



# Social Media Handbook

## Town of Castle Rock

**Community Relations is in the process of updating this handbook to include newly launched Nextdoor and 2018 Social Media best practices.**



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## INTRODUCTION

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Now more than ever, people are constantly connecting. They are using new technology to stay in touch with family and friends. They share vacation photos, announce new jobs and watch crazy cat videos on Facebook. They laugh at jokes and get up-to-the minute news on Twitter.

They also ask questions and share opinions on a variety of public policy issues. They are talking about their nation, their state and their local governments. They are talking about Castle Rock.

At our core, the Town of Castle Rock is about customer service and transparency. That's why we are an active part of the conversation.

Castle Rock was one of the first municipalities in Douglas County to engage social media. And why wouldn't we be? Our values outline clear communication and transparent government. We are customer-service oriented.

The first platforms to launch were Facebook and Twitter in 2008. Since then, these platforms have been wildly successful. The Town has more than 13,400 followers on Facebook, more than 7,000 followers on Twitter, more than 1,000 followers on Instagram and more than 600 connections on LinkedIn – all significantly higher than industry standard for government social media connections.

As new technologies come online, it is important to adjust communications strategy to meet new demands and to update policies and procedures to account for new industry best practices.

This Castle Rock Social Media Handbook is more than a set of policies outlining what NOT to do on social media platforms. It is a guidebook. It defines how social media is part of the Town's overall integrated communication strategy and how social media is used to provide accurate and timely information in emergency situations.

A related piece to this handbook adjusts annually. It is the Town's social media plan, which defines how we promote Town programs in a strategic and data-driven way to reach Townwide goals and objectives.

*Now let's **connect.***

## SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINITIONS

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While on the forefront of social technology, the Town has been strategic in its approach to using the new media. Here is a look at the social platforms the Town currently uses:

### Facebook

One of the first and most well-known social media sites, Facebook began as a connecting tool limited to college students. Now – more than a decade after its initial launch – it's the most widely used social platform.

Users create an account and select “friends” or companies/celebrities/governments to follow. The platform is a way to share photos, videos, thoughts, news and other links.

In direct opposition to the “Bowling Alone” Internet theories, Facebook (and other social sites for that matter) have created online communities where people share ideas, discuss issues and connect with friends and family.

For governments, Facebook is a unique opportunity to meet our residents and business owners where they are. Since the Town launched its site in 2008, it has been used to share news, event information, road closures, and event photos and to answer questions from our customers directly.

As of May 2017, the Town had more than 13,400 people following the page. This number continues to grow, and the Town will continue to leverage this tool as a two-way communication technique.

## Twitter

The saying goes, “a little blue bird told me.”

Enter Twitter and its bluebird logo and tweets.

With this platform, less is more. Tweets are limited to 140 characters, so posts are short and pointed. There’s no room for fluff, nor feathers. Jokes and quips welcome.

Each user creates a handle and chooses people/entities to “follow.” @CRgov launched 2008. Now, there are more than 7,000 followers.

But I need more characters!? Links are king, but should be short. See more info on CRgov.com.

Unlike Facebook, Twitter has an exceptionally strong press following. So in emergency situations, Twitter replaces the release.

Talking about something in particular? Use a hashtag (#). Then search the #hashtag to see what others are #saying. (#Justsayin.)

If someone else says it better, #retweet them. Want to create the conversation? Create the #hashtag (then multiplatform market it).

Talking to others doesn’t require email nor phone. Tag them by typing in their handle. @DCSheriff. @FoxNews.

More than you think can be said in 140 characters. It’s another way to get out the message. And that’s what #transparency is all about.

#Yes,WeJustDefinedTwitterWithASeriesOfTweets.



## LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social place for professionals. The focus is careers, connecting with others on a professional level and keeping up with industry news.

Founded in 2003, there are now more than 300 million members worldwide, including executives from every Fortune 500 company. The Town has more than 600 followers.



## Instagram

Instagram is one of the fastest-growing social media platforms. In December 2014, Citigroup was estimating the app to be worth more than \$35 billion. Forbes magazine announced Instagram now houses a bigger audience than Twitter, at more than 300 million monthly active users.

Generally, this rapidly expanding audience consists of younger participants. The Town joined Instagram in 2014 and now has more than 1,000 followers.

