

## **VR&E VBA Public Relations: Crafting the Right Message**

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### **Slide 1 – VR&E VBA Public Relations: Crafting the Right Message**

Welcome to the VR&E VBA Social Media Training, a training course for VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) Counselors.

I'd like to introduce Mr. Jason Davis, one of two Social Media Administrators for VBA's Web Communications team, who will be presenting the first part of this training.

### **Slide 2 — Learning Objectives**

Hi, I'm Jason.

As a Social Media Administrator for VBA Web Communications, I use (ever-changing) social media best practices to create and curate content for VBA social media channels. Our content is Veteran-centric, though we primarily deliver VA benefits news and information to our stakeholders.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to identify the following with 100% accuracy:

- What/Where/Who is Social Media (SM) and why it is important.
- How VA is using Social Media and who VA interacts with.
- How Social Media is relevant or beneficial to VSOC Counselors.
- Guidelines for using Social Media appropriately.

### **Slide 3 – The Who, What, Where & Why**

Social media is still in its infancy, even if we can remember its earliest days. We've been around it long enough to know it when we see it. But what is social media? Here is a condensed and widely-accepted explanation: Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks... it's a group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

### **Slide 4 – It Goes Where You Are**

Platforms, channels, programs, and Apps are places we digitally gather. And as you'll see in the next slide, social media is where we discuss where we gathered, where we're planning to gather, and also in the present tense, where we're gathering. Thus, wherever we were and wherever we are, there Social media went, and there it goes.

If that sounds cryptic, consider the following platforms and sites and channels and apps, and how you have personally used them:

Facebook/YouTube/Twitter/Instagram/Tumblr/Reddit/Google+/Pinterest/LinkedIn/Flickr/Pandora/SnapChat/Periscope/Runkeeper/Foursquare/Last.fm—and THOUSANDS more, including elements of America Online, Myspace, and Friendster.

social media has so infiltrated our lives that they have even spawned their own language, practices and customs.

“Selfie” was Oxford Dictionary’s 2013 word of the year. I’ll let you Google “belfie” on your own. “LOL,” or laugh out loud, is an internet slang acronym now used in face-to-face communication. Yes, people now phonetically say LOL: “That was so funny, I totally LOL’d.” And did you catch me above when I used “Google” as a verb? “Memes” are an idea, style or behavior that spreads from person to person in a culture. I’ve used them throughout this presentation. They are self-replicating, an inimitable phenomenon. #Hashtags are metadata tags that make it possible to group messages in an electronic search.

#### **Slide 5 – SM is Mobile**

Today’s social media is mobile. With the approaching “Internet of Things” upon us (your dishwasher and refrigerator and Nest thermostat and your car and many other things are connecting to the Internet and to your social media), social scientists question whether social media will ever be static again.

When this slide was created in late 2014, 40 percent of Americans were using smartphones, and 28 percent were using mobile social media daily. That number will only increase.

#### **Slide 6 – If Mobile, Then Always On**

Social media is highly interactive and addictive. If it’s mobile, then it’s always on.

#### **Slide 7 –Who Uses Social Media?**

So who uses social media? For better or worse, my grandmother.

#### **Slide 8—AND THIS GUY**

And this guy...you may have heard of her (Grumpy Cat)

#### **Slide 9— And Everyone else**

And everyone else too.

Celebrities/Science and Technology Experts and Influencers/Journalists and Media/Businesses and Brands and Attractions/Marketers/Recruiters/Major Sporting Events, Venues, and Teams/Politicians/local, state, and FEDERAL GOVERNMENT/PUSA/terrorists/and Parodies of them all

In fact, Probably YOU.

As consumers, we advocate product comparisons, user reviews, dating services, recalls, driving directions, streaming movies and music, discount and coupon services. And if we’re not consuming the product, we’re consuming its content.

Why? To connect. To search. To compare. To buy. TO be a part of a group or community. To follow our interests. To stay informed.

#### **Slide 10–Content is King**

When crafting a professional brand or image, content is king. Is there anything more disappointing than to find out the people behind your favorite brand are boring, can’t spell, or are otherwise not socially active?

What kind of content, How Important is that content, and Why? To be seen & be heard:

- Use relevant, targeted, and timely information (Is it a holiday weekend? Presidential election or other social significant event?).
- Strong photo and video content dominates
- Infographics and shareable content generate interest in your product or plan.
- Do you go to Facebook to read press releases and long blocks of text? *No, you do not, because that is boring, and boring fails on social media.*
- Thus, you and your content have to be real; but be as social as you are also professional.

