Social Media for Music Educators

By now nearly every music educator, every band parent and every music student has access to the world of social media. There is no doubt that it has changed everything we do on a daily basis. It has changed how organizations of all sizes communicate with their constituents or customers. Any arts program is really no different. Whether it’s a high school marching band, a middle school concert band or a music parent booster organization, managing the social media efforts for any one of these groups will take some time and some thought.

At the end of the day social media activities are just another method of communication, another way to tell people the who, the what, the when, the where, the why and the how of what any group is doing. While we are all finding the most appropriate ways to utilize this medium, there are certain standard elements of protocol which, I believe, one must be knowledgeable.

1. **Create a Plan.**

Sit down with the band boosters’ board of directors, the school administration or the senior leaders of your band program. Come to an agreement on the following questions: How do you want to use social media? Which platforms do you want to use? What you want to post? How often do you want to post? Who will be posting? Who is going to be monitoring the posts?

This exercise is necessary for a few reasons. One is that it’s a method of keeping everyone in check about the goals of your efforts. Two is that it will help to ensure that what you do is in line with the goals of your organization. Three is that it will help to ensure that what is posted is relevant and important to your members. Lastly, students and parents come and go. Some are more active than others. This process helps to ensure that those involved in the program as doing their part.

So write it up and put these details your plan. As the organization changes, your social media plans should change too. Be sure to review it once a year and update as needed. When new staff instructors, new parents and new students arrive into the program, be sure to give them an overview during your orientation sessions.

2. **Social media should be a part of your communication plan.**

Let’s face it. The fastest way to get information out to your audience, which in this case, is your students and your parents, is via social media. Back in my day it was a gold old fashioned phone call.

“The buses are late”; “15 minutes until we leave”; or “Schedule change for the field show next week”; These sound familiar? Social media is probably the fastest way to get the word out about what is happening or what will be happening.
Be clear to both the parents and students that the program will be using social media as its primary communication tool for immediate information. This way they can be sure to follow your program on Twitter or Facebook.

3. **Have all staff sign on a social media “Code of Conduct”**

This is very simple. Educators and paid staff music instructors should not be friends on social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter plain and simple. Make this clear to all. Some instructor may be very recent former high school students attending a local college and may still have friends in high school. As they are now staff members they should no longer be associated with students still in high school on social media. The life of a teacher/instructor vs. the life of a high school student is very different. Do you really want to want the high school kids to see everything our teachers and instructors do on a daily basis? Some level of distance is probably better in this regard.

4. **Do not post photos of kids without parental permission**

This is hard not to enforce but really necessary. Many parents do not allow students to participate in some social media platforms. Moreover, there are some parents that do not want photos of their child posted online. The topic of a digital fingerprint comes to mind. Once a photo or a tag it is online it is there to stay. Since a student under the age of 18 is really a minor its best not take any chances and get permission from all before posting.

Additionally, the posting of photos of the color guard or the drumline on a private Facebook page or Twitter account of a paid staff member should not be allowed. Put that requirement into the guidelines set forth in the employment contract with each contracted instructor.

5. **Make it easy for your program to be contacted.**

Determine how people can contact your group and make it easy for people to figure this out. The goal here is to get back to people right away if they contact your music program. If you post an email address on your organization’s Facebook page, determine who will be checking that email and how often they will do so. Make sure that if that person is on vacation or leaves the organization, that someone else handles that responsibility. Not getting back to people in a timely manner presents the risk of being unable to answer questions in a timely manner.

6. **Spread it around.**

Allow more than a few people to be administrators whether it be on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. One person cannot do it all and certainly parents. Allowing senior student leaders to get involved keeps everyone in the loop as to the time and effort it takes to
manage your presence. It also helps the leaders understand the medium and the potential it has to help or hurt the organization.

7. **Find a happy medium for posting.**

There are some organizations who feel it necessary to post all the time while others almost never add content. Your group will find that happy medium over time. Some days your program may post a lot and other days not at all. It really depends on 1) how active the program is and 2) how much the educators want to post, and 3) what into the band boosters need to tell the parents. Your followers will tell you by their actions how much is too much. But be aware that many people are bombarded with too much information each day. Often times less is more.

8. **Make it easy to join any social media group for your organization.**

Make your Facebook page a “Fan Page.” Unless want only certain members to view your page and you need to verify membership, do not make it difficult for people to join. If the goal is to tell your story to as many people as possible, then allow everyone access to that information. Keeping it easy to get information is the key to ensuring that the audience gets that information when they need it.

9. **Proof read and spell check**

Errors can make you look unprofessional as can the use of shorthand, emoticons or slang. If your audience includes individuals over the age of 40, spiff it up a notch and use more professional language. Not doing so can make your organization look young and immature. Remember that what you post is ultimately a reflection of the music educator.

10. **Image consistency**

If your organization has rules about logos and links, which is likely the case with many school programs, you need to be careful and follow the proper procedures. Check with your administrator head to ensure you have the right logos, brands and trademarked logos, and that they are being used consistently across all mediums.

