Neighbourhood Watch Queensland
Social Media Guidelines

Introduction

Purpose

These guidelines assist Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) members and relevant QPS members in the use of social media in the management of their local NHW (only) social media channels and in particular NHW blog sites\(^1\).

Audience

The document is primarily intended for NHW executive members responsible for the management of local areas and the dissemination of NHW related information, and police responsible for overseeing the implementation of NHW related online community engagement activities.

Background

Neighbourhood Watch has been operating in Queensland as a community safety and crime prevention program since 1988. It is a community based program and has played an integral role in the establishment of community partnerships, reducing crime and improving personal safety. These partnerships have worked across different tiers of government, the community and local business, with a common goal of preventing crime and improving community safety.

In April 2012, the Government released its ‘Getting Queensland Back on Track – Statement of Objectives for the Community’ and committed significant funding to Neighbourhood Watch Queensland (NHWQ) and Crime Stoppers Queensland Limited (CSQL) to inject new life and new direction into community policing.

The Government set specific priorities to deliver on its commitment to reinvigorate Neighbourhood Watch. They include:

1) Increasing the number of NHWQ groups
2) Taking NHWQ online with a focus on social media.

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\(^1\) See Appendix C – Blogs
The Queensland Government supports the use of internet-based technologies as part of the routine conduct of business. This extends to the use of social media as part of an integrated approach and through the application of a risk-management approach.

The significant uptake of social media offers many benefits, however uncontrolled use also presents many risks. These guidelines have been developed to assist NHW members realise the benefits of social media use while identifying the risks.

What is social media?
Social media is an umbrella term covering websites, technology, applications or tools that enable active and participatory publishing and interaction between individuals; citizens and organisations over the internet.

Social media can be characterised by:
- Relationship building
- User participation
- User-generated content
- Collaboration
- Multi-directional conversations
- Highly accessible and scalable publishing
- 24/7/365 operation and availability

How can social media be used for Neighbourhood Watch
Social media is an additional channel for information dissemination and another channel to enhance client service through being able to build a direct relationship with community members. For Neighbourhood Watch, social media represents a way to directly engage with local and specific communities and to support or deliver a wide range of activities including:
- Community engagement, communication and marketing
- Reporting of information through appropriate channels
- Participation in NHW activities
- Volunteering and attendance at initiatives and events

Before you begin – consider the risks
A NHW area’s use of social media has the potential to conflict with legislation, especially in relation to the release of information; privacy; accessibility; and recordkeeping. Content posted on NHW managed social media may infringe upon the rights of others including defamation, intellectual property and fraud. Due to the seriousness of these risks and the implications for NHW as a government sponsored program, it is important that you take some time to consider the risks and ensure processes are in place to mitigate these.

Official and personal use of NHW related social media

Official use of social media
Official use of social media is any use of a Neighbourhood Watch social media account, profile or presence by an authorised user. Comments made through official NHW social media accounts are representative of the program and made by those authorised to do so. Uses can include: publishing messages, uploading content (text, images, video), and responding to communication from others.

Authorised social media users will at all times adhere to the requirements of the NHW Social Media Policy. If you are unsure of a message, content or communication is appropriate for publication, you should contact your local District Crime Prevention Coordinator (DCPC) or the State Coordinator NHW for clarification.

Personal use of social media

At no time are NHW related social media accounts to be used for personal reasons. There is no scope for authorised users to publish content that contradicts the NHW Social Media Policy. This includes (but is not limited to):

- personal opinions
- political views, electioneering or bias
- racial, gender or sexual vilification
- misrepresentation or unsubstantiated claims
- fraudulent, inappropriate or illegal content

What is online community engagement?

Community engagement refers to the connections between NHW, people and communities on a range of crime prevention and community safety issues. It encompasses a wide variety of program–community interactions ranging from information sharing to community consultation and, in some instances, active participation in events and activities.

Online community engagement is any form of community engagement that occurs through an online channel. Engaging with your community online is shaped by the technologies available and how well these reach and interact with your community.