### **Slide 11 – Most Re-Tweeted Photo**

In 2013, this 2012 photo was the most re-tweeted photo in the world. (Consider the timing of the photo, what the picture shows, the simplistic and far-reaching message attached to the photo, and the fervor it created; was that the intent?).

(Later in the year, Ellen’s all-star selfie at the Oscar’s surpassed BO’s photo with 1.3 million re-tweets in less than an hour)

The upshot?

People love and react to clear, evocative, and engaging photos.

### **Slide 12 – Targeted Infographs**

Unless you’re a photo agency, you’ll need to have a diverse content portfolio. For most platforms, mix up your photos with text, links, video, and infographs.

Here is an infographic we use for the VA Home Loan.

On its own, it’s a pretty graphic. There’s a story, and it teases the reader to move left to right. But how do you engage your audience?

Take a stand and make it interesting. Inject some personality. Ask a question. Invite your audience to participate.

Which house would you choose? I’d take the contemporary modern at the end of a cul-de-sac at the top of the hill...

### **Slide 13 – Open Data**

Whether you realize it or not, you’re collecting information on what does and doesn’t work on social media.

What do people react to? Is it data? Emotion? News? A mix of all of those things?

Give it back to them.

### **Slide 14 – Social Responsibility**

Consider, though: in many ways, we have a social responsibility.

Our message, our efforts, our reach impacts real lives. Our content wears many hats, but in a time of need, what is our role?

Here's a snapshot of a wonderful graph about how social media has become the tool to inform and aid during natural disasters (think about how quickly you receive news these days, about the weather, a hurricane or earthquake, or even a domestic act of violence).

Social media isn't our only means of communication, but I wonder... has it become our most effective?

#### **Slide 15 -- So how has social media influenced our lives?**

But don't just take my word for it. The following video demonstrates (to sobering and also inspirational effect) how social media has influenced our lives.

This YouTube video is titled, "#Socialnomics 2014 by Erik Qualman." Qualman is a best-selling author and keynote speaker on digital leadership. Source data for the statistics in the video is available in the book *Socialnomics*.

To view this video, return to the content in TMS at this time and click on the link for the video.

#### **Slide 16 -- How VA is Using SM, and who do we interact with?**

You've seen how Social Media has influenced our lives.

So how is the VA using social media, and who do we interact with? Here's the official stuff you need to know:

- VBA Web Communications has a duty for Outreach (38 U.S.C. 6303)
- VA Directive 6515, Use of Web-Based Collaboration Technologies
- The social media team uses these directives to find, contact, and assist Veterans in the digital arena

#### **Slide 17 -- Our Web Presence**

By now you should be well familiar with our web presence. You *are* familiar, right? Right?

Among the too many to list are the VBA website, VBA media and publications page, and VR&E's website.

You've seen the blogs, VAntage Point and HeyVBA!

Well, these aren't social media. They are some of the tools we use ON social media.

#### **Slide 18 - Facebook**

VBA uses Facebook to share VA benefits programs, news, and information to its Stakeholders, as well as refer them to other VA social media services.

VA, VBA, VHA and NCA have multiple Facebook pages, distinguished from our own administration. Our own VBA Facebook page has nearly 400,000 followers.

### **Slide 19 - Twitter**

VBA uses Twitter to connect with Media, Social Media Influencers, Stakeholders, etc.

That's our Twitter account right there at the top.

We connect with Student Veterans of America and other VSO's and groups.

We connect with schools that have VSOC programs.

We connect with influencers like Craig Newmark, and hundreds of other media outlets and reporters who cover VA.

### **Slide 20 - YouTube**

VBA uses YouTube for video hosting; the videos live on YouTube, but we share them on other platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and G+.

Our videos feature a mix of speakers, events, and benefits how-to's.

### **Slide 21 - Flickr**

VA uses Flickr for photo hosting and event documentation rather than as an easy standalone social platform.

### **Slide 22 - Google+**

VBA uses Google+ mostly the same way and with the same content as on Facebook, but Google+ has different features and tech more inclined for Google backend algorithm searches. Its future as a social platform is in question.

### **Slide 23 - Pinterest**

VBA developed a Pinterest page to connect with women Veterans; in practice, though, it's turned into a landing pad collection of images from special events. We now primarily use it to celebrate and honor Veterans—most notably for our weekly tribute.

### **Slide 24 - Social Media Instructions for VSOC Counselors**

Keeping in mind that VSOC sites are managed differently across the nation, this slide and the next two slides provide a few ideas and examples of ways to increase outreach efforts through the use of social media.

As VSOC Counselors, the first step you should take is to develop an outreach plan. As you develop your plan, determine which events will benefit from social media exposure. Meet with your VR&E Officer, RO Director, or Public Affairs officer to solicit any ideas, suggestions, or feedback for your plan. You should also reach out to your VSOC Program Lead at Central Office as well.