11. **Be guarded on who you attach/link as “friends.”**

As a teacher, becoming “friends” with your students under the age of 18 can be a dangerous decision. My suggestion is to have a personal rule and keep your personal Facebook “friends” just that, as actual friends. Leave those young students off your “friends” list. You never want to put yourself in any situation that may jeopardize your career.
12. Check your organization’s policy about social media.

If your organization does not have a policy yet, assume that they will in the near future. If there is no current plan help create one. This will ensure that everyone is clear on the goals of the program. Be clear and open about your goals to your superiors. Keep them aware of your success and your future plans. Be a role model for other departments at your institution.

13. Mix it up – Don’t just make a bunch of noise.

Do not just post the same content all the time. Some posts I see post about the same few things, such as the weather, traffic, Oprah, etc. Mix it up and be original. Create a plan on what you want to post and mix in new types of material once in a while. Be different. It gets old if everyone is posting about the same thing. Be unique and tell your own story in your own way.


For any high school or middle arts program your audience really consists primarily of two groups, students and parents. The goal here is not to grow the audience but to serve the audience with information. Be clear on that with everyone as that will drive the content in that will be posted.

15. Not everyone may like your posts.

Not everyone is going to like what you say and some people may tell you this on your blog or your Facebook page. Be prepared for this and be OK with accepting criticism. If you are going to put yourself out there be willing to hear and accept opinions other than your own. The worst thing you can do is retaliate to unfounded criticism; no one wins these battles. Making it worse is that now all that inflamed content is searchable.

16. Teamwork is key.

Think as a team with others in your city or state and work together to promote events wisely. Get to know the other teachers in the school, other arts programs in the district, local drum corps, and university arts programs that are in your circle and optimize your communications. Use Twitter hashtags and other tools to help each other. The power of social media lies in the ability to share information with who you know, and who they know.

17. Observe others.

Look at others around you in your activity. Who’s doing it right, who’s doing it not so right? Make note of that. If you see someone with some good ideas, use them to your advantage. Talk to others about how to share and collaborate online. Figure out how to
use social media to the benefit of everyone. If you do, it will catch on and you will be successful.

18. The world is watching.

If you are “friends” with your boss, school administrator, or band director, they know everything about you, even that time back in 1987 when you went to the prom. What a night that was! Your personal posts and tweets are now public information, and it is important to remember that what you do may be used against you.

19. Plan your postings in detail.

- Practice and rehearsal times – A great way to let your members know the status.
- Clinics and special events - A great way to let your online “friends/fans” know about an event you are having.
- Scores from events - A neat way to let parents know what how the band is scored at the big event down South.
- Location Status – “We have arrived”, “We are on our way”, “We are stuck in traffic.” The more you can let parents know about where their kids are the more you will be trusted and the more parents will be ok with letting their kids participate more.
- Off season events – Keep the excitement going all year with content during the off season.
- Industry events and other associated activities/information – A great way to keep your members and friends up-to-date about pertinent news in the industry.

20. Keep track of it all.

Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Digg, Blogs, Flickr, etc. can be a lot to manage. There are some great tools out there to help you manage all these sites and networks. Use them so you message is current, relevant and consistent across all mediums.

You can also set all your social outlets to come to you via one outlet. Most folks use a select email account to pool it all in one place. This will help you manage what you are doing thereby keeping all the conversations manageable.


Ask other industry professionals about your social media activities. If you work with an indoor group, ask the parents about the group’s social media activities. Be open to criticism and make changes where necessary, as it can only help.

22. Be aware what you share.

Share as much as you can including links, blogs, photos and videos. The power of social media comes through sharing your content with associated organizations. If your group
targets those under the age of 18, be cognizant of where these associated links are being directed. This can affect how your organization is perceived.

23. It’s addicting.

Think about how much time you want to spend doing all this. Is it worth it? Are you neglecting your family, your job and other school activities? Are you tweeting in the car while driving? What’s it all worth? Is a car accident worth it because you wanted to Tweet the fact that you just bought a new drum set? Keep yourself in check so as not to let it get the best of you.

Don’t let social media give you a bad rap. Let’s say you get hired to write music for a marching band. If I am the band director that hired you, the last thing I want to see on Facebook are details about your Vegas trip when you committed to getting me the new 2014 opener by August 1st and now it’s August 15th.

24. Start small.

If you are new to all this, start small and see what works for you, your organization, or school. See what others are doing first and revamp it into your own style. This is not a race. Take your time and do it right.


This is what it all comes down to... communication! It’s not about having people read your Twitter feeds all the time but rather it is about engaging people whom you have never met in a conversation about percussion, music, education and life. If you can do this then you are doing it right.

26. Measure your success.

This is as simple as counting the number of your friends, fans, followers, tweets or linked associations. This helps to tell the story of why you are doing what you are doing and if your effort is having any impact over time. At the end of day, if you cannot measure what you are doing you may not be putting your time and energy in the right places.

There is more to the story of course but this will get you going. Tweet me up if you have a question ‏@tcwollwage.
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Troy Wollwage has nearly 20 years of experience in the field of marketing services, strategic planning and ebusiness strategy. Mr. Wollwage holds an MBA from Boston University and a BS in Business Administration from the University of Southern California. Troy is currently in his 11th year as the Marketing Manager of Percussion Instruments with Yamaha Corporation of America.