

GUIDELINES FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA

OVERVIEW

Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter have firmly established themselves as both an essential part of the newsgathering process and a space where the news is shared and consumed.

The management encourages AFP journalists to open accounts with popular social media networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook to develop new tools for monitoring and reporting the news, and to build up contacts. This process should be done in accordance with AFP's rules on the use of social networks.

The management also encourages AFP journalists to use social networks as a tool to interact with the general public, engage in the real time news process, tap into new sources and identify trends. These guidelines aim to help this process and they will be regularly updated to keep abreast of evolving trends on the Internet.

Social networks pose new challenges for agency journalists because they allow us to interact directly with the public without the filter of an editor or client. The presence of AFP journalists on social networks helps to build the agency's credibility across the Internet and demonstrates that AFP has a solid presence across the spectrum of digital and traditional media. These networks bring together Internet users who want to be involved in the newsgathering process and news organisations who are keen to build up their brand and credibility.

AFP journalists are well placed to take part in this process in a measured and credible way by relying on the agency's strong and historical journalistic traditions.

HOW?

AFP journalists can play a vital role in protecting the credibility of the agency's work and championing the quality of our journalism. Twitter, for example, allows journalists to quickly address false information or unfair criticism online. By building up networks on Twitter, AFP journalists not only develop useful sources of information, they also help to gain visibility for AFP's journalism across the Internet.

Journalists participating in social networks need to be aware of the need to protect the agency's image and principles. All information posted online – whether on Twitter, Facebook or any other social network – is effectively in the public domain even if it originates from a personal account.

As a result, two overarching principles should govern online activity by AFP journalists, whether on social networks or other online forums, even if personal accounts are being used. All content should:

- **Broadly conform with the spirit of the AFP stylebook, the ethical values of the agency and its guiding principles of fairness and balance. Even if a freer tone is permitted on social networking sites, no profane or offensive language should be used.**
- **Respect the independence and impartiality of AFP.**

These rules apply to social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as blogs and other online forums.

AFP journalists who want to open personal accounts on Facebook need to conform with these rules OR they need to limit their Facebook network to close friends.

The agency's presence on social networks and the application of these guidelines will be reviewed and updated each year in the agency's annual report.

1) MANAGING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA IDENTITY

- If AFP journalists are using social media such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn or Flickr in a professional capacity, then it is essential that they are clearly identified as AFP journalists.
- On Twitter, AFP's technical department recommends journalists use the following formulation for email addresses – name.surname + Twitter@afp.com (eg, mike.jones+twitter@afp.com) to register a Twitter account. Journalists can obtain this email address by sending a mail to seri-twitter@afp.com. This precaution will allow the technical service to intervene quickly if the account is attacked by spam or hacked by an outside party.
- Journalists should include a disclaimer on their Twitter profiles such as: « The views expressed here are my own. Links and re-tweets are not endorsements » or « On Twitter I speak only for myself ».
- Journalists should inform their direct managers or bureau chiefs about their social media presence. They need the direct approval of their line manager (bureau chief or desk chief). Journalists who have already opened social media accounts should also seek formal approval from their manager.
- If a journalist feels strongly about having a personal social media presence, then he or she can open separate work and private social media accounts. The private account should make no reference to the person's role as a journalist at AFP.
- If you already have professional social media accounts opened under a pseudonym, you must change them to use your real name.
- AFP will keep a list of the professional social media accounts of all staff.

2) GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE BEHAVIOUR

- Avoid all vulgar or overtly opinionated comment. Refrain from reacting in the heat of the moment; take time to write a considered cool-headed post.
- Before Tweeting or posting comments, bear in mind that your words will be in the public domain and will be archived and referenced by search engines.
- Respect the user rules for each individual site.
- If an AFP journalist sees the agency challenged or criticised on a social network, he or she should immediately contact a senior editorial manager such as a bureau chief, desk chief or member of the redchef.

WHAT TO POST ONLINE?

- Do not post any internal AFP correspondence.
- Journalists should not post online any exclusive information gained in the course of their work for AFP or any alerts. They can post any observations, colour or anecdotes which will help them to build up a network of followers.
- Journalists should avoid criticising other media, regardless of whether they are clients or not.
- Journalists should ensure they remain fair and balanced when commenting on the areas, countries or governments they cover. They should also refrain from any comments that could harm the agency's image of impartiality.
- Recommending or re-tweeting links is an essential part of the social network experience and should be encouraged. However, it is important this process is done with care. A re-tweet or link is often considered a sympathetic recommendation.
- The AFP wire and AFP Live Reports must remain the priority for AFP journalists covering breaking news. No AFP journalist should post or tweet developing news stories they are covering, UNLESS they have the explicit written authority from the regional or central redchef. This dispensation will be given in only exceptional circumstances when it is considered important for AFP to have a social media presence on a particular news story. When this is done, the redchef will ensure there are enough AFP journalists on the ground to ensure the quality of service to the wire and the Live Reports is not affected. An AFP journalist will also be detached to manage the online presence and ensure it complies with AFP's guidelines. In such circumstances, AFP journalists on the ground will be asked to refrain from tweeting on personal subjects.
- If an AFP journalist mistakenly Tweets or posts incorrect information, then it is important that a correction is published.

4) POSTING OR TWEETING AFP CONTENT

- All AFP journalists should avoid publishing AFP alerts or breaking news on social networks, even with a time delay.
- Where possible, links to AFP content should go to AFP's Facebook, YouTube or Daily Motion sites and through client websites. In future, links should also be able to go to AFP's proposed official Twitter accounts which will be managed and updated with AFP content.
- Every time AFP content or journalists are referenced on Twitter, the hashtag #AFP should be used.
- Journalists should refrain from posting AFP content culled directly from the wires or platforms such as ImageForum. This can be done in a very limited way in exceptional circumstances (such as a photographer using an image on his personal blog), but permission should be sought from his/her manager and nothing should be posted in high definition.

LEGAL ISSUES

Journalists should remember that social networks such as Twitter and Facebook are hosting sites which essentially give space to users to express themselves under their own responsibility. Journalists have to understand they are responsible for the information on their Facebook page or Twitter account, and can be held legally accountable for any issues arising from that information. If information is posted while the journalist is carrying out official AFP business, AFP could also face legal ramifications. As a result it is essential that journalists respect the agency's social media guidelines, the principles laid out in the AFP stylebook and laws relating to the freedom of information.