Over the last few years, the online environment has changed to enable people to create, share and engage with web content rather than being a passive recipient. The evolution and popularity of social media has made available new techniques for online community engagement and additional avenues for consultation and interaction with people and communities in ways that can facilitate dialogue, creativity, collaboration and participation.

Social media governance

Neighbourhood Watch managed social media accounts represent the program online. Consequently, the use of social media must have a strategic focus aligned with the principles of the NHW program. They should include:

- only using specific social media tools that are capable of delivering the NHW message in a clear and relevant way
- adopting appropriate security precautions
- committing to ongoing community engagement and relationship management
- monitoring activities on your NHW social media accounts
- ensuring transparency when managing NHW social media accounts
If you intend to use other types of social media accounts (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram etc) to manage your NHW area, support and endorsement by your local police is required (speak to your local District Crime Prevention Coordinator).

When considering appropriate online account governance, you should think about the following:

- **Risk management** (what is appropriate, what isn’t?)
- **Information security** (an individual’s personal details should never be disclosed on a NHW social media account)
- **Information licensing** (what are the legal implications of posting content that belongs to another party)
- **Communication strategies** (what is the best way for you to communicate with your local community through social media)
- **Policy frameworks** (always refer to NHWQ policies or the State Coordinator NHW if you require clarification)
- **Community engagement** (the move to social media is about communication and community engagement. You should think about new ways to improve participation in your local community. What can you do through social media that will assist in this)
- **Code of conduct** (develop a simple code of conduct for authorised users of social media in your NHW area. Authorised users of NHW social media accounts need to understand their responsibilities. This may differ from area to area. Police officers (representing the QPS) who contribute to local NHW blogs must adhere to the QPS Professional Conduct policies)
- **Records and information management** (how are you storing your members’ email addresses and other personal information?)

**Success measures**

As with any other NHW activities, local NHW blogs will be measured for their success. This will help to better understand whether or not they are achieving the objectives of the program. This information will be disseminated to local area coordinators to assist in the management of their NHW areas. Assistance will be provided to areas (negotiated) that are having trouble meeting the potential of this social media tool.

For NHW areas that also utilise Facebook and other social media accounts, the area coordinator and/or social media coordinator for that area are responsible for gathering data. The NHWQ State Office will contact individual areas if this information is required.

**Establishing a meaningful social media presence**

Establishing an official NHW social media footprint through your local area’s blog site will include focusing on your local community and managing the ongoing relationships that comes with this engagement.

When using other types of social media accounts such as Facebook, they should complement your primary NHW Blog. It is important to note that your local NHW Blog is the focal point of all NHW information and audiences should be directed to visit that site as much as possible.

Don’t wait for State NHW or police content to automatically populate your local blog. Get posting! Be proactive and write articles that have relevance to your local community. This
could be a story about crime in the local area and preventative activities or it could be about an event or initiative you wish to run in the local area. Take the time to ensure your content will be interesting and relevant enough for others to share. This is the one of the keys to a successful blog – share ability.

Your online presence can be built over time to have an established audience who know and have confidence in your NHW area’s social media profile, and they are more likely to recommend other like-minded people to it.

**Tips**

**Determine your blog strategy**

Establish goals for your blog. Remember that your blog, like any other form of social media, is a simple tool to enhance what you already have, the services you provide and your area’s mission.

You should create a simple management plan for your blog outlining how often you will post, how often you will monitor comments and other questions, and how often and when you will respond to comments.

**Assign responsibility**

Decide who will manage the blog. Who will be authorised to draft stories and who will be the administrator i.e. who has final approval? Will the same person be responsible for content creation and comment moderation? You should also determine what will happen if that person no longer volunteers for your NHW area. Establish who will fill in as the responsible party as well as what the protocol will be for changing passwords.

**What do I post?**

You will be posting content on community safety and crime prevention and your local NHW blog allows you to share your story, unfiltered by anyone else. Alongside the automatically populated information, decide what you want to post to help guide your efforts, and to inform people so they know what they will find when they visit your site.

