Using social media in early education and care

Why use social media?
Families talk to each other. Twenty years ago they talked to each other at the school gates, at community events or catching up at coffee shops. Now, they talk on social media. While previously the opinion of one parent could influence only their closest friends and relatives, now possibly thousands of other parents are listening to what they say.

Don’t believe us – here are some statistics
- Just under 70% of Australian internet users have a social media profile
- 90% of Australians under 30 use social networking
- 52% of social media users use it more than 5 times a day
- Parents, particularly mothers are choosing to connect with each other in social media mothers groups. It’s not uncommon for an Australian mothers group to have over 10,000 active contributors.

Still not convinced? Here are some very good reasons you should use social media
- Gain brand recognition
- Grow loyalty to your centre
- Listen to what others are saying about you
- Connect with your community of families
- Connect with potential staff
- Counter any negative talk
- Become a leader in the sector
- Keep an eye on your competitors.

Making the most of social media
Start with who you are
What is your philosophy? What are your strengths? What do you specialise in? Who are your influencers? What are your values? No one can be everything to everyone. The ‘thing’ that you choose to be – your educational focus and the way you choose to deliver a quality service to families is your brand. Social media gives you an opportunity to develop a unique voice and focus on what sets you apart. Once you’ve defined who you are, you will be able to evaluate every opportunity to post on social media according to whether it supports your vision, philosophy and brand.

Consider your key communities…
Being specific about who you’re targeting will help you decide which social media platform to focus on and what you want to say when you get there.

…and what you want to say to those communities
In social media, content is king (and queen), but not just any content. Content you post needs to be not only consistent with your centre’s philosophy but also
- relevant
- valuable
- timely – to your audience.
Good content has the power to make a person stop…read…think…behave…differently. Good content keeps paying off, and one good, relevant and timely blog post, photo or piece of video footage can be posted across a number of social media platforms. Content doesn’t have to be words, you can effectively tell your story through video and photography, and often, social media sites are set up to preference photographs and video.

Choose your social media platform
These are some of the largest social media platforms and what they are typically used for.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Australian social media users on this platform</th>
<th>Number of Australian users (May 2015)</th>
<th>Used for</th>
<th>Typical audiences</th>
<th>Use it to…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>14m</td>
<td>Networking with family, friends and those with similar interests</td>
<td>Wide range – females are typically heavier users than males. Females 25 - 54 are the heaviest users</td>
<td>Engage with families Create ‘private’ groups making it easy to connect with families more privately Sharing photos and video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12.8m</td>
<td>‘Microblogging’. Short posts of 140 characters. Great for connection with journalists, political leaders or senior influencers</td>
<td>37 year old female</td>
<td>Engage with media, political leaders and sector and social influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked In</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>3.5m</td>
<td>Career networking, your online CV, your company’s ‘go to’ place for job applicants</td>
<td>Typically older, career oriented</td>
<td>Profile your business to prospective employees Build your own professional online CV Let the world know why they should work with you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>340k</td>
<td>Sharing and discovering ideas. Pinterest users are most likely to be moved to purchase</td>
<td>Typically female – 17% of female social media users are on Pinterest</td>
<td>Share innovative ideas in your centre Create posts that can be shared on other social media like Facebook and Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>5m</td>
<td></td>
<td>Typically young adults with almost 40% of users under 19</td>
<td>Share pictures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Research what others are doing
Check the websites of your competitors and sector leaders. Do they have social media links? What are they posting? How successful do they appear to be? Also check some industry leaders and critically evaluate their social media presence. What are they doing? How successfully are they doing it? What type of content are they posting?

Build a content strategy
Use the information you have gained from the steps above to build your social media plan. Include in your plan:
• Your philosophy, values and goals.
• Your chosen platform and rationale?
• Who will post?
• How will they get content?
• How often they will post?
• The restrictions on what they can post?
• Some ‘stand by’ posts to use in quieter weeks (quotes from your favourite educational influencer or inspirational quotes might work well here).
• Contingencies for a ‘backup’ person who can post if you’re away.
• List any special events or activities scheduled in the next 6-12 months and plan how you are going to cover those.
• Set some rules around posting pictures of children.
• Use of social media in an emergency or critical incident.
• Check your website, is there content on your site that your key communities would find interesting and useful?
Remember content can be words, photos, sound, video.

Make sure you have a social media policy
A social media policy will outline acceptable and unacceptable online behaviour for your staff. There are many online templates you can follow. Make sure your policy covers:
• Who is specifically permitted to post online on behalf of your business?
• Staff use of social media in business hours.
• Bullying and harassment policy.
• Protecting confidential and proprietary information.
• Guidelines for your expectations from your staff.
• Privacy and child safety concerns (particularly sharing photos of children).
• The need for specific written authority from parents and carers to post photos of children and from staff to post photos of them.
• An educational component on internet safety encouraging staff to ‘think before they post’.

Give up total control
Social media is like a big, online, public conversation. Like any conversation you can take part in it, but you can never totally control it. Let’s face it, you never had control over what people were saying about you anyway, but a social media presence will give you the opportunity to listen and respond to what people are saying about you.

Go forth and post
But make sure your posts are
• relevant
• valuable
• timely
to your communities.

Promote yourself
The more people who know about you and follow you, the more people you influence. Be innovative about generating friends and followers.
• Ask your families to follow and like you through posters around your centre.
• Include social media links in your email footer.
• Ask your parents to recommend that their family and friends like or follow you.
• Take the time to question parents about their social media use.
• Post in the kind of groups you know your target audiences hang out (but do it respectfully, making sure you abide by any group rules).
• Use your expertise to interact usefully with groups.

Never stop learning
Social media like Twitter and Facebook have some useful tools to help you to evaluate your social media influence. Make sure you use them to ensure you are using your social media presence to meet your goals.

Legal and safety considerations
When you use social media you are bound by rules and laws such as those governing discrimination, misleading conduct, copyright, privacy and defamation. Keep your reputation safe by making sure that your social media accounts are secured by a safe password.

References and useful links
Guide to social media for schools
Sample social media policies http://blog.hirerabbit.com/5-terrific-examples-of-company-social-media-policies/

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