisers.

The Correlation Department, after privacy, intellectual property, and visual identity items have been addressed, will forward the request on to the Communication Services Committee (CSC). The purpose of the CSC's review is to promote effective and standardized use of web, mobile, and social media resources in (1) providing a common message to the world, (2) conserving resources, and (3) staying alert to new opportunities of electronic communication. Requests are typically processed by Correlation within 10 business days.

Legal and Security Requirements

Church websites and social media resources must comply with legal and security requirements and the Church's intellectual property, data privacy and visual identity policies.

Prohibited Practices

The limitations below apply to the use of any website, social media resource, or mobile application created by or for the Church. The following are prohibited:

1. Disclosing confidences. The responsibility of confidentiality extends to current and past work assignments and all information subject to nondisclosure agreements. Those who are unsure about a confidentiality issue should consult their supervisor. For example, employees should not share designs, proposals, computer code samples and so forth on public social media resources without permission from their supervisor.
2. Identifying or posting pictures of vendors, customers, employees, other interested parties, office equipment, or surroundings without approval from the responsible data steward or the person to whom the information or image pertains.

3. Copying or posting copyrighted or trademarked materials or images without the owner's permission. Contact the Intellectual Property Office for permission to use the Church's copyrighted or trademarked materials or images, and the appropriate vendor, customer, employer, person or organization for all other permissions.
4. Using the employer's time or systems for fundraising; for partisan political purposes; to endorse, support, oppose, or otherwise comment on the election or candidacy of any candidate for public office; or to advocate for the enactment or defeat of any legislation, unless it is directly and clearly within the scope of a person's job duties and assignment (*Handbook 2*, 21.1.22).
5. Publishing material that is obscene, profane, defamatory, libelous, threatening, hateful, harassing, or abusive to another person or entity.
6. Requesting information from individuals under the age of 13.
7. Disclosing reporting structures or descriptions of sensitive job functions. (Providing such information on LinkedIn, for example, may put individuals or the Church at risk.)
8. Collecting personal information without appropriate notice and consent.

Employees or other personnel should not disclose work experiences, opinions, or other content in the name of the Church without approval from their supervisor.

Official and Unofficial Use

As outlined in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, "The Church provides a number of official websites and other Internet resources for general use. These sites and resources are clearly identified as official either by the use of the Church logo or in some other way. They also comply with legal requirements and the Church's intellectual property and privacy policies" (*Handbook 2*, 21.1.22).

Websites, social media, and mobile resources should not use the term *official* to indicate that they are resources owned and operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The term *official* is reserved for official statements and policies issued by the First Presidency.

Therefore, Church websites, social media, and mobile resources can be clearly identified as official either by using the Church logo or using language that indicates Church affiliation without actually using the word *official*. Correlation Intellectual Property will assist with specific terminology on a case-by-case basis.

Note: Where possible, Church websites, social media, and mobile resources should use the full name of the Church rather than the term *Mormon*. The term *Mormon* should not be used regularly (except by the Newsroom) to designate the Church or Church members. Correlation Intellectual Property can provide guidance in cases where using the full name of the Church may not be feasible.

Making Use of Multiple Internet Channels

There are many ways to use multiple Internet channels simultaneously. In addition to standard websites, social media and mobile resources permit the Church to reach broader and more dispersed audiences. The information in the following two sections (“Mobile Technologies” and “Social Media Technologies”) should be considered when determining the messages for various audiences. Governance for these outlets follows the process previously outlined in this document.

Social Media Resources

The following practices should be applied to the approved social media resource. The ICS and PSD may assist with initial setup of the administration account to ensure that appropriate permissions, monitoring, notifications, search, security, analytics, and other helpful functions are appropriately enabled.

Social Media Guidelines

1. Give priority to receiving and sharing the prophetic word and foundational gospel principles. This includes:

- Focusing on providing access to and sharing gospel messages while limiting areas that might detract from this focus (for example, simplifying the Church's overall web offering).
- Developing messages that can be easily shared (most Church-provided content may be shared through existing social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and so on).
- Ensuring that content is of high quality and relevant to viewers.
- Giving sufficient priority to establishing social networks or connections with youth, young adults, and those not of our faith.

2. Support the sharing of meaningful conversations. This includes:

- Discouraging the use of social media to generate individual entries, observations, or comments from audiences outside youth, young adults, and those not of our faith.
- Allowing members to bear their testimonies online. When appropriate, members may share testimonies that are personal, authentic, inspirational, respectful, and joyful on select Church website locations (such as the youth site or mormon.org profiles). Church social media tools should be used to help members and those not of our faith to learn about the Church and share content with others, not as an open forum for comments. Exceptions might include managed profiles like those currently found on mormon.org.
- Encouraging members to share gospel-related messages on the Internet (for example, Mormon Messages).

3. Communicate using simple messages and a common visual identity.

This includes:

- Making the user experience as standard as possible while still respecting the audiences and activities being addressed.
- Encouraging development and application of common design elements (such as the look and feel, style, use of approved design templates when available, navigation, and search).
- Targeting messages to those seeking the truth and to other interested parties (including members) using material that can be understood by all audiences.

4. Maintain the dignity of the Church and its leaders. This includes:

- Ensuring that the Church, its leaders, temples, name and logotype, and other sacred matters are always presented in a dignified and respectful manner. Also, limiting conversations on authorized websites that would marginalize or trivialize the Church, its leaders, or temples. (For example, from time to time on Church websites, personal views of website users are shared that may not reflect the official position of the Church. Departments and entities should carefully plan a response to these situations.)
- Using broadcast communication tools (such as texting or “tweeting”) to communicate meaningful information, not minutiae.