Think of all the different places where content can come from. Many people have stories to tell and your blog may be the perfect platform. You can also recycle content from other areas (following Intellectual Property (IP)/copyright laws). This doesn’t mean simply copying and pasting from a press release, but different types of content you already create can give you ideas for blog posts. Ensure your content is interesting, relevant and shareable.

**Promote your blog**

If people don’t know where to find it, they won’t read it. Tell people about your blog. Put the URL address on your email signatures, flyers and other promotional material. Contact local councillors and businesses in your community and ask them to assist you in the promotion.

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2 See Appendix D – Legal implications
The focus of your blog is crime prevention and community safety so you will have a targeted audience that you want to promote it to. For example, pass the blog URL out at NHW meetings, events, initiatives and activities.

**Committing to ongoing relationships**

Going online with your NHW area creates an expectation of ongoing dialogue and engagement with your local community. Individuals in your area who manage your social media accounts should be appropriately skilled and briefed on their role and responsibilities.

NHWQ State Office has provided training and also online learning packages for those who are responsible for the management of social media in your area. If further, or face-to-face training is required, please contact your local DCPC or the State Coordinator NHW.

The real time aspect of social media content and its reach on the world wide web can be daunting. It is important that your NHWQ area appoints an appropriate person to represent the Program, supported by appropriate reporting and escalation processes. This may include the area coordinator, local DCPC and the State Coordinator NHW.

Using social media successfully requires good relationship management. This requires a consistent approach in the way you conduct yourself on your social media accounts. This means having an understanding of the NHW philosophy, always presenting the same persona and using a consistent voice when speaking on behalf of the program. When more than one person is representing the program through the same account, they should all share an understanding of the program’s online reputation and adhere to a common style of communicating with the community.

**Tips**

**Less is more**

People have short attention spans and they want their information as succinct as possible. Keep your information clear and concise. People may be less likely to read a lengthy, text-heavy post. If you have a lot you want to say on a particular topic, you can break it into several parts and post each one separately, making it easier for people to consume the content. Also, be sure to use common language and try to stay away from legalese and police jargon which community members may find confusing.

**Catchy titles**

Many times, people will choose whether or not to read a post based on a title. The title of your post may be all that someone sees on first glance through a search engine or other social media sites. Therefore, a title can make or break a post. Think of titles you would want to read. Use strong and exciting words, ask a question, or pose a benefit to your readers in a title. These strategies, along with many others, will build people’s curiosity and entice them to read the rest of your blog.

**Themes**

Having daily, weekly or monthly themes may assist you in developing your content strategy and lets your audience know what to expect. For example, your theme for the month of October may be ‘Locktober’ where you might post stories about property and vehicle security. Having themes will also help stay consistent as you progress with your local blog.
These themes will allow your readers to know what to expect when they come to your blog as well.

**Guest bloggers**

Featuring guest bloggers allows you to provide multiple perspectives and bring fresh ideas to your blog. You may even decide to have a number of bloggers who regularly contribute to your local NHW blog. Being able to provide multiple perspectives will help expand your blog content and will ease the creative burden on a single person. You might choose to have a guest blogger once a month, featuring a new person on a different theme. There are many ways to incorporate guest bloggers effectively.

**Managing expectations**

You should take a moment to think of the ways you will and will not use your social media account/s. For example, if your account will be used to respond to individuals who post comments you should consider: how this will be managed outside of business hours; what expectation does this raise and how will they be managed? Will you respond to all messages? If not, how does that affect the relationship with people who observe that? If your account is not used to respond to comments, how will this impact upon your area’s credibility, and how can this be managed?

**Tips**

- Be timely and consistent with your responses. Advertise what timeframe responses will be provided.
- If you do not respond to all messages, develop standard responses directing people to other channels such as an email or phone number, contact us details or feedback form.
- Provide easily accessible links to important reporting/contact points such as Triple Zero (000); Policelink; Crime Stoppers; Qld Police blog site.
- Develop standard responses e.g. ‘Posts containing offensive language are deleted as they breach the terms and conditions of this blog site’.