# Social Media General Guidelines

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Social media is a conversation. Social platforms are built to be informal, yet informative.

This set of guidelines is meant to be a resource for the Town's Community Relations Division as it implements a social media strategy. This document is a compilation of best practices and a little bit of trial and error. Social media will continue to evolve and change. This set of guidelines will also grow and change as we continue to streamline an already strong toolbox.

We'll start with general guidelines that apply to all social platforms and then move to specifics for the platforms the Town currently uses.

## Voice, tone and personality (lots of personality)

As writing coach Roy Peter Clark states, voice is "an effect created by the writer that reaches the reader through his ears, even when he is receiving the message through his eyes."

Voice is one of the most important elements of writing. It is defined by word choice, tone and punctuation. When it comes to government social media, our voice should be casual and conversational, yet knowledgeable. We should avoid jargon and acronyms. We are the helpful neighbor, who's in-tune and unbiased. We emulate the Town's values: excellence, dedication and service.

These conversations are from we (your local government) to you (our resident and business owner). We're objective, except when it comes to the hard work of our employees and the value we place on our community. We relate when things are frustrating, and we are serious when news is grim. We show empathy. We show humor. But most importantly, we pay attention to our audience.

## Audience

As Castle Rock grows and changes, our social media audiences will evolve. It's important to keep up with trends, sentiments and shared values expressed by residents and business owners who follow us on social media.

Annually, Community Relations should formally research and summarize its audiences on each social media platform and draft the annual plan according to that research. Monthly, the division will keep tabs on its audience, particularly noting the time of day the audience is most active on each social site.

## Content

Best practices indicate content should be fairly short, engaging and friendly. It should be useful, relevant and interesting. We'll ask, "what would we gain from reading this?" and "what is the call to action?"

Visuals are key, and appropriate photos and videos should be used when possible. However, we will not include a photo or video for the sake of having a visual. Photos and videos will be engaging and relevant to the written content.

We will include links when there is more information to share (mostly from CRgov.com), but not just for the sake of it.

## In case of emergency

Crisis communication situations move quickly. So does social media. In the case of an emergency situation in which media is interested and possibly on scene, social media should be the go-to platform.

Most research in 2013 indicates that members of the media are more often relying on social media for information over the traditional news release, because information is distributed more closely to the time it is available.

The FEMA introductory PIO class suggests sending an initial news release with as much information as is available and releasable, along with a hashtag for the incident. All other updates would be sent on social media with the established hashtag. We should heed this advice, but wrap up the event with a summarizing news release. For crisis communication incidents, we should use Facebook and Twitter.

For clarity, we know evacuation notices and other life-saving communication will primarily occur through police and fire platforms, such as CodeRED. Social media will be used for broad updates, including evacuations and other important information, but should not be considered a go-to place for life-saving information.



## Measurement

Monitoring impact and engagement is vital to the success of our social platforms. Because these platforms are constantly changing, it is important to keep an eye on engagement statistics and adjust accordingly. It's also important to experiment with different types of content and monitor how that content is received.

General social site statistics should be included in the Deputy Town Manager Office's monthly report. What was our average Facebook reach? How many followers do we have on our sites? Was there a post that was a particular hit in terms of engagement?

Finally, an annual audit of the social sites should be done in late-December to plan for the following year.

## Frequency

Social media is a conversation, and no one likes a person (or entity) who talks too much. Yet, there's a need to keep the conversation going. So how much is too much?

Generally, research shows there are more posts per day on Twitter than Facebook.

For Facebook, the average number of posts for top brands (such as iTunes, Disney and Starbucks) is one post per day, according to Socialbakers, a global social media analytics company. A 2011 social media study by the same company found the sweet spot for Facebook posts is five to 10 posts per week. The Town should post no more than 15 times per week, notwithstanding emergency situations.

Twitter is different. Socialbakers indicates three Tweets per day reaps optimum engagement. The Town should Tweet no more than three times per day, notwithstanding emergency situations.

Research helps guide best practices, but the main themes should still be audience and purpose.

What matters most is what engages our fans. Ongoing audience research and analysis will help us define these general guidelines.

## The Particulars: Facebook

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In general, we post only about Town news, events and initiatives, or in case of an emergency. Some exceptions for what the Town posts will be made for sponsors of events on a per-case basis and approved by the Community Relations Manager.

