



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
I MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE  
U. S. MARINE CORPS FORCES, PACIFIC  
BOX 555300  
CAMP PENDLETON, CA 92055-5300

5780  
COMMSTRAT

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POLICY LETTER 5-18

From: Commanding General, I Marine Expeditionary Force  
To: Distribution List

Subj: CONDUCT FOR EXTERNAL OFFICIAL PRESENCES AND USING INTERNET-BASED  
CAPABILITIES FOR OFFICIAL ACTIVITIES

Ref: (a) DoDI 8550.01  
(b) The Social Corps; The U.S.M.C Social Media Principles  
(c) SECNAVINST 5720.47B  
(d) SECNAVINST 5720.44C

Encl: (1) Guidelines for external official presences and using internet-  
based capabilities for official activities

1. Purpose. To establish policy for I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) units who have an External Official Presence (EOP) through Internet-based Capabilities (IbC). IbCs are defined as information systems not owned or operated by the Department of Defense (DoD) or U.S. Federal agencies, such as, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.

2. Information. Digital interaction is an increasing and defining characteristic of modern society. People's access to information has expanded exponentially with the rise of social media and web-based interactive technologies. The prolific use of technology in almost all aspects of day-to-day activity demands vigilance for online users, to include those maintaining an EOP on behalf of military units, as described in reference (a). Social media serves as a major component of organizational communication and interaction; therefore, adequate training and understanding are necessary for information security and to protect and maintain safe and appropriate online forums, per the references. I MEF is dedicated to maintaining a cohesive, resilient operational force both offline and online.

3. Scope. This policy applies to official activities conducted on IbCs, which include social networks and applications, websites, and other emerging technologies primarily driven by user-generated content. The term "official activities" refers to the use of IbC platforms by units or individuals within units to provide information to, and for use by, the public and/or unit personnel. Official activities may include managing unit pages and social media accounts to inform audiences and promote effective two-way communication with key publics.

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a. EOPs are typically maintained by Communication Strategy and Operations (CommStrat) personnel. However, many units have established their own social media pages to communicate with their unit and family members. Unit-maintained EOPs below the major subordinate command level exceed the capacity of unit CommStrat offices to manage every EOP for every unit.

b. Should commanders choose to establish a unit-maintained EOP, they will appoint Unit Information Officers (UIOs) in writing to manage the EOP(s) and will comply with guidelines established in this policy and enclosure (1). UIOs serve as the primary point of contact between a unit and the command CommStrat office. EOPs are only authorized at O-5 level commands and higher. Any existing publically accessible EOPs that are below the O-5 command level shall be closed down or security settings changed to private/invite only.

c. Commanders without a CommStrat officer on staff are not authorized to release visual information (VI), defined as still photography, motion picture photography, video or audio recording, graphic arts, and visual aids, models and displays. Release authority of VI resides with designated CommStrat officers. In addition, information typically considered newsworthy or that could be of significant public or media interest is only authorized to be released by a CommStrat officer in accordance with reference (d).

d. All content released will be in accordance with the command's Communication Strategy. I MEF's Communication Strategy can be found at [https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/imef/CommStrat/\\_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Home.aspx](https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/imef/CommStrat/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Home.aspx)

e. Prior to establishing an EOP, commands will contact their local CommStrat office, and the appointed UIO will receive applicable training and guidance. Each command with an official presence on any IBC will ensure the individual who manages that site complies with enclosure (1) and the references. Commanders will ensure personnel releasing information on EOPs understand regulations and guidelines for operations security (OPSEC) and public engagement and have completed the following National OPSEC Program computer-based-training courses available on the Interagency OPSEC Support Staff website (<https://www.IAD.gov/IOSS/>).

(1) OPSEC Fundamentals Course (OPSE-1301)

(2) OPSEC and Public Released Decisions (OPSE-155)

4. Certification. This policy letter is effective the date signed and is applicable to all I MEF commands, to include those units assigned under operational control of I MEF.