**Responding within social media**

Responding to others on social media is an official representation of the NHW Program and should be based on the program’s objectives and philosophy. Your responses should consider the expectations of visitors to your account/s.

In considering the risk of responding, you should also consider the risks of not responding. Social media is interactive and users’ initial expectations may be high in terms of responsiveness. Although your statements and actions can mitigate these expectations to some degree, an unexpected issue is an opportunity for you to engage early and directly with those already talking about it.

Be mindful of responding to queries outside the NHW charter. Referring the enquiry to another more qualified recipient is a legitimate response.

**Moderation**

3 See Appendix A – Should I Respond?
You have a responsibility to moderate content or messages posted on your NHW social media account/s to protect against issues like offensive language and behaviour that may breach the NHW Social Media Policy.

You also have a responsibility to ensure your social media account/s are used genuinely, meaning that where users post content or comments they should not be edited where valid criticism or an alternative point of view (e.g. crime, crime prevention or community safety) is expressed.

**Use a disclaimer**

A general disclaimer will be automatically added to your local NHW blog. However, you should develop separate disclaimers to advise users on how your NHW area will manage your social media presence.

**Monitoring social media activities**

Responding in a timely manner means that you should monitor the activities on your local NHW account/s on a regular basis. While this might seem like a daunting task, in reality it isn’t difficult and doesn’t take a lot of time. You don’t need to sit in front of your computer for hours replying to comments or posts.

Monitoring what is said on your social media account/s can be a good source of information about how your local community feels about certain issues. This information can be useful when you are developing any strategies or initiatives for your local area.

**Transparency when using social media**

You should be fully transparent (as a representative of NHW) in your interactions on social media, including adding and removing content. When responding to and/or posting new comments you should identify the comment as an official response of your local NHW.

**Communicate account closures**

Where your local NHW area wishes to close a social media (blog) account you, or an authorised user should advise the community (via the account):

- the reasons for closure
- options for further communication or engagement

You should also inform your local DCPC of the reasons for the closure of the account and what contingency plans you are putting in place to maintain communication. The DCPC will then contact the State Coordinator, NHW to discuss ways to assist your ongoing communication with your local community.

**Information security**

Information security is a necessary part of managing any use of social media. If your local NHW area has appointed more than one authorised user of the social media account/s, an approval mechanism must be put in place to ensure the appropriateness of blog posts. For example, if the social media coordinator drafts a post on a local issue, it should go to the area coordinator for final approval before being posted live on the blog.
You have an obligation to securely store any personal or confidential information. At no time are you to provide a third party with an individual’s personal information (unless agreed upon by the individual) i.e. email addresses, phone numbers or home/postal addresses.

Personal information that you have gathered as part of managing your local NHW area should be kept in a secure location. For example, email distribution lists should be stored on a computer that can only be accessed with a password.

**Intellectual property**

The term 'intellectual property' covers the various legal rights to protect original and creative effort.

**Potential risks**

- Sharing content without acknowledgement to the original author
- Posting photos to blogs, Facebook or photo sharing sites without consent from the agency, participants or photographer
- Copying work such as songs, articles, movies, or software, from a source without being authorised to do so
- Posting content on social media sites that conflict with the site's terms of service or with NHW policy

**Tips**

**Avoiding intellectual property infringement**

- Produce content specifically for your social media account/s – if choosing to post certain content be mindful of the potential conflict between the NHW Social Media Policy and any intellectual property requirements.
- Do not post third party content without permission or licence – where the third party has provided permission, check that it is broad enough to cover posting to social media.

**Accessibility**

Social media offers new ways to involve and interact with the community in many aspects of their lives. Unfortunately, access to NHW social media account/s may be constrained by a community member’s:

- lack of access to a computer
- inadequate skills to operate a computer
- lack of access to a reliable internet connection
- excessive internet access fees
- not being a follower/friend of the official NHW social media account

**Tips**

You should try to implement or continue with more traditional ways to communicate with people in the community who cannot access your social media account/s. This may include (but are not limited to) face-to-face interaction, hand delivered hard copy information (newsletters, factsheets, resources etc), or telephone contact details.
Information management

Your NHW social media account/s will be relied upon as authoritative sources of information. It is vital that the NHW related content you upload to your social media accounts aligns with objectives and principles of the NHW program.

