

Facebook and other Social Media

By Heather Arnold, Secretary of the South Eastern Historical Society.

We talked about operating a Facebook page at our August 2019 meeting and this paper is partly based on some of the discussion that arose. I am a bit of a Facebook fan and I do the Facebook pages for the S.E.H.A., Koo Wee Rup Swamp Historical Society, Trafalgar Truck Restorers Club, Lost Country Victoria; I contribute to the Lost Melbourne Facebook page and I also do the Casey Cardinia Heritage Facebook page as part of my work.

Social Media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are a great way of communicating with the community about your Society, events, displaying your photos and receiving information about items in your collection. They also attract an audience that do not come to your meetings or want to join your Society. However, you want your organisation to be represented professionally and if you are dependent on local or state government funding then you want to make sure that all the tweets, Facebook posts, Instagram posts are respectful to the community and the funding bodies.

Here are some things you need to think about, but please do not get turned off by this as Facebook sites can be fun and the immediate response you get when you post a photo is really gratifying.

Setting up your account and posting

Every time you apply for something on-line such as a Council grant or establish a social media account such as Facebook or Instagram or have an internet site or a Victorian Collections page or an on-line banking account you need a log-in and a pass word. The Narre Warren & District Family History Group have a policy that the secretary must be told all the passwords and log-ins so there is a record somewhere. This is good advice. Plus, there is also a record of where your group is on the Internet and who administers each site or account.

Which brings us to Succession planning. If no-one else knows the log-in and password, then you will have no end of trouble if the person who manages the site gets hit by the proverbial bus. This means no-one can update the site or correct wrong information.

Who is authorized to represent the Society on social media? What can a member of your Society say about the Society or issues the Society is involved with on their own social media? Do you want a member of your Society involved in a war of words on-line with local Councillors or Council Officers over, for instance, a planning issue? People have a right to free speech but sometimes Facebook or Twitter isn't the right medium for that, especially if it seems that they are speaking on behalf of an organization. There is where having a Social Media policy can be useful - more on this below.

It might be easy to decide which members of your Society will post, but you also need to decide if anyone other than administrators can post to your Facebook site timeline. This will depend if you set up your site as a 'Page' or a 'Group'. The S.E.H.A Facebook site is a 'Page' - so the administrators can post and followers can make comments or send messages but cannot post directly to the timeline. The Gippsland History Facebook site is a 'Group' so you have to 'apply' to join and can then make comments and also add posts to the timeline. The Gippsland History Facebook Group is great – if you are on Facebook then look it up

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1755971574632862/>

Read more about Pages and Groups, here <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/facebook-tips-whats-the-difference-between-a-facebook-page-and-group/324706977130/>

You need to decide whether to have a 'Page' or a 'Group' - allowing people to post directly to a timeline in a Group means you can get really great stuff, but you can get material that is off-topic and then an administrator must deal with it. A Page allows 'visitor posts' which you can then share to the timeline or if people want to send you a photo, they can send the photo in a message to your inbox and you can share it, if you decide to. This will also mean that you can ask questions as to where the photo came from, so the source can be acknowledged.

Posting – what do you post

Photos – some issues to consider. Copyright - is the photo still in Copyright? If so, who owns it? Do you watermark your photos? Do you post from other sources such as the State Library of Victoria or Museums Victoria - if so, you should acknowledge the source. I have seen Historical Societies post photos from other organizations with no acknowledgement whatsoever - that is wrong. You also need to decide if you share posts from other groups.

Subject matter of the Facebook site - agree to this and post it on your Facebook page either in the 'Our story' section the 'About' section or as a 'pinned' post at the top of your time-line. This is an example from the Casey Cardinia Heritage page - *This page is to promote the history of the City of Casey and the Shire of Cardinia region, in the south east of Melbourne. It essentially covers the history of the old Shire of Berwick and the old Shire of Cranbourne. It will promote events of an historical nature and showcase some of the photos belong to the various Local History and Heritage groups in the Region, who are part of the Local History Reference Group, auspiced by the Casey Cardinia Libraries.*

The Gippsland History Facebook Group has this very comprehensive description of their purpose. It is 'pinned' to the top of the page. OK, people may not be bothered reading it, but as it is there it makes it easy for the Administrators to delete posts or comments which are off-topic or offensive.

