…NETWORK SOCIALLY (9)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are the software applications and websites that allow users to create, share, and communicate about personal content within a network or community of other common users.

Utilizing social media for networking can help your experiential education (EE) program to spread the word about events or opportunities, connect members or clients, create a "buzz" of interest around your initiatives, and provide an online space for meaningful conversations.

Through social media, programs have the ability to create an online community that is informed and engaged with your EE activities. Media can also be used as fun spaces to show behind-the-scenes adventures. Many tools are available to network depending on your needs and goals.

EXAMPLES

During a trip, clients and leaders can use social media to share real-time moments. By using creative writing and photojournalism, they may:

1. share experiences (Facebook, LinkedIn);
2. post messages (Twitter, Snapchat, Tumblr);
3. upload videos (TikTok, YouTube, Vimeo);
4. save images (Flickr, Instagram, G-Photos);
5. access information (Pinterest, Google); and
6. identify by crowdsourcing (iNaturalist Seek).

Clients can conduct interviews, document key historical events, maintain trip journals, edit movies, create slideshows, and more. Not only do these become educational endeavors, but the results can also inform friends and family at home. This also brings these additional people into the EE program community as prospective clients and provides sources of photographs and testimonials for future marketing.

CONSIDERATIONS

Like most EE programs, social media comes with obvious risks. Before you get started, be certain to set clear expectations and prepare with a comprehensive plan. Consider these points.

1. **Have a strategy and consider your goals**. Who is your audience? Why are you using this platform to connect with them? What will you share? How often? Who is in charge of sharing?
2. **Designate important roles**. Who is primarily responsible for the platform? Who will routinely check and monitor the community page and for any issues arising?
3. **Set guidelines**. Make a communications plan for any potential crises or issues that could arise. Publicly state expectations, policies, and procedures for the community.
4. **Post regularly and consistently**. If you have multiple staff contributing to the social media account, create a brand guide or tone for them to ensure a constant voice.
5. **Understand your capacity**. As your social media platforms progress and grow, you may find that utilizing automation and planning tools can be helpful to each.

REPUTATION

Remember that social media use will have an impact on the reputation of your organization, so be sure to follow the guidelines you set and inform all staff of how best to post content. When created with clarity and intentionality, social media can provide an extremely valuable space for networking and connecting people.

Anna Miano & Simon Priest

aee.org