



## Social media strategy

The European Ombudsman's Strategy for the mandate, adopted in September 2010, includes five objectives, the fourth of which, entitled 'Communicate', reads as follows: "We want to provide our stakeholders and the public with timely, useful and easily accessible information". In order to effectively fulfil this objective, the European Ombudsman recognises the increasing importance of social media as a central part of any modern communication strategy. This Social Media Strategy is an integral part of the Ombudsman's outreach activities, which are coordinated in Brussels by the Deputy Head of the Communication Unit. The institution uses social media platforms to support its communication activities through: (i) social media optimisation, (ii) publication, (iii) community engagement, and (iv) monitoring. On the basis of the institution's Key Performance Indicators, the Ombudsman strives to find a balanced use of social media which supports its core activities in the best way possible:

**1. Social media optimisation:** Our website makes passive use of social media by integrating social sharing.

**1.1.** Visitors to the European Ombudsman's website can easily share our content through their preferred social platforms.

**1.2.** We promote our social network accounts on the website.

**2. Publication:** Distribution of content on social media platforms (Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+, etc.).

**2.1.** The choice of platforms used should be based on an assessment of where our target audiences spend their time online and on the human resources required to maintain and update content.

**2.2.** The content posted should contribute to raising awareness of the role of the European Ombudsman, the scope of the mandate, the Ombudsman's activities (cases, events, visits, speeches, etc.), and help citizens and organisations find the right place to lodge their complaint.

**3. Community engagement:** Ombudsman staff engage with online communities in order to amplify and extend communication, aiming towards a full 'customer service' approach.

**3.1.** "General public" engagement on social platforms should support citizens and organisations in finding solutions to their problems (helping them find/use the interactive guide or linking to other services).

**3.2.** "Stakeholder group" engagement with key influencers should aim to build trust in the institution and develop a community of ambassadors (NGOs, chambers of commerce, associations, journalists, etc.) who help spread our messages and provide valuable feedback on our activities (such as engaging in conversations on Twitter or LinkedIn).

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**3.3.** The training of our own staff and cooperation with the European Network of Ombudsmen should help to improve the use of social media and develop mutual promotion and network building on social platforms.

**4. Monitoring:** Optimising social media communication requires detailed monitoring and reporting. The European Ombudsman uses an external monitoring service to track online activity related to the institution's work.

**4.1.** Measuring impact should help us learn from experience and continuously improve our communication activities.

**4.2.** Monitoring "buzz" around events and communication activities should contribute to expanding our network and identifying key conversations and people/organisations to engage with.

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## Examples

### **A. Social media optimisation of websites (SMO)**

**1.1.** Visitors to the European Ombudsman's website are encouraged to share individual content pages, images, videos, etc. with their online networks.

**1.2.** Relevant pages on the website should enable and encourage visitors to 'follow' our social media accounts.

**1.3.** SMO should be fully integrated into web content creation (including content management processes and work flows). Metadata on each page must be adapted to maximise the value of the shared page on social platforms.

### **B. Social media as a distribution channel**

**1.1.** Social media platforms can be used as a channel to distribute approved online content (such as press releases, invitations, photos, videos, etc.).

**1.2.** Social media account details should be included in the e-mail signatures of all staff as well as publications and other documents.

**1.3.** Content distribution offers stakeholders and journalists another convenient way (like e-newsletters and RSS feeds) to keep up to date with our news without having to visit our website to check for new content.

**1.4.** Content distributed via social media can achieve viral amplification as followers re-post to their networks.

**1.5.** Content, editorial selection and distribution itself need to be carefully managed (choice of platform, content, frequency, etc.) and continuously fine-tuned in order to deliver maximum value to our key audiences.

**1.6.** The content we post on social networks may receive comments and questions: relevant or irrelevant, positive or negative, in small or in very large numbers. A clear editorial policy for each platform must be developed to ensure suitable handling of user feedback.

### **C. Social media community engagement**

**1.1.** Community outreach and engagement goes beyond content distribution and reactive response to feedback. Social media representatives must find, join, build, and engage with online communities of multipliers and advocates. Such a genuinely proactive and innovative approach by the Ombudsman has the potential to benefit a large number of citizens seeking help or advice and to increase trust in the EU institutions.

**1.2.** Social media users select their sources based on a variety of considerations, including practical utility, novelty, insight, humour, and relevance to specific, personal, or professional interests. We should keep this in mind when engaging.

**1.3.** Social media communities and networks are thematic and each have their own specificities. Interest in specific topics (transparency, environment, health) is likely to be much larger than interest in the institution itself.

**1.4.** Social media engagement demands a 'customer service' approach that differs from that of traditional EU communication. The Ombudsman could make a significant difference in the EU social media landscape, where a one-way approach to communication is still dominant.

**1.5.** Authenticity is highly valued. Effective engagement relies on personal interactions. It means entering into conversations, including conversations not



necessarily initiated by the Ombudsman institution itself. Individual staff members must be authorised, trained, and empowered to experiment (and to learn from experiences) in order to serve the public by sharing their knowledge and expertise.

**1.6. Successful use of social media demands clear, unambiguous leadership from the senior management.** Training of the staff and senior management is therefore key to ensuring an overall understanding of the role of the internet and social platforms in today's media landscape. Clear and helpful tools and guidelines for engagement should help staff make decisions on whether and how to interact.

#### **D. Social media monitoring (SMM) and analysis**

**1.1. Reputation management** – How are the European Ombudsman, her work, her events, and her communication activities being discussed in online news, blogs/forums, and social media? Social media monitoring offers rich reporting opportunities.

**1.2. Conversation monitoring** – The right monitoring may be able to help identify and reach out to potential complainants who would not otherwise have known about us. Language issues are a challenge in this regard.

**1.3. Crisis communication** – Picking up stories before they appear in mainstream media gives us time to intervene and influence the discussion, as well as to prepare for media questions if a story evolves.

**1.4. Influencer identification** – SMM can help to identify relevant journalists and commentators whose content is widely shared and discussed online, and who can therefore be targeted by media relations activities both online and offline.

**1.5. Impact assessment** – SMM provides excellent real-time indicators of the impact of our own outreach and social media activities. Measuring social media impact also provides evidence for comparisons of cost-benefits between channels, campaign themes, countries, etc.