WELCOME to all New Members.

Please take a minute to read this post. Long term members may also wish to occasionally review it as well.

We are a group of people passionate about the history of Gippsland. We post photos, discuss topics and research many and varied things - all relating somehow to Gippsland. But particularly its history, built heritage and places where we can find more information. We have a lot of information in the files for this group, especially about places.

We appreciate that people love this group and want to immediately join a heap of their friends when they discover us. Please restrict these to two or three people, as more can cause a lot of work for already busy admins. We do it, but then often people do not take up the invitation. If you want more to join you, consider posting about the group on your timeline.

We operate in a culture of respect for the work of others, and acknowledge that, and other sources where at all possible.

We do not host discussion of objects, be they bottles, tools or other items, and would prefer you took them to more appropriate pages. We have a "sister-page" Gippsland Genealogy Noticeboard for detailed family tree enquiries and listings.

We support and encourage people to share the photos and other information posted here. However, as a research group we like to see them shared publicly, not as friends only. This allows those who have posted them to see where they have been shared to and follow them for any comments. This may provide them with valuable information.

It also allows your friends to share them in turn - we think Gippsland history should be spread far and wide.

We have long-held a policy that it is a condition of membership of the group that people do not share photos to closed groups, as researchers cannot follow them. There is an exception for small closed family groups.

Finally - we routinely remove large gifs, as they do not add to serious, ongoing conversation. Please post only in plain text - large, colourful posts with multiple balloons and the like often do not last long either - please use the content to catch attention, rather than the format.

Thank you - Please join us in learning more about our history.

One more thing about posting - should you post about planning decisions that have been made by your local council? There is clearly a role for Historical Societies to play in advocating for the preservation of heritage buildings, sites, trees and streetscapes. However, as we said before, do you want to get involved in an on-line battle with the local Council? You need to make that decision.

Posting – how often do you post

Too infrequently you run the risk of dropping off the radar; too frequently, people may get sick of you. More than once a day is, I believe, too frequent.

Comments and messages

Who will respond to comments and messages? What do you do with comments with swearing in them, comments about the government or current issues? You can hide comments so only the person who posted it and their friends can see it. I sometimes do that, if it has bad swearing (the F-word) but it really is a case by case thing. Racist comments and those that target individuals or groups in society in a nasty or insulting way should be deleted straight away.

Trolls - a troll is some-one who posts something controversial on Facebook to get a response usually angry from other users or some-one who deliberately starts an argument. If they are being controversial or off-topic or insulting just for the sake of it, then delete the comments. However, just because you don't agree with the comment doesn't mean they are a troll, and the term is used by some people just to shut down legitimate debate, you need to decide that on a case by case basis. It's your Facebook page, you are not obliged to allow others to hi-jack your page for their own purposes.

The other thing about comments is that if you are supported by your local council, then I feel you need to be careful with comments that disparage the Council, Council staff or Council Officers. If people are unhappy with a general Council decision or their local Councillor, then there are other forums they can use to communicate their displeasure, they don't need to use your Facebook page.

You will also get messages in your Facebook inbox asking for information – I had one the other day – “I am writing a history book on (name of town deleted) and I am seeking new things not covered in the old book, so anything helpful” Not asking much at all, really! As you know, there will always be people who want you to do their work for them and some people do not seem to realise how much work answering their question will take. However, you need to respond to them in some way - so you might decide to do this once a week or whatever. You can set up an autoreply on Facebook that flicks them back a generic message ‘Thanks for your message. We're away and can't respond at this time. We appreciate you getting in touch’ so that gives you time to form a response. Your response could also be to direct them to your website which has information about your research fees and/or procedures or to ask them to email your research officer, if you prefer to communicate by email and not on Facebook.

Social Media Policies

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc can be covered by a Social Media Policy, and everything we have talked about here could be included in it. Here are some examples that you could use to get ideas for your own Social Media policy.

- Nepean Historical Society <https://nepeanhistoricalsociety.asn.au/about-us/our-purpose/>
- Port Macquarie Historical Society <http://www.port-macquarie-historical-museum.org.au/policies.php>
- Society for Military History <http://www.smh-hq.org/policies/socialmedia.html>
- Royal Historical Society, London <https://royalhistsoc.org/home/social-media-and-take-down-policies/>