



### **Social Media and Summer Camp - It Starts with Policy**

If you're a summer camp looking to embark on the wild world of social media marketing, you will read from various online resources that it starts with "goals" and "strategy" but for summer camps, while goals and strategy are an important place to begin, the nature of the industry requires camp directors to start with one crucial piece to the social media puzzle: policy.

Camps have various policies in place to protect both children and staff. All staff members are required to undergo criminal background checks and sign off on various policies and practices that restrict communication between staff, campers, and their families. Directors understand that the impact and bond between staff, campers, and their families often extends beyond the confines of the camp session but that policies restricting communication are essential in warding off accusations of misconduct or conflict of interest. The hyper-connectedness of social media challenges these rules and regulations.

Most camps have policies that restrict staff behavior including language, smoking, alcohol and drug use but this behavior is rarely extended to the online sphere where many staff members may post photos of the staff party on weekends off, fowl language; or complaints about campers, fellow staff, and your organization as a whole.

A [2011 BBC survey](#) of children aged 9-12 revealed that over half are already using Facebook despite Facebook's 13+ policy. Facebook is also [exploring opportunities](#) to open the network to kids under the age of 13. As more kids join social networks, the potential problems for camps and staff are sure to mount. Camp counselors are heroes in the eyes of campers and the desire to become Facebook friends with them are seen as a norm in today's hyper-connected social media world.

In order to protect your campers, organization, and staff, an all-encompassing social media policy is incredibly important. Here are three easy tips and tricks:

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## **Tips & Tricks for building a Social Media Policy:**

### *1. Conduct a “social media” background check*

On Facebook, conduct research into your prospective staff members by simply searching for them on the network. Many status updates and photos may be “public” which will give you better insight into your prospective staff members. Photos that indicate a “party animal” or status updates full of foul language should impact your decision to hire. If a prospective staff member has enhanced privacy settings, this can be interpreted as responsible social media use. You may also ask prospective staff members for links to their online personas including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and others.

It is important to note that you cannot direct Social Media use. You can include verbiage in your Social Media Policy which suggests that any negative impact on work or the organization due to Social Media use can result in corrective action.

### *2. Develop a social media policy*

Develop an all-encompassing social media policy that restricts connectivity between staff members and campers/parents. If you already have a policy that restricts communication outside of camp, adding a line regarding social networks and email is essential. Be sure to include “no staff member is to ‘Friend’ campers or their family members on any social network.” See our suggested Social Media template for ideas (*located at: [www.ourkidsmedia.com/marketing/tools-for-camps](http://www.ourkidsmedia.com/marketing/tools-for-camps)*).

### *3. Facilitate appropriate social media use*

Many campers will seek to ‘Friend’ your camp staff. You can alleviate this by having your staff members create their own Fan Pages with specific guidelines and policies regarding their use. All messaging should reflect the persona of your camp and your staff member as a ‘Camp Counselor.’ You, as the camp director, should have administrative access to all of these Fan Pages so that you may monitor all communications between your staff members and the online universe. This should help fill the void of your campers looking to become Facebook friends with your staff members.

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Every summer camp has one ultimate goal and that is to provide a safe environment for all campers. Social media has the potential to challenge this goal by creating communications between staff and campers outside of camp on social networks. As a camp director, you have a responsibility to ensure that you are developing policies that protect campers, staff, and your organization and that your staff members are adhering to said policies.

*Greg Peters*

*Greg Peters is a former summer camp director turned social media strategist. He now develops social media policies and strategies for some of the world's best-known brands and is an internationally sought speaker on social media.*

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