



# Engaging through social media

## Guidelines for European Ombudsman staff

### What is social media?

Social media is a term that covers technologies allowing users to share opinions and content, promote discussion, and build relationships online. In practice it means blogs, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Wikipedia, discussion fora, Skype, reviews on TripAdvisor and Amazon, and thousands of other online and mobile applications.

New technologies have turned the Internet into a place where conversations take place, and where meaning and content are continuously co-created as well as being published and distributed. In practice this means that a layer of online conversation is added to almost everything happening around us – both on and offline.

As citizens become increasingly interconnected, their expectations of being able to interact with government via social media will become ever greater. They will expect us to respond when they contact us via social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

This guide is intended to be a helping hand for European Ombudsman staff that use or consider using social media for both personal and professional purposes. It is divided into two main parts:

1. introduction to social media as a corporate communication channel
2. general expectations regarding staff conduct on social media

If you have further questions or run into any problems, please contact our Social Media Officer ([eo-socialmedia@ombudsman.europa.eu](mailto:eo-socialmedia@ombudsman.europa.eu)).

### 1. Social media as a corporate communication channel

The European Ombudsman actively uses social media to reinforce our strong ties with key influencers and partner organisations, and to raise awareness amongst the general public regarding the activities and services we provide. Staff members active on social media are encouraged to follow our corporate accounts and to share content which they think could be of interest to their personal networks.

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## Outreach to target groups, multipliers, and partner organisations

The target groups we work with are all either advanced users of social media or are in the process of becoming so. By interacting with them online we can spread awareness about what the Ombudsman does among opinion leaders and well-connected individuals:

- A three-year contract for online media monitoring and analysis began on 1 November 2013. This tool enables us to track relevant online discussions and reach out when appropriate.
- Our own events are streamed live and tweeted to allow remote audiences to participate. Video recordings of our events are also shared on YouTube ([youtube.com/eotubes](http://youtube.com/eotubes)).
- The Ombudsman's Communication Unit ensures that the corporate Twitter account ([twitter.com/EUombudsman](http://twitter.com/EUombudsman)) is used to tweet during other events in which we participate.
- Summaries and press releases are shared via Twitter and through our LinkedIn ([linkedin.com/company/european-ombudsman](http://linkedin.com/company/european-ombudsman)) and Google+ (shortlink tbc) pages.
- Staff (especially case handlers and senior management) who participate in external events are encouraged to notify the Social Media Officer in advance<sup>1</sup> – preferably well before the event – so that we have time both to research which online resources will be used during and after the event and to prepare and validate content for posting on social media. If you give a presentation to a specialised audience, make sure to promote the Ombudsman's Twitter and LinkedIn accounts. If you give a presentation to a generalist audience, please promote the Ombudsman's YouTube account.

## Raising awareness about our existence and the services we offer

The general public is difficult to reach, so a special effort is made to publish and share engaging and educational video material about the European Ombudsman for easy dissemination via social networks.

Our YouTube account acts as a hub for online video content aimed at a broader audience. We strive to make our own content available in all the official EU languages:

- The teaser video, 'Tangled up in EU administration' (published in September 2012)
- A longer, more educational, video explaining the role and activities of the Ombudsman (published in November 2013)
- Within time, a specific case presentation or "how to" video per language, targeted at "national" audiences and serving as an example of how the Ombudsman has been able to help, thus making our work relevant to national audiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Please complete the form available on Sisteo ([www.sisteo.ep.parl.union.eu/com/Staff%20guidelines/Home.aspx](http://www.sisteo.ep.parl.union.eu/com/Staff%20guidelines/Home.aspx))



We also add videos produced by others in specific playlists on YouTube:

- If you come across videos about the European Ombudsman or featuring the staff of the Ombudsman, please notify the Social Media Officer.
- Please also inform the Social Media Officer of any videos you come across produced by members of the European Network of Ombudsmen.

## Staff conduct on social media

Whenever you use social media for work purposes, please keep these basic principles in mind:

- **Be credible:** Do your best to be accurate, fair, and transparent. If you are in any doubt, please ask the Social Media Officer, or your line manager if appropriate, for advice.
- **Be consistent:** Do your best to engage in a constructive dialogue. Be cordial, honest, and professional. Try to add value, for example by referring someone to our interactive guide or to a specific case summary on our website.
- **Be responsive:** If you learn something new, remember to share it with your network and your colleagues.
- **Be integrated:** Think about how your offline work can be linked with your online activities.

## Your obligations as a member of staff

You should never forget that as an EU staff member you are bound by the EU staff regulations<sup>2</sup> and should respect the European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour. Rules in the staff regulations and guidelines in the Code regarding staff conduct, ethics, and integrity also apply on social media.

When you use social media, even in a personal capacity, you should always be aware that your actions have a direct impact on how we are perceived as an institution. Think of yourself as an ambassador for the Ombudsman institution: participating online is little different to speaking at a conference, except once a message has been posted, it is there for eternity, in writing, and may well reach a much larger audience than originally intended.

Many staff members use Facebook and LinkedIn, while a growing number are on Twitter and on Google+. Some staff members have experienced attempts by complainants to connect with them via social media, which shows that the lines between what is personal and what is professional are becoming increasingly blurred. Please feel free to speak to the Social Media Officer and/or to your line manager if a problematic issue arises.

- **Facebook:** Mainly used for private purposes. If you would like to restrict access to your profile, talk to the Social Media Officer about how to do so.

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<sup>2</sup> The Staff Regulations ([http://ec.europa.eu/civil\\_service/docs/toc100\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/docs/toc100_en.pdf)) define the rights and obligations (including conduct and behaviour) of EU staff and govern relations between staff and the administration.



- **LinkedIn:** Mainly professional. If you don't feel comfortable connecting with a certain person, you can always propose that they follow the Ombudsman's LinkedIn page instead.

**Twitter:** Mainly business to business as far as our institution is concerned. If you have an open profile on Twitter, anybody can follow you without your validation.

**Google+:** Used for both private and professional purposes. If you have a Gmail account, you most probably also have a Google+ profile.

If you create a social media account, on these or any other platforms, through which you plan to discuss professional issues, please inform the Social Media Officer and your line manager.

## Be transparent

- If you post online in your professional capacity, please add to the profile information of your account details on where you work, or write it in your contribution.
- Please like/follow our institution's corporate profiles and share the content we post with your network, whenever you feel it is appropriate.

## For your own safety

- Avoid disclosing sensitive personal information online, such as your home address or telephone number. Never give your bank details or credit card number to websites you don't trust and never share such information in online messages.
- Be careful not to use the same password for all your accounts.
- If you use a smartphone or tablet, make sure that it is password-protected to safeguard your accounts and data in case of theft.
- Be suspicious of phishing attempts (people trying to steal your password and abuse your accounts or even steal money from you electronically).

Staff who wish to familiarise themselves with social media in a safe environment are invited to join the European Ombudsman's group on Yammer (yammer.com). You must use your work e-mail when creating the account. The Ombudsman's group can only be accessed by our staff. You can use various collaborative tools on Yammer to discuss with colleagues and to create/share documents.

Anne Christensen  
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