We'll also market our Facebook page as a Town forum. It's open to the public and should be used as a community resource.

We are open regular business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays). Only emergency posts and responses, along with some event posts, will occur after hours. For this reason, we almost never schedule posts.

### Anatomy of a post

First and foremost, our posts are about our audience. That's why we research and report on them on an annual basis. While there are best practices, our annual analytics will be our guide as we plan and then post on Facebook.

Generally, think about how we talk to our friends. It's casual, conversational and fun. But we also often want our friends to realize we know what we're talking about. Posting on Facebook is much the same.

Research shows successful posts are short, engaging, active and include a photo or video. We always post news releases with a link and a photo (when possible). Share the most grabbing piece of the release (likely the lead and nut graph) and a link with "read more in our news release..." Do not repost the headline, as Facebook does not allow us to use bold font.

In addition, posts should be mobile-friendly, because 189 million Facebook users only access the site on a mobile device. A total of 751 million users access the site on their mobile devices at some point. So, we'll keep it short.

When appropriate, posts should include a "call to action" asking followers to share, post a comment or like. Posts with high engagement include photos, tips, fill-in-the-blank opportunities, photo caption requests, questions and quotes. Remember to use trends wisely but also have fun and experiment.

## When we respond

We respond to general questions we have the authority and accurate information to answer. We include a link to more information or additional contact information when applicable. Remember, this is a conversation, and we should be relatable yet perceived as the go-to expert on anything related to the Town of Castle Rock. It's worth noting for internal purposes that Community Relations will research the answer with other departments and post on behalf of the Town. Other employees may not post on behalf of the Town. We also answer our posts to other pages.

## The value of visuals

Posts with photos have a higher rate of likes, shares and comments. Use a photo when possible, but make sure it is a good quality photo that won't take longer than an act of Congress to load. (Think Web-ready.)

Photo albums should be posted for Town-sponsored events and include between 12 and 15 photos. We will not guarantee a photo album for all events, and we lean on our departments to help provide photos. We'll ask people to tag themselves and summarize the event in the comments. Tag related entities that partnered on the event, such as the Chamber of Commerce for Starlighting. We will also add captions to photos. We credit photographers who request to be credited. We will not credit our division.

## When to use a note

Notes are like blogs. While still fairly short, they can be used in place of a status update for a topic that requires more information. Using a note means users do not have to link to a Web page for more information, though some links may be included as an option. Include a visual when possible.

## When to use video

The Community Relations Division is still reviewing its capacity to utilize video in general. Guidelines will be developed for YouTube. In general, videos will be short and sweet, but have a positive impact.

## "Like" guidelines

"Liking" something on Facebook often shows agreement. The Town will "like" posts that positively highlight the Town's natural beauty (think cool photos of the Rock) or thank our personnel. Other posts may be "liked," but with discretion rooted in the Town's mission, vision and values.

## Number of posts per day

There is no strong and fast rule regarding when and how often to post. It is important to strike a balance and pay attention to our audience. Entities that post too often are “unfriended” for being annoying. Those that do not post enough are forgotten. We’ll monitor our audience and find that balance. In addition to posting news releases, the Town should post no more than 15 times per week. Social media is part of Community Relations’ blended marketing strategies, so refer to the annual social media plan and weekly social media calendar.

## Events

Facebook has added a new special events feature that allows users to informally RSVP to an event, ask questions and get updates. The Town will use this feature for Town events being run by a Town staff member.

## Emergency response

Facebook will be used to post news releases and other brief updates in an emergency. This emergency could be related to a fire or police incident, waterline break or road closure. Emergency information takes priority over other planned posts.

## Correcting misinformation

When information posted by someone in the public is incorrect, we’ll correct it by replying to the post, and link to more information when possible.

## Removing a post

First, refer to the Town’s Social Media Policy for information on what posts are not permitted and will be removed. A portion of that policy is outlined in the “about us” on Facebook:

“We generally only post 8a-5p Mon-Fri. We will remove profane, discriminatory, abusive, potentially malicious or personal attack items. We disclaim liability of external content. Looking for more information about the Town? Visit <http://CRgov.com/>”

Posts that are removed should be carefully archived and recorded on the Community Relations Division J Drive. Message the person to explain that his or her post was removed and why. Link to the policy stored on our Facebook page in the “about us” section.