5. Recognize the office. This includes:

- Developing websites, social media and mobile resources for the Church, not for individual leaders.
- Balancing and rotating messages given by Church leaders, giving priority to the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (similar to the approach taken by Church magazines).
- Avoiding the creation of “Internet sensations” (by, for example, focusing on how many hits, followers, or friends a web feature or page may have).

6. Focus on Church strengths; reuse content rather than duplicate what has been done by others. This includes:

- Focusing on what departments, areas, and entities are uniquely commissioned to do, not on technical capabilities.
- Working with existing resources. (Used appropriately, websites, social media and mobile resources may provide an inexpensive way to share Church messages and information with others.)
- Using social media and mobile resources to point viewers back to Church websites.

7. Support, rather than bypass, local leaders. This includes:

- Respecting the priesthood lines of authority by not engaging in communication with members directly (for example, texting between general auxiliary presidencies and members).
- Selectively developing tools and resources that will simplify and support the efforts of local leaders (such as communication and scheduling tools, tools that will provide access to information, and so on).

8. Ensure Proper Registration

- In order to protect Church trademarks and copyrights, and to address other security and legal concerns, all social media accounts, profiles, or similar types of registrations (not content) are to be created and maintained by the Intellectual Property Division of the Correlation Department.
- This process applies to all social media resources, whether they are intended to be used immediately or at a later date. The Intellectual Property Division will maintain a list of all approved social media profiles and accounts.
- After a social media resource has been approved by the Correlation Department and the Communication Services Committee, the requesting Church department will manage the

use of the resource in accordance with established Church policies and procedures.

Mobile Resources

The ever-increasing availability of mobile devices provides the opportunity to publish Church information and resources to a more dispersed audience. Because many people in the world primarily access the Internet through mobile devices, the Church employs many mobile-audience solutions.

Church departments, areas, and entities should give attention to mobile offerings during the conceptual stage of the planning processes. This is not to say that every solution should be accessible through mobile devices, but that the possibility of distribution through mobile devices should be considered early on where appropriate.

The Information and Communications Systems (ICS) and Publishing Services Departments (PSD) have established and keep current with best practices for selecting, creating, and delivering mobile websites and applications. Please consult with ICS and PSD to make decisions regarding website, social media, or mobile resource development.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Website Migration Planning

When seeking information on the Internet, a significant number of users start with search engines (such as Google, Yahoo!, or Bing). Where a site ranks in search results (sometimes referred to as “search authority”) is determined by many factors such as the number of other sites that link to it, the age of the web address, and the quality of the content.

As requested, content- or site-specific scorecards can be provided by Publishing Services to help initiating departments appropriately improve search result

rankings. While it is highly recommended that an SEO plan be prepared for each project, Publishing Services has prepared the following overarching guidelines.

1. Use Domain Names to Improve Findability

More domain names allow for more opportunities to outrank objectionable or irrelevant content. For example, a website called thomassmonson.org could rank higher than an address like lds.org/churchhistory/thomassmonson. The quantity of domain names should be balanced with the amount of resources available to maintain, update, and monitor those sites.

2. Keep Existing Sites When Possible

Existing websites are much more findable than new websites. The value of an existing site should be carefully evaluated when creating or relocating websites or even web pages.

3. Plan Carefully When Migrating Websites

Much of an existing website's authority can be transferred to new addresses if a migration plan is followed. Publishing Services can provide specific details on migration planning.

4. Use Interlinked Sites to Improve Search Results

Links between Church sites can help improve the way pages are ranked. As websites are updated (or moved), consideration should be given to the support structure that site provides to other Church websites. For example, changes to LDS.org may impact other sections of the site like the online catalog.

5. Use Common Words and Phrases

Common words and phrases that individuals actually search on should be used alongside or in place of unique jargon. For example, *survival gear* is searched on about five times more than *emergency preparedness*.

6. Follow the Three-Click Rule

Search engines begin to discount pages that are more than three clicks from the homepage. Search engines regard the distance from the homepage to be reflective of content importance. Thus, a “flat-site” structure is better than a “deep-site” structure. The fact that a site requires more than three clicks may indicate that the site is too big or the topics it covers are too broad.

7. Use Focused Pages

Lengthy web pages covering a number of topics dilute the value of any one topic. Where possible, sites should focus on a specific purpose and audience. Websites that address diverse subjects (such as welfare, history, languages, personal finance, and so on). require extra effort in order for search engines to return the appropriate results.

8. Measure Performance

Tracking capabilities (such as scorecards and Omniture reporting) can be used to identify any issues that may have been missed in the creation or migration plan. Reporting mechanisms should be in place before launching, enhancing, or migrating websites.

9. Mark Duplicate Content Appropriately

Content that is exactly the same (duplicate) should be clearly marked with the appropriate HTML tag so they do not negatively impact search result rankings. For example, the same articles may exist in the *Liahona* and *Ensign* sections of LDS.org; this kind of duplication should be marked. Similar content (as opposed to duplicate content) does not negatively impact search result rankings.

Additional Resources

- Church Website, Social Media, and Mobile Resource Request Form (Cor-digital@ldschurch.org)
- *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 21.1.22
- Communication Services (Michael Colemere)
- Intellectual Property Division of the Correlation Department ([Berne Broadbent](#) 801-240-5849)
- Information Security ([Michael Carter](#))
- Search Engine Optimization ([Dave Prestwich](#))
- Mobile Advisory Team ([Clint Bishop](#))
- Social Media Advisory Team ([Jared Covington](#))
- Web, Social Media, and Mobile Resource Media Briefs
<https://home.ldschurch.org/MSDdept/Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>