Your social media plan should include:

- A list or schedule of known events
- Materials that may be needed for the events
- Staff requirements
- Drafts of social media content that you intend to use
- SOP's for handling different social media platforms and content (sent out by the school, VBA, SVA, etc.)

VSOC Counselors should meet with their colleges/universities Public Affairs Office, Veteran Student Services, or other appropriate office(s) to discuss outreach or social media events, develop rapport, and discuss social media best practices and review current institution/facility/administration/ practices.

#### **Slide 25 – Social Media Instructions for VSOC Counselors, continued**

Since the social media plan will more than likely feature reoccurring events, VSOC counselors should be able to take the plan at the end of the academic year and update it pretty easily for the next year.

When drafting social media content for Facebook, Twitter, etc., VSOC counselors should first prepare draft social media content. Again, VSOC counselors are encouraged to work with your local RO Public Affairs Office and/or VR&E Central Office VSOC Program Lead.

Remember: All content must be approved by the VR&E Officer, and/or RO Director, as appropriate, before being posted to Facebook, Twitter, etc. through your school, community, or on our VBA sites.

**Colleges/Universities/Media sites** - have content approved by your school's Public Affairs office/social media team.

**VBA sites** - To have approved content post on VBA's Facebook and Twitter sites, VSOC counselors.

#### **Slide 26 – Social Media Instructions for VSOC Counselors, continued**

VR&E Central Office wants to hear from you about the great work you are doing on campus. As you know, we are always seeking good news stories.

Social Media is another avenue to spread the news, not only with Central Office, but among the VSOC world as well.

Once your social media content has been approved, share it with other VSOC Counselors who may be interested. Inform your VREO about other VSOC social media posts and request permission to retweet, or repost.

Use videos, photos, and images for posts that will attract viewers and pique their interest. In this case, the less written the better.

And finally, reach out to the community. Work with your local community to find out what events or activities are currently going on that may be beneficial to student Veterans and,

Collaborate on outreach events and social media to share community wide.

But please remember that approval is always needed before any content can go public.

### **Slide 27 – Using Social Media Platforms**

Now it's one thing to have social media platforms, it's another thing to use them well.

As VSOC Counselors, many of you will be utilizing your school's social media platforms. Take advantage of it.

This is a great way to share information and get the word out about events happening at your campus.

With that said, it is important to remember that any and all social media posts must be reviewed and approved by your VR&E Officer and/or RO Public Affairs Officer.

### **Slide 28 – SM Successes**

To be successful, you have to think outside the cookie box, know your audience, and continually change your approach. What does that mean?

Think outside the cookie box when crafting your social media posts. Who is your audience? What are their interests? What social media content would they engage with? Can you captivate them with little-known information, amazing facts, or on a simpler level, hitting them in “the feels” emotionally?

Then, what action do you want from your community? What will they do with your presence in their social sphere? Are you customer service? A news site? How will your community use you? What does the VSOC or VR&E gain from using social media?

The following slides are successful examples of thinking outside the cookie box, instances where social media has been literally driven up sales, saved countless lives, or informed large numbers of people in a short amount of time.

### **Slide 29 – Honey Boo Boo's Cookie Box**

Honey Boo Boo, young reality TV star, bought a Facebook ad to sell Girl Scout cookies at \$3.50 per box. With her audience and multitude of fans, you could say she shipped a LOT of cookies...

If we break it down, the issue was fundraising. How to sell more cookies? Standing in front of the grocery store is what every Girl Scout does, but Honey Boo Boo took advantage of her popularity, added some social media, and voila, instant success.

Takeaway: Know your audience; think outside the cookie box.

### **Slide 30 – You can help**

You may have seen that social media is literally saving lives. Community advocacy groups, hotlines, call centers, concerned friends and family—these and more are leveraging social media to help people. Such is the case with the CNN story above: “Websites become tool for stopping veteran suicides.” When you read the story, you see that “websites” really means “Facebook.” The groups are literally patrolling social media sites looking for those who publicly display symptoms that can lead one to suicide, and then they're helping.



Aside from the fact that these groups are saving lives, how else is this a social media success?

Think back a few slides. CONTENT IS KING, including imagery and video that catches attention. If we're shuffling between five open tabs in two different browsers, scrolling Facebook or Twitter and barely reading headlines, what is going to catch YOUR attention?

As a VSOC, or even any social media administrator in any capacity, you encounter community members of various backgrounds, and how these people interact in social media will be different from what maybe you expect. By different, I mean crass, salty, offensive, uneducated, uninformed, and in some cases, with harmful, racist, or unacceptable content.