## Paid advertising

Following a year of implementing these guidelines and best practices, we will evaluate unpaid engagement and further explore the possibility of paid advertising on Facebook.

## The Particulars: Twitter

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Much like Facebook, Twitter should be used to promote Town events, news and initiatives. It should also be used to communicate quickly in case of an emergency. Audience analytics are more difficult to come by on Twitter, so our guidelines are derived from general research of Twitter users.

### What to post

Research outlined in the October 2012 issue of PRSA's Tactics magazine indicates people will share information on Twitter for three reasons:

- They find it interesting or entertaining
- They think it will be helpful
- They laugh

Further research outlined in the same article indicates people will share (or "retweet") information found on Twitter with the following priorities:

- News (Shared 78 percent of the time)
- How-to information (58 percent)
- Entertainment (53 percent)
- Opinion (50 percent)
- Products (45 percent)
- Small talk (12 percent)

Based on this research, the priority for the Town's Twitter handle is news releases. We will always Tweet a news release at the same time it is posted to CRgov.com and Facebook. We'll shorten the link to leave more real estate for meaty teasers to the release.

When information is incorrect, we'll correct it by replying to the Tweet and link to more information when possible.

When there is a question, we'll reply truthfully and with links to more information if it is available.

## Frequency

Twitter moves much faster than Facebook, so multiple posts per day is what Twitter users expect. The Town should consider Twitter “events,” such as a Tweet-along with Castle Rock Police or Castle Rock Fire and Rescue.

## #Hashtags

Because the flow of information on Twitter is so rapid (5,700 Tweets per second on average), hashtags are used to categorize and group Tweets on the same topic. For example, #CastleRock.

Research shows “less is more” when it comes to using hashtags. On average, one-quarter of all Tweets include a hashtag, so they’re common but not necessary.

Tweets that include one or two hashtags have a higher rate of engagement than those without. On the other hand, those with more than two hashtags have a much lower engagement rate. The bottom line is that it is important to choose wisely.

We are the key source for Town news, and we want to share our information on topics. We’ll use Twitter to promote Town information and to be the go-to source for Town government news. Because hashtags link people to a variety of sources on a given topic, we can’t guarantee the accuracy of those posts and should not push followers to information we can’t ensure is accurate.

For these reasons, hashtags should only be used in the case of an emergency or a Town-sponsored event or initiative. In an emergency or during an event, a hashtag will help streamline a series of posts and categorize important information from the Town.

## Retweet

Use “retweets” in case of an emergency. Use it to share information from Douglas County if the County is handling a situation that impacts our residents and business owners.

Retweet, photos, videos, or articles that highlight the Town’s core priorities, small-town character or mission, vision and values.

## The Particulars: LinkedIn

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LinkedIn is a social place for professionals. The focus is careers, connecting with others on a professional level and keeping up with industry news. For this reason, we will use LinkedIn for three things: to post news releases, promote our publications and share job openings. We are open regular business hours (Mondays through Fridays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.).

### News releases

LinkedIn aggregates news from people it considers “influencers,” or other big news sources. We are the expert on Town of Castle Rock news, so we should share our news releases wherever we can.

LinkedIn status updates allow for 140 characters, just like Twitter. Therefore, we can share our news releases on LinkedIn just like we do on Twitter, with the headline and a shortened URL.

This social platform is much slower-moving than other sites, so we should post feature news releases here that showcase our core priority projects, Town character, etc. Examples include: Money magazine ranking and project process reports for core priority projects. Photos should be used as often as possible.

### Advertising publications

In addition to news releases, LinkedIn should be used to market our other publications, including Your Town Talk, Rec Guide, MAC Guide and Outlook magazine. This should be planned in conjunction with Facebook and Twitter outreach. LinkedIn should also be used to market our videos when YouTube has been ramped up again.

LinkedIn is in the process of rolling out long-form posts. Castle Rock does not yet have this option, because we haven't reached the required level of activity and followers.

### Job postings

This effort will be coordinated with Human Resources. When job postings are sent via email to Town staff, Community Relations will post the link with the new jobs and ask people to click the link for a list. Community Relations and HR can coordinate additional posts for jobs that are hard to fill or need extra/individual promotions.