  
J. L. OSTERMAN

### Guidelines for EOP and using IBCs for official activities

"The Social Corps; The U.S.M.C Social Media Principles," is a handbook that presents guidance for official social media posts. The handbook - available at <http://www.marines.mil/News/Social-Media/> -- empowers Marines, Sailors and Marine Corps Civilians to effectively communicate in a digital society and engage in greater discussions as improved representatives of our Corps. It is particularly helpful for those members whose official responsibilities include releasing information to the public. It describes the importance of adhering to the Marine Corps' core values while communicating in the current information environment. Marines must be aware that, while representing the Marine Corps - or even in their personal online communications - they must display sound judgment and common sense while adhering to established policy and the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

The Marine Corps is, above all else, guided by the principles of honor, courage and commitment. In deed and appearance, Service Members must keep themselves, their unit and the Marine Corps above reproach. The medium and platform for communication may change, but the Marine Corps' high standards do not.

There is no "unofficial" Marine Corps site. If you are representing your unit on a social media site or other website, that is an official presence; you must comply with applicable guidelines.

### What to Consider Prior to Assignment as a Social Media Site Owner

There are many considerations when establishing social media properties or assuming unit information responsibilities online. Social media managers must be command-appointed, and their responsibilities include (1) identifying users who will post and engage publics, and (2) determining the type of content and frequency of posts on external official presences. All content posted will be aligned with the commander's communication strategy. Managers must ask the right questions and take certain steps to maintain an effective external official presence. The full details of these steps are found on page 18 of MCO 3070.2A, "The Marine Corps Operations Security (OPSEC) Program." Your command CommStrat office can also provide tips on how to effectively plan an engagement strategy.

- **Why are you doing this?** Determine the purpose and intent of the command's external official presence.
- **Who are you engaging with?** Identify the publics with whom you intend to interact.
- **Review the policy.** Understand Marine Corps social media policy. Marine Corps social media resources can be found at: <http://www.marines.mil/socialmedia>.
- **Choose where to post.** Identify the social media platforms that will be best suited for the needs of your organization.

- **Draft content strategy.** After identifying your publics and selecting the platforms, draft a posting strategy. This helps refine your organization's social media goals.

#### Unit Social Media Site Registration

All official Marine Corps social media sites must be registered in the Marine Corps' central directory. To register your page go to <http://www.Marines.mil/socialmedia>. Unit social media sites must adhere to Marine Corps Public Affairs policy and guidelines. Once your unit site is registered, advertisements will be automatically removed, as corporate endorsement is prohibited.

#### Professional Behavior

Marine Corps units, commanders, subject matter experts and individual Marines engaging people through social media should use their best judgment. These basic points, highlighted here, should be used when interacting online.

- **You are the Marine Corps.** As a Marine, it is important that official posts convey the same excellence the Marine Corps instills in all of its communicators.
- **Get approved.** Have a method in place to ensure there is a thorough content review before posting - conduct a security review, being mindful of operations security and foreign disclosure directives, for official use only (FOUO) information, and content subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
- **Provide meaningful content.** If your complete thought, along with its context, cannot be squeezed into a character-restricted space (such as Twitter), then provide a link to an online location where you can express it completely and accurately.
- **Respond to all necessary topics and comments.** Avoid the tendency to defend and protect every comment made. Given time, social networks normally self-correct negative comments, posts or misinformation. If an official position or expert opinion is required, that's your cue to join in. Replace errors or misrepresentations of the Corps with facts.
- **What happens online is permanent.** Take great care in what you do or say online. Aside from being published, and essentially part of a permanent record - even if you "remove" or "delete" it later or attempt to make it anonymous - the information is released and distributed at high velocity.
- **Negative comments will happen.** Don't join in with an emotional or passionate rant or response. What you say and how you respond should be reviewed and approved to ensure you accurately express the Corps' position without editorializing or straying from the facts.
- **Politics.** The Marine Corps encourages Marines to carry out their obligations as citizens - this includes politics. You can express your political views on public issues or political candidates online, but

not as part of an organized communication campaign. If your communication identifies you as a Marine, you should clearly state the opinions are yours alone and not the Marine Corps'. You cannot solicit votes for or against a party, candidate or cause. You cannot participate in any interview or discussion as an advocate for or against a party, candidate or cause. It's against federal law for commissioned officers to communicate contemptuous words against the President, Vice President, Secretary of Defense, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Navy, or Governor and Legislature of any state in which he or she is located or performing duty. For additional guidance and information on political items of interest, read Department of Defense Directive 1344.10, Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces.

