

Social Media Response Guidelines

August 2013

People talk about Dalhousie all the time online, from high school students excitedly applying for admission, to current students discussing food, sports or campus life. The vast majority of these conversations do not require a Dalhousie contribution, but there are times when it's appropriate—and welcome—for the university's voice to be heard in the discussion.

Spokespeople

Responding to an online discussion as an individual is very different than responding as someone responsible for the issue at-hand.

Only staff who are authorized by Communications and Marketing or the president to speak on behalf of the university administration may do so in an official capacity. Staff who respond on behalf of a department, faculty or office should have the authorization to address the subject matter at hand – and should clearly state their association with the university.

If you are ever unsure, please consult Communications and Marketing prior to responding.

When to consult Communications and Marketing

Communications and Marketing monitors Dalhousie's online reputation, but no one system can find everything. Sometimes, members of our community—faculty, staff, students—are best positioned to discover emerging online issues. Let us know if an online issue:

- Is being discussed across multiple websites
- Has posts with a large or increasing number of comments or responses
- Has potential legal implications (such as defamation)
- Appears significantly threatening to the university's reputation
- Appears to warrant a response, but you are unsure how to proceed

We also appreciate a heads-up on positive mentions, especially if there is potential to share the conversation on our own communications platforms (Dal News, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

General response considerations

Transparency—Disclose your Dalhousie connection if you are responding as a Dalhousie employee. Do not misrepresent yourself, as this can often cause greater harm if the Dalhousie connection is eventually uncovered.

Sourcing—Cite available sources when available using links, videos or other references (Dal News articles, online news postings, etc.)

Tone—Responses should be honest, considerate, and reflect positively on the reputation of Dalhousie. Remember that a comment from a Dalhousie representative may be understood by readers as a reflection on Dalhousie as a whole: your coworkers, our faculty and our students.

Timeliness—It's important to join the dialogue while your contribution is still relevant. This doesn't mean rushing a response and regretting it later, but it generally means that comments should be responded to within hours, not days.

Value—All responses should provide something meaningful to the conversation: this can be a solution, an explanation, some insight or simply a recognition that the university hears the concerns being raised. If you have nothing meaningful to contribute, don't.

Responding to positive mentions

If you have something constructive or valuable to contribute to a discussion about Dalhousie, do so following the general response considerations outlined above.

Responding to negative mentions

When to consider a response

- "Misguided": When the post or comment has its facts wrong. If you are in a position to point out the errors, do so in a constructive manner, providing evidence or web links whenever possible.
- "Unhappy customer": Someone who is unhappy with a service at the university. If you're able to rectify the negative experience that the person is complaining about, doing so can be to everyone's benefit.
- "Reasoned discussion": When a comment is a well-written piece of constructive criticism. The issues raised may be important enough to warrant a university response, but do so in such a tone that avoids a harsh or prolonged debate.

When to avoid responding

- "Troll": Posts that are senselessly aggressive, angry or harsh. These comments are trying to bait an argument, and readers generally know not to take them seriously. We shouldn't either.
- "Rager": Rants that don't mention specific concerns to respond to. People often

go online to vent, so unless you can offer a solution to the problem, its best to consider these comments, but not respond to them.

- “Social solution”: When others in the Dalhousie community (or elsewhere) have sufficiently responded to the concern. Sometimes our community members are better spokespeople than we are, because they have more credibility with their friends and online network.

Responding on your own social media channels

Comments on your own social media channels—blog, Facebook Page, Twitter account, etc., should be treated with higher priority than comments on other sites, as the person writing the post may have a greater expectation of being responded to. That said, not all of them necessarily warrant a response: trolls, ragers and social solution comments still rarely benefit from a university contribution.

Posts that contain personal attacks, false or unsubstantiated allegations, libelous statements, offensive language or commercial spam should be deleted. However, avoid deleting posts simply because they are negative. Most of the time, well-reasoned response is the preferred course of action, as it demonstrates an openness to dialogue and respects the opinion of the original commenter.