HR will be responsible for answering questions from interested candidates on LinkedIn. In the same way Community Relations facilitates answers to questions on Facebook, Community Relations will facilitate Q and A on LinkedIn. Community Relations and Human Resources should work together to develop a jobs icon to use when new jobs are posted.



## The Particulars: Instagram

Community Relations plans to use the platform to communicate with residents regarding events, expert tips and other Town activities. The below guidelines are a starting point to launch the Town's Instagram account. Further research and evaluation will be used to refine these policies over time.

Instagram is reliant on pictures and short videos. Users post pictures then add captions or hashtags to group the photos together. Using photos as a primary communication tool will help the Town use other avenues to tell the Castle Rock story.

### Posting process

Posting photos will allow the Town to highlight employees and give a "face" to specific projects. It's easy to forget there are people behind the scenes planning the events residents enjoy, or crews working hard to resurface roads for commuters. Posting a picture will help remind residents there are people hard at work making Castle Rock a great place to live.

Town staff will be encouraged to take photos during their daily activities. Photos should be sent to Community Relations by text or email to be posted on the Town's Instagram profile. Staff photographers should also include a brief description for the post. Community Relations will evaluate the picture and edit the post as necessary.

Photos should include some sort of action, illustrate a key message for residents or demonstrate useful information. Photos of former employees, inappropriate material, or things that could be considered offensive will not be posted.

The primary goal will be to post photos on Instagram at least twice a week. That goal may be increased after an evaluation of the platform at the six-month mark. Current research has shown that, in regards to Instagram specifically, the quality of the photo is more important than the frequency of an organization's posts. While impromptu photos are usually best, the twice-a-week goal will allow posts to be planned in advance. Many pictures will require coordination between Community Relations and other departments. A schedule will be needed to ensure each department is represented appropriately throughout the Town's Instagram profile.

### Who can post photos?

Generally, the Community Relations team will be the only people with access to the Town's Instagram account. In the future, there may be an approved list of Town staff members who may get access to post on the Town's Instagram account directly. These will be staff members who are in the field and able to take pictures on a frequent basis, and will require approval by Community Relations, the Town Manager's Office and department directors.



## #Hashtags

Hashtags are very important with Instagram. They are used to compile information and photos. Hashtags are used as a sort of filing cabinet for pictures of specific topics. This gives a single photo more exposure than to just the people who are following the Town's page. Instagram users can search hashtags to find photos on a specific topic. This gives a post even greater reach.

Community Relations will evaluate the use of hashtags when necessary. To start, hashtags will be used for events, communication campaigns and emergency events. These hashtags will be created by Community Relations on a case-by-case basis and will coincide with key messages and other social media campaigns. Residents will also be encouraged to use the hashtags when posting photos of events to their own accounts.

## When to tag others in posts

Instagram allows for other users to be tagged in individual posts. Further research is necessary, but to start, official organizations, events or groups will be tagged when relevant. Individual users will generally not be tagged.

## Filters

The ability to add filters to photos is a unique feature of Instagram. More research will be required to determine how these filters may be applied to the Town's Instagram posts. Ultimately, Community Relations will determine if and when a filter is appropriate.

## When to use video

Instagram has the capability to post 15-second videos. The Town is exploring new avenues to use video. To start, only videos with a specific purpose will be posted. This will include video messages from staff and event highlights. Other cases will be reviewed individually. Videos will be edited and posted by the Community Relations team.

## Managing comments

Comments will be managed as they are on the Town's other social media platforms. If there is a question, we will try to answer it within 24 hours and during normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., excluding holidays). If the user is not posing a direct question, this platform will serve as an open forum for discussion.

Community Relations will remove profane, discriminatory, abusive, potentially malicious or personal attack items. We disclaim the liability of external content.

A decorative header featuring a light blue background with diagonal stripes. Various social media icons are scattered across the top, including YouTube, LinkedIn, RSS, Google+, Blogger, Digg, Twitter, Facebook, a group of people icon, WhatsApp, and a speech bubble icon.

## Conclusion

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As we seek to strategically connect with our customers, social media is a piece of the whole. These guidelines will grow and change with our audience and with our Town communications goals. ***Time to connect.***

