

Social Media Guide

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Introduction

Social media can build awareness of PlanRVA and its initiatives directly with the community. It is a great digital tool to help you meet people living and working in the Richmond Region where they are already spending time online.

Social media is intended to be social and accounts should not simply be used as virtual bulletin board. The following guide offers best practices for developing PlanRVA's social media strategy for community engagement and for planning out content to fit this strategy. It is not intended to be all-encompassing, but to offer a framework that can be used and adjusted over time.

Social media platforms are constantly evolving and the PlanRVA staff responsible for planning, posting, and moderating PlanRVA's social media content should make it a priority to keep up with changes and adapt their social media strategy as necessary.

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Social Media Best Practices

1. Use G.A.P. as your overarching social media strategy.

Goal. You need a specific, relevant, and measurable goal in mind for each of PlanRVA's social media accounts. Defining your goal from the start ensures every piece of content helps work toward that goal.

Audience. You need to know before you post who your target audience is. While there may be some overlap, your audience will likely be slightly different for each social media platform.

Plan for Engagement. The best way to meet your goals and to make sure you are reaching your target audience is to plan ahead. This means planning out what types of content you want to post, planning for consistent posting, and preparing responses to comments.

The G.A.P. strategy offers a loose framework that will help keep all PlanRVA's social media efforts focused on productive community engagement.

2. Make your content accessible. (Learn more in [Section 6](#))

Accessibility on social media is a small but important part of a larger objective: making digital communications truly inclusive, ensuring that everyone is included in the conversation and feels represented. Not only does implementing accessibility best practices fall in line with PlanRVA's values, but it also just makes sense. By making your social media content and the way you deliver it more accessible, you can avoid excluding a sizeable portion of your audience in the Richmond Region.

3. Post consistently and ensure post content is written and designed to be specific to each platform. (Learn more in [Section 5](#))

You never want your social channels to be silent or lay dormant for any extended amount of time. Utilize a scheduler to make sure planned content is posted.

In general, don't post the same thing on all platforms on the same day. If you absolutely need to do this, make sure that the timing of these posts is different. Some of your audience is going to overlap across platforms, showing the same content just gives them a reason to stop following you on one or multiple channels. Each platform also has a different algorithm and what works well on one platform may not play well on another. Make sure you are tweaking your content to fit the specs of each platform and to serve the correct target audience.

Facebook Tips

- Post once daily
- Use images and videos to draw attention to each post
- Tag others where possible to reach a larger audience and build credibility
- Facebook is the most community driven of PlanRVA's platforms

Twitter Tips

- Post 1-3x daily
- Keeping the 280-character limit in mind, write the tweet to grab attention and use a free URL shortener to point to a website
- Twitter polls offer followers the opportunity to participate
- Retweet with comment allows PlanRVA to add commentary while resharing tweet

LinkedIn

- Post 3x per week
- Mondays and Wednesdays are usually higher activity days
- Post about real problems people are facing and ask others to weigh in by posting questions or polls or utilizing the poll function
- LinkedIn is often considered an effective recruitment tool. Post about job opportunities or local professional development opportunities

4. Respond to those who engage with you. (Learn more in [Section 4](#))

Engaging with the community is key to good social media management and building a relationship. Individuals have come to rely on social media as another avenue to communicate directly with organizations, and being responsive is important to gaining trust, identifying issues early, and correcting misinformation.

5. Track your data and use it to make informed decisions.

Social platforms have built-in analytics that allow you to measure the level of engagement with each post. Learn from your most successful posts by identifying which posts have performed the best. See what is working and what isn't for each audience on each platform and be willing to adapt. As you track your data, you may notice a spike in activity. If a post is garnering attention naturally, boosting the post through a paid advertisement might help further the post's reach.

Defining PlanRVA's Social Media Voice

A consistent and distinctive brand voice will build PlanRVA's credibility online. People often want to feel a connection on social media, not just passively receive information. PlanRVA's voice plays a big role in that.

Our target audiences should understand the authentic personality PlanRVA has as a brand through its voice and style. We define PlanRVA's social media voice by asking, "If the PlanRVA brand was a person, what would they sound like? How would they like to be perceived by the Richmond Region?"

The PlanRVA brand voice is:

- Engaging and Accessible
- Educational and Civic-Minded
- Innovative and Forward-Thinking

Engaging and Accessible

PlanRVA is community-driven and being engaging and accessible online helps paint that picture. On PlanRVA's social media accounts, we can help do this by avoiding technical jargon, following accessibility best practices, and using people-first language as much as possible.