Your social media account/s will be the primary source of NHW information for your local community. It is important that you maintain the information on your social media account/s and always ensure that they are monitored regularly. Understanding your local community will help you gauge the success of your communication methods.

- Is the information you are posting relevant to your local demographic?
- Is it interesting? Would you want to share it?
- Will your local community get something out of what you are saying?
- Is the information you post increasing awareness? (how do you know?)
- What is the social media feedback telling you?
- Do you need to reconsider the style in which you approach your local community?
- Is the ‘post’ time sensitive i.e. are there legal obligations to remove photos of ‘persons of interest’

Avoid using your social media account/s in isolation to release specific information to your local community i.e. local NHW events, initiatives etc. Letterbox drops, local newspaper articles, emails or other traditional communication methods may also help.

Tips

Ensure information is:

- **Transparent** – the community has a right to information
- **Trustworthy** – information is accurate, relevant, timely, available and secure
- **Private** – personal information is protected in accordance with the law
- **Valued** – information is an asset
- **Managed** – information is planned and compliant with NHW policies and guidelines.

Defamation

Defamation is the injury to another person’s reputation either directly or implied through the publication of words or sounds. It does not matter if the defamation was unintentional, and ignorance is not an excuse. Be mindful of what you post and who it might affect.

Potential risks

- Making false accusations about an individual on a public forum (social media) which cannot be substantiated e.g. ‘Police Officer X is corrupt and is not fit for duty’
- Defamation action may be brought, not only against the person who posted the comment, but also against anyone who takes part in the publication or re-publication of that comment e.g. if a community member posts this comment on your NHW blog and you authorise it to go live

Tips
Avoiding defamation

- Do not post content online that is a rumour or confidential relating to an individual or business.
- A NHW volunteer who has identified themselves as such should not vilify the NHW program, its sponsors, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) or government, whether the information is verified or not.

Negligence

Negligence is the failure to act when bound by a duty of care. You should take reasonable steps to avoid incidents which you can reasonably foresee would likely result in a crime or victimisation.

Potential risks

- If a community member posts a comment on your local NHW blog and you acknowledge receipt of the message but do not act on the issue (an appropriate response/forward the message to the police) and as a result the person posting the comment is a victim of crime. If the blog comment is acknowledged, it should be treated in the same way as a phone call or email
- Not acknowledging a comment can also be seen as an act of negligence. Be sure to acknowledge all relevant comments. This does not include SPAM or other malicious content

Tips

Avoiding negligence

- Do not provide advice or recommendations unless you are an authority on the subject i.e. advice to a person who is a victim of a specific crime (domestic violence etc).
- Use a disclaimer! This will help you avoid issues if something were to happen as a result of an original comment.
- Think about ways to appropriately monitor and respond to posts and comments.
- Explicitly set expected response times and state any limitations to responding i.e. contact police in case of emergency, or report non-urgent incidents online and provide direct link
- Recommend appropriate channels for different forms of communication and for reporting information and incidents i.e. Triple Zero (000), Policelink and Crime Stoppers and provide the direct links to websites/blogs/downloadable apps.

Privacy

Social media by its nature can result in the disclosure of personal information in a public way. Privacy is one of the major concerns of people using social media and the following sections discuss the use of social media.

Photos

If you are disclosing personal information (such as photos) on your NHW social media account/s, consent must be obtained from the individual/s concerned. In the likelihood that

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4 See Appendix B – Privacy and Security tips
you hold NHW events and activities, you will most likely take photos from these. It is important that permission is obtained from participants and photographer prior to being posted on social media.

Some people may avoid using or engaging through social media due to privacy concerns. Others, who may actively use social media, may not feel confident in publicly sharing their opinions. When you’re using NHW managed social media, consider other ways, both online and offline, that complement the purpose of your social media account.