### Operations Security

The following are considerations for Operations Security (OPSEC). The Marine Corps order on Operations Security should be thoroughly reviewed and understood by anyone who is planning on sharing command information on an official Marine Corps social media site.

### Profile Information/Status Updates

- Keep sensitive, work-related information off your profile.
- Keep your plans, schedules and location data to yourself.
- Protect the names and information of coworkers, friends and family members.
- Adhere to the Uniform Code of Military Justice and other applicable policies.

### Posted Data

- Information typically considered newsworthy or that would be of significant public or media interest is only authorized to be released by a CommStrat officer.
- Prohibited content includes classified, FOUO or sensitive but unclassified information; proprietary information; pre-decisional information; information protected by the Privacy Act; identification of family members of DON personnel by name; unit rosters or personnel contact information; plans of the day/week; content that may imply endorsement or is political in nature; and advertisements. When in doubt, have content reviewed by a CommStrat officer.
- Visual information (still photography, motion picture photography, video or audio recording, graphic arts, and visual aids, models and displays) must be released by an official releasing authority and cleared by a CommStrat officer.
- Check filenames and metadata for compromising or sensitive information, for example personally identifiable information (PII).

- Remove geotagging information by manually deleting it or by disabling location services on devices.

### Security

- Keep your anti-virus software updated through your G-6/S-6 or Information Systems Coordinator.
- Beware of links, downloads and attachments just as you would in emails.
- Beware of apps or plugins that are written by unknown third parties to access your data. Plugins usually come in the form of various browser video playback features or programs. Some popular ones include Adobe Flash and Microsoft Silverlight. Often times these programs will have malware attached, which aims gathering information from your computer and is intended to damage or disable computers and computer systems.
- Look for "HTTPS" in the address bar and the lock icon that indicates active transmission security before logging into a website or entering sensitive data.
- Do not post photos or videos with geotags. These release your exact location at the time of posting and can be detrimental to operations security. Be wary of "check-in" functions and mobile apps requesting to access your location.

### Passwords

- Use unique passwords for each online site you use.
- Ensure your passwords are sufficiently hard to guess.
- Do not share your passwords with anyone.
- Update your passwords regularly and keep them complex. Include multiple special characters (!@#\$), numbers, and upper and lowercase letters.

### Terms of participation to be posted on sites

The following terms of participation and posting guidelines will be posted all official sites:

Welcome, this is the official U.S. Marine Corps (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, etc.) for (UNIT) where you will find the most recent information and news about (UNIT). It is our goal to provide the public with information and news about (UNIT) and allow for an open forum of discussion about (UNIT) topics.

If you are looking for our official web page, please visit (OFFICIAL UNIT .MIL) or <http://www.marines.mil>

Participants are asked to follow our posting guidelines below. Violation of the guidelines below may result in your post being removed.

Please feel free to express your opinion about the Marine Corps in an objective and respectful way.

While this is an open forum, it's also intended to maintain respect for those who participate (i.e. family-friendly). Please keep your comments clean.

We do not under any circumstance allow graphic, obscene, explicit or racial comments or submissions, nor do we allow comments that are abusive, hateful or intended to defame anyone or any organization.

We do not allow solicitations or advertisements. This includes promotion or endorsement of any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency. Similarly, we do not allow attempts to defame or defraud any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency.

We do not allow comments that suggest or encourage illegal activity.

You participate at your own risk, taking personal responsibility for your comments, your username and any information provided.

Lastly, the appearance of external links on this site does not constitute official endorsement on behalf of the U.S. Marine Corps or Department of Defense.