Educational and Civic-Minded

Educating community members in the Richmond Region will help facilitate more informed and productive conversations. On PlanRVA's social media accounts, we can help do this by offering information in plain language, providing links to more information, and clearly outlining processes and next steps in a way that is relatable to the general public.

Innovative and Forward-Thinking

PlanRVA seeks to thoughtfully and creatively incorporate community voices into plans for the Richmond Region's future. On PlanRVA's social media accounts, we can help do this by ensuring our word choice and voice are inclusive of all members of the community.

Developing a brand voice is not a one-time effort. Language evolves and without a consistent check in on your voice, you can risk sounding out of date or out of touch. PlanRVA should undertake a review of brand voice once a year.

Rules of Engagement

Well-defined rules of engagement are essential for a consistently effective social media program. They help provide a consistent presence and level of service from PlanRVA's accounts and offer protection from reputational harm.

The rules of engagement are not policies related to the individual use of social media by employees. These are guidelines and policies that establish expectations and procedures for official PlanRVA social media accounts.

Comments on PlanRVA's Posts

Comments are crucial. They're important in a community-building, conversation-having sense, but also important in an engagement and algorithm-friendly sense. Providing a place for authentic, productive conversation will build PlanRVA's audience and trust with the community.

PlanRVA's posts should encourage community members in the Richmond Region to respond and to post their own thoughts as comments.

Deleting Comments

Comments can/should be deleted if they include hate speech or personal attacks. Do not delete comments if they are simply someone sharing a different opinion, are negative in nature or are just pointing out something you don't like. Over-censoring comments prevents your audience from seeing your account as an authentic, transparent community to engage in.

On Facebook, PlanRVA hides comments that violate their policies instead of deleting comments. On LinkedIn, comments will be deleted. There is no mechanism for hiding or deleting responses on Twitter. If a thread has been overtaken by comments that violate its policies, PlanRVA reserves the right to delete the full thread.

Responding to Comments

Comments should be responded to if:

1. There is a sincere question being asked by someone who might be open to a productive conversation.
2. There is a point being made that provides for a natural, conversational response.
3. There is misinformation that needs to be corrected.
4. There is a positive point being made that you want to draw more attention to and make more visible to others.
5. There is a negative point being made that you feel needs a response to send a signal to the entirety of your audience.

Comments don't need to/should not be responded to if:

1. The commenter is obviously trolling or trying to bait the account into a response.
2. The commenter has ties to groups or organizations that can be especially problematic.
3. There is nothing foreseeably productive to come from starting a conversation with the commenter.
4. You don't want to draw unneeded attention to the comment.
5. You aren't willing or prepared to face additional negative comments that might come in response to your response.
6. You're not confident that your response is truthful, respectful, and in-line with PlanRVA policy and procedure.

If you do decide to respond, you should:

- Respond in a timely fashion.
- Respond in a tone that positively reflects PlanRVA's values.
- Direct commenters to the most relevant portions of PlanRVA.org where possible.
- Respond on the same platform the original comment was posted on.
- If after two responses, the commenter continues, give the commenter an option to engage privately. Expect anything, private or public, to be shared.

As a public entity, it is crucial that PlanRVA is transparent about these rules of engagement. A statement explaining PlanRVA's stance should be posted on the PlanRVA website and linked on each social media platform so community members can access it easily. A public statement also offers a place to direct community members who have questions about the policy or about removed comments.

Sample statement:

We encourage public interaction and communication about the content we post on our social media accounts and want to hear your questions, comments, criticisms and concerns. However, this does not imply that PlanRVA agrees with or accepts the content, opinions, or views expressed within any public comment. The person who posts a comment is solely responsible for the content of the comment.

While we do not discriminate against views or opinions posted to our social networking accounts, we reserve the right to remove any comment. A comment will not be edited or modified to remove unacceptable content; the entire comment will simply be deleted.

Some of the reasons we may remove a comment include:

- Abusive, vulgar, obscene, racist, threatening, or harassing comments
- Libel, slander, or personal attacks of any kind, including the use of offensive terms that target specific individuals or groups
- Spam content, including content that promotes products or services or contains gratuitous links
- Makes unsupported accusations
- Comments that suggest or encourage illegal, dangerous, or destructive activity
- Clearly off topic
- Political campaigning or lobbying

Moderating and responding to comments should only be expected to occur during PlanRVA's normal business hours.