Potential risks

- Posting photos of an individual or public event without consent to use the images of the people
- Not providing adequate notice of how personal information will be used, transmitted, accessed or protected on your social media account/s

Tips

**Avoiding breaches of privacy**

- Detail how the personal information (i.e. photos, email addresses) will be used, who will have access to it, and how it is protected.
- Seek consent before posting photos or other personal information to NHW social media account/s.
- Social media by its nature will result in the transfer of information out of Australia. Ensure that this information is clearly stated when seeking consent for the release of personal information.

**Other issues to be aware of when using social media**

**Posts are viewable around the world instantly**

Posts through your social media account/s, or any other application you may be using should be accurate, approved and proof read for grammar and spelling errors. The message is instant and may be seen by readers around the world within a moment.

**Advertising**

Readers may associate advertising appearing around your content as NHW endorsing the product/s. You should ensure that any advertising on your social media account/s is reserved for supporters of your local NHW area.

**Other users**

If you are using other types of social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter) to promote your local NHW area, you have no control over other users’ content or what they will do with your content.

The internet is a free space and many social media sites, like Facebook and Twitter, do not have approval requirements for posting about, or to, other participants. Facebook users are able to post anything they want about your brand until the comments are deleted. You should consider possible scenarios that could affect your local area and prepare for how you are going to react to these.
Appendix A – Should I respond?

Has a comment about your local NHW area been identified?

Is the comment inaccurate, misleading, a misrepresentation; offensive or defamatory?

No

Is the commenter requesting assistance or providing relevant information i.e. suspicious behaviour in the local neighbourhood?

No

Do not respond to the comment.

Post an appropriate response advising that the local NHW blog is not used or intended for this type of

Appendix B – Privacy and security tips

Remember, it’s hard to control the information once it is out there

In the online environment, privacy once lost can be extremely hard to retrieve. You can update your profile but the comments you publish on your space or someone else’s will probably stick around for a long time, even if you close your social media presence.

Guard against identity theft

Don’t assume that anything you post online is completely private or limited to certain groups, or that the password you set up cannot be accessed through inadequate software protection. Even basic information, such as an address, birthday, photo or mobile phone number, can be coupled with other public information, enabling someone to steal your identity.

Respect the privacy of others

Remember that everyone has different comfort levels when it comes to privacy. Ask permission before posting information, photos or videos and respect the choices people make.

Stay safe

In the vast majority of cases, people’s experience of social media is positive and fun-filled. But it’s best to avoid responding to messages that seem a little off i.e. spelling, grammar and sentence structure is wrong. If people are posting threatening or harassing content, you can report the behaviour to your local police.

Use the most appropriate method of communication

When you want to communicate with a select group of people only, it may be better to communicate directly by email. If you post a meeting schedule on your local NHW blog, you might run the risk of a lot of unexpected guests.
Report abuse or misuse

If you are persistently harassed by an individual or continue to receive spam mail from the same entity, report it to your local DCPC or to the State Coordinator NHW.
Appendix C – Blogs

A blog is a diary; A daily pulpit; A collaborative space; A breaking news outlet; A collection of links; Your thoughts on your local NHW; Memos to the world.

Your blog is whatever you want it to be in relation to NHW and your local area. There are millions of blogs, in all shapes and sizes, and there are no real rules.

In simple terms, a blog is a website, where you write posts on an ongoing basis. New posts show up at the top, so your visitors can read what’s new. Then they comment on it or link to it or email you. Or not.

What are blog posts

To get slightly more technical, the stuff that the explanation above refers to are better described as posts. Think of posts as entries you might make in a traditional diary or articles that you would find in a magazine.

On a blog the posts are displayed in reverse chronological order so that the very latest post will appear at the top and the earlier posts with appear underneath it.

What makes up a post?

There are some common characteristics that make up a blog post:

- A post will have a title or a headline, similar in format to newspaper articles or the subject field of an email
- The main body of the post, the core ‘blog’ content, appears under the title – your content depends upon your particular blog and is limited by your creativity
- The post more often that not will have a date and time stamp so that readers will know when you put the post online
- Usually posts will have comments. This is where readers can respond to the post. It should be noted that not all blogs have comments despite the value that they can add
- You may also find categories and tags which are ways of describing the post through keywords and themes

What’s the difference between a web log and blog?

