Social media guidance for British Geological Survey staff

Social media is a great way for BGS staff to communicate BGS science, technology, activities, achievements and services. This guidance is for both those using social media channels for personal use as well as administrators of BGS branded accounts.

Top tips

- Learn by example. Look internally at BGS people and teams already using social media to see best practices for two-way engagement.

- Enjoy it. Get your team involved. Think of interesting and fun things to share. Engaging with the online community can be rewarding and impact positively on society and your work.

- Participate frequently. For microblogs (e.g. Twitter) that's daily or weekly, for blogs (e.g. Blogger) that's weekly or monthly – minimum.

- Vary your content. Post photos, comments and links to websites and articles. Also be sure to ask questions, respond to other users, share (with acknowledgment) their content and don't be afraid of adding an appropriate level of humour.

- If you can't answer questions directed at you then refer them to BGS Enquiries.

- Do not engage with ANY users who are aggressive or abusive. Accounts that try to initiate negative responses from you are referred to as 'Trolls', ignore them.

- If you use your personal account to talk about work be aware the online audience includes journalists and your peers. If in doubt about the appropriateness of previous content have a clean-up or start a new account.

- New branded BGS social media channels will be set up and operated with the authorisation of the appropriate Director of Science or Technology and in consultation with BGS Corporate Communications & Publications. These are purely for communication of BGS science and information. They are, and will remain, the property of the BGS.

- Be aware what to do if your account is hacked or you notice any activity out of the ordinary. All social media channels carry this advice in their Help section. Also be aware of the BGS Security Policy regarding passwords.

Social media guidance for British Geological Survey staff

Seven rules to remember

- BGS staff using social media must act with integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

- Avoid commenting on government policies & practices, controversial issues, personal attacks and politics. Postings considered inappropriate may result in disciplinary action.

- BGS's computing facilities must not be used to distribute material which might reasonably cause offence or be considered socially unacceptable or embarrassing to yourself or others.

- Unless authorised to do so, staff must not give the impression that they are speaking on behalf of the BGS in personal websites or blogs. Phrases such as 'BGS employee but views my own' should be used (although this is not recognised as a legal defence).

- Posting information which is privileged or has been supplied in confidence is not acceptable. Permission should be obtained before posting photos or video taken by other people.

- Staff are permitted to use their own personal social media channels to communicate their work for the BGS. A personalised mix of work and non-work related postings is acceptable as long as these conform to these guidelines. The careful addition of sensible personal postings will help to make your social media engagement more interesting and effective.

- Check the accuracy and sensitivity of your comments, use your common sense, if unsure don't post and seek advice.

Useful references

CABINET OFFICE. 2012. Social media guidance for civil servants. 17th May 2012. Available from:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62361/Social_Media_Guidance.pdf

MITCHELL, CJ, NICE, SE, STEVENSON, JP, THOMAS, JE, NASH, GV AND NOAKES, L. 2014. Broadcasting the science stories of BGS: The British Geological Survey communications strategy. British Geological Survey Open Report OR/14/019. 32pp. Available from:
http://nora.nerc.ac.uk/507919/1/Communications%20strategy%20for%20the%20British%20Geological%20Survey.pdf

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL (NERC). 2013. Electronic Communication policy. Available from:
http://eduroam.nerc.ac.uk/doc/e-communication-policy.pdf