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Content Ideas

You need to have a strong presence on social media, not just a presence. PlanRVA's posts are competing to stand out in a crowded timeline.

How to Vary Up Content

- Post a blend of call to action, news, human interest, partner posts, and events
- Utilize a mix of text, images, videos, and graphics
- Tie into relevant trending news and local events
- Tag partners or community members
- Post images of your work in action
- Showcase local successes and promote upcoming events

Content Framework

Topic	Examples	Percent of Content
Direct Call to Action	Public comment period, survey, Committee applications	20%
Announcements and News	New data sets/plans, new Board/Committee members, news articles	10%
Human Interest	Staff profiles, content that shows impact of PlanRVA work	30%
Partner Posts	Relevant reshares from community partners and localities	25%
Events	Meetings, Webinars	15%

Sample Content Calendar

Once you have that framework in place, you can start building out a monthly calendar to ensure you hit those marks and to see the story you are telling on social media visually.

The Sample Content Calendar is included as an Excel template and offers both a monthly overview and more detailed weekly planning.

While planning content is key for consistent posting, social media is dynamic and requires flexibility. Posts should never be scheduled on a platform more than a week in advance and close attention must be paid to scheduled posts to ensure they do not go online if the landscape has changed.

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Accessibility Checklist

Accessible social media posts make a big impact on the user experience for people with visual and auditory disabilities and those who use screen readers. Use this checklist to double-check your content. You should be able to answer “Yes” to all of the items below before posting.

Hashtags

- Are you using hashtags in moderation?
- Are multi-word hashtags in Camel Case?
- Are the hashtags at the end of the post?

Images

- Do all images, including GIFs, have alt-text?
- If an image has flat text, is there alt-text?
- If an image has too much flat text for alt-text limitations, is there a link to read the full copy?

Videos

- If a video has audio, is closed captioning included?
- If a video does not have audio, have you provided a written description of the video?
- Are there flashing lights in the video? If so, is it possible to remove them? If not, consider a light sensitivity warning.
- Does your live video offer live captioning and/or an on-camera interpreter?

Characters, Symbols, and Emojis

- Have you removed/avoided any special Unicode characters to make type appear in different styles or fonts?
- Have you removed/avoided using ASCII Art?

- Are you using emojis in moderation?
 - Have you removed/avoided using emojis as bullet points?
 - Have you avoided interrupting written text with emojis?
 - Unless a skin tone is necessary for context, are emojis in the default yellow?
 - Have you double-checked the descriptions of your emojis on emojipedia.org?
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Thinking Beyond Traditional Platforms

When we think of social media, it is tempting to only think of the big platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, but social media really refers to any corner of the internet where Richmond Region community members are in conversation.

[Richmond Forum](#) is one platform with more than 200,000 members that has a strong presence of local Richmond users and may be a forum that PlanRVA should monitor and then potentially invest time in participating.

Facebook Groups like [Richmond VA Things to Do](#) and [Richmond Events and Happenings](#) could also provide another avenue for participation as the PlanRVA Facebook page.

Social media is constantly evolving, and new tools are always coming on the scene. Investing in creating a presence on a particular platform takes time and resources so PlanRVA should ask the following questions to help evaluate whether adding a new platform is worth the investment:

- Is this platform used by our target audience?
 - What do we hope to achieve by using it?
 - How would we define success from the use of this platform?
 - How much time do we have to invest in building this from the ground up?
 - Can we commit to having a consistent presence on a new platform?
 - Would this be used in place of an existing platform?
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Additional Online Resources

Alt-Text

- [How to add alt-text on Facebook](#)
- [How to add alt-text on LinkedIn](#)
- [How to add alt-text on Twitter](#)

Free Tools for Creative Content Creation

- [Remove](#) – Remove the background from any image
- [Promo Photo Resizer](#) – Easily adjust image size to meet the ever-changing platform standards
- [Lumen5](#) – Turn website text into easy videos
- [Headliner](#) – Turn audio into a video for social media
- [Bitly](#) – Popular URL shortener tool

Staying Up to Date on Social Media News and Shifts

- Facebook Groups – [Social Media Masterminds](#), [Social Media Geekout](#), [Social Media Strategist](#), [Accessible Social](#)
- [SWAN of the Week newsletter](#)
- [Social Media Today](#)