Nothing at all, the term blog comes from weblog. They are the same thing except very few people still use the term weblog.
Appendix D – Legal implications

Is a local NHW area liable for comments of an offending nature on NHW social media channels such as the local NHW blog, (or Facebook if utilised by the area)?

The local NHW area would likely be subject to regulations under Schedule 7 of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 in respect of prohibited content. It would also likely be liable for comments of an offensive, defamatory or discriminatory nature where the NHW area is:

- considered to have "published" the comments and has not acted appropriately to remove the content.

In addition to defamation, there are a number of restrictions on content, including (but not limited to):

- vilification on the grounds of race, religion, sexuality, or gender
- obscenity and indecency
- blasphemous libel
- pornography
- sedition

Schedule 7 of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 contains a regulation which relates to access to prohibited content by a content service provider. A ‘content service provider’ is a person who allows access to content (in any form) by way of a carriage service (i.e. social media).

‘Prohibited content’ is defined as content which would attract an RC (refused classification) or X18+ classification. This ‘content’ can include a hyperlink to a separate content service (other inappropriate websites).

Defamation

Inappropriate or offensive material uploaded by a NHW area to a social networking site could result action for defamation.

An organisation (NHW) that merely ‘facilitates’ the transmission of offensive material will not be liable. However, if a NHW area ‘publishes’ this material, even in a passive sense, will be liable for the offensive content. The key distinction between a facilitator and a publisher is the ability to control content.

A local NHW area blog would be considered a ‘publisher’ and a ‘facilitator’ due to the automated nature of some of the content (QPS and State NHW content) loaded onto the blog. However, local NHW blogs would be considered a "publisher" rather than a mere “facilitator” as:

- local NHW blogs have the power to block and remove inappropriate material
- comments and material posted to the blog is reviewed for suitability by an administrator and, where considered inappropriate, deleted or edited
- a local NHW area would be considered a ‘publisher’ and will only be liable in respect of offensive material on social media channels where the material is ‘published’. Publication will take place where there is:
  - a physical publication (posted and then accessed by the public)
an assumption of responsibility for publication (a NHW area claims the post is it’s own views)

In most cases, posting and access will be instantaneous. However, there are times where publication will not occur, even though the material has been posted. For example, if the local NHW area blog goes down immediately after the content is posted and before the content has been accessed, there will not be a publication.

The following key factors describe why responsibility may be assumed:
1) whether the NHW area was aware of the existence of the offending material
2) whether the NHW area has the ability to monitor postings and amend or remove them
3) whether the NHW area, on becoming aware of the material, took any action to remove it
4) where action was taken, how long did it take between posting and removal of the offending material

**Liability**

Awareness of offensive content will result in liability. Knowledge of the publication without knowledge of specific defamatory content itself may also attract liability. Where the NHW area is aware that certain comments have been made which include links to other sites, liability would likely extend to the offensive material on the other sites.

**Does the use of a disclaimer relieve a local NHW area of liability?**

A disclaimer by itself will not relieve a local NHW area (on social media) of liability regarding content posted online. However, it does mitigate liability if it is supported by a robust monitoring and enforcement process.

Because the local NHW blogs use a pre-publication model (i.e. comments and content must be approved before going live), a moderator determines the suitability prior to posting onto the blog. But merely having terms and conditions on the blog which prohibit the posting of inappropriate content is insufficient. It is necessary to backup the terms and conditions with a robust monitoring and enforcement process which can quickly identify and remove inappropriate content.

**What are the local NHW responsibilities regarding "negligence" to the community posting comments directly to NHW social media channels?**

The issue of failure to act in respect of social media comments can arise in a number of different contexts:

- The "rescue" context in which information is provided concerning a possible threat to life or safety of an individual or the public in general
- The "investigation" context in which information is provided concerning possible breaches of the law

In considering the issue of negligence for failure to act, there are two positions - failure to act at all and failure to take reasonable steps.