Honey Boo Boo thought outside the box. CNN is good with imagery. But how is VBA's social media team succeeding?

### **Slide 31 - Create or Curate**

We create and curate content that Veterans and their dependents and survivors and supporters find interesting.

In this case, I asked our community: "Did you know Maude was a Marine?"

How do I make content interesting? I slipped in this bit of information: "While no one knows why she denied serving..."

The Internet ran wild with speculation. It affirmed an urban myth and was seen by 2.2 million people in 2 days.

With social media, some people have great content, some people make content great. The key is creating or curating content that you yourself would consume.

Next we will discuss how Social Media and the VetSuccess on Campus program works. I'm going to hand it over to VR&E for an in-depth look.

### **Slide 32 - Social Media & VSOC**

Thank you, Jason. My name is Terry Brown, and I am a Training Specialist on the V&RE Service Training Team. I would like to first provide contextual background about VSOC Counselors' roles in the Social Media arena. VR&E's policy on the use of social media is more restrictive than the VA-wide policy for use of Social Media, as provided in VA Directive 6515. Our additional restrictions are based on the nature of the counseling relationship, and are consistent with the CRC Code of Ethics governing use of technology and media presentations. Lastly, we consulted with VA's Office of General Counsel when updating our social media policy.

With that being said, how is Social Media relevant or beneficial to VSOC?

- Partner with your schools to get the word out about events and other news related to student Veterans
- Learn and share VA news and success stories from other VSOC sites (you should be following and engaging, which is just as important as sharing)



- Learn who else is serving Veterans in your community; whether that's the Student Veterans of America, other student Veteran groups, or other community and non-profits, etc.

**Remember:**

- As VSOC Counselors, you should not use your personal social media sites to communicate with Veterans, Servicemembers, and/or families regarding any VA-related issues.
- Nor are you permitted to respond as a VR&E employee to any posting on social media sites unless officially designated by a senior management official.

**Slide 33 – Social Media & VSOC (cont'd)**

- VSOC Counselors cannot have individual VSOC social media accounts for their school on social media platforms, however VSOCs can follow social media sites through their private accounts.
- VR&E staff are expected to adhere to VA-wide policies on the use of social media described in VA Directive 6515.
- Employees who are not officially authorized to speak on behalf of VA must never state or infer their communications represent VA's official position.
- When acting in or outside of their official capacities, VR&E staff must remember that they are personally responsible for the content they publish on social media, and be mindful that what is published will be public for a long time; in some cases, a personal disclaimer should be written to indicate that the speaker is not representing the VA or their respective program.

**Slide 34 – Confidentiality & Privacy**

As VSOC Counselors, you are the face of VA on your respective campuses, therefore ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of our Veterans is of utmost importance.

To ensure confidentiality and privacy concerns in situations emerging from developing technology, VSOC Counselors:

- Should not use their personal social media sites to communicate with Veterans, Servicemembers, and/or families regarding any VA-related discussions nor
- Will not respond as a VR&E employee to any posting on social media sites unless officially designated by a senior management official.

**Slide 35 – Prohibitions/Restrictions of SM**

VSOC Counselors should not communicate with Veterans, Servicemembers, and/or families through social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Skype) to conduct official VA business.

VSOC Counselors are responsible for protecting Veterans' privacy and ensuring that Veterans' PII are not communicated in a public forum.

### **Slide 36 – What’s Next?**

So what should you do next?

Well, you should be following VA social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter to learn more about VA benefits and programs.

- Follow your schools, local partners, and SVA chapters.
- Connect with your school’s public affairs officer and if applicable, your local student Veterans organizations; ask them to also share VA news and information through their own accounts.
- And lastly, consider new ways to use social media (think outside the cookie box).

### **Slide 37 – In Closing**

In closing, when used appropriately, social media is a great tool to inform, assist, and connect with Veterans and Servicemembers. However, VR&E Staff should be mindful of the VA Directive 6515 and VR&E’s policy when using social media.

### **Slide 38 – Social Media Policy References**

Here is a list of Social Media references that were used to create this training module.

Please refer to these references if further clarification is needed.

In particular, please make note of VA’s New Social Media Policy as it serves as the arching umbrella for all social media related policies within VA.

### **Slide 39 – Questions?**

We would like to give special thanks to Jason Davis and our BAS partners for VBA’s Web Communications.

If you have any questions regarding social media on the VBA WEB communications, please be sure to email your District Field Liaison.

This concludes our training for today. Thanks for your participation and for your dedicated service to our Nation’s Veterans and Servicemembers.