SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

The Auburn University social media strategic plan was approved in this form in 2021. It guides content strategy for flagship accounts. Campus units are encouraged to incorporate the university goals into their social strategy.

Objective
To deliver coordinated and consistent communication that advances Auburn's Strategic Goals through the university's flagship social media accounts, using diverse, creative and engaging content steered by the Office of Communications and Marketing (OCM) in collaboration with units across campus; and to establish and share guidelines with other campus units that manage their own social media accounts.

Goals for Auburn University flagship accounts
Advance the mission. Demonstrate how Auburn prepares high-achieving, diverse and motivated students to excel in a globally competitive, culturally diverse and rapidly changing environment.
Promote Auburn University. Increase pride, engagement and foster community among university stakeholders by sharing content that facilitates connections with the university and reinforces shared values.
Engage and inform students. Assist student recruitment and retention by sharing content that elevates the Auburn experience.
Reinforce the reputation. Advance the university's reputation by promoting its achievements, highlighting its role as a cultural resource for the community and developing and protecting its brand.
Enhance the culture of philanthropy. Share compelling stories that demonstrate how private gifts provide the university with a margin of excellence and celebrate those who support the university.

Tactics
- Tell stories (text, photos and video) that highlight the individualized attention students receive in and out of the classroom.
- Work with campus partners to share content that informs and engages prospective students and their families.
- Reflect Auburn's diverse scholarly community by highlighting undergraduate, graduate and faculty research.
- Share content that routinely reflects the diversity of the student population.

- Highlight impact that Auburn has in the state, as well as around the world.
- Share stories about successful alumni outcomes, including careers and personal passions.
- Connect with target audiences in the coming year using email databases and lookalike audiences
- Grow specific engagement with target audiences through paid promotions using content from individual profiles

Promote Auburn University

Foster pride by highlighting university accomplishments, including academic honors, points of pride, athletics, student leadership, civic engagement and other distinctions.
Elevate the visibility of educational, alumni, cultural, athletics and recreational events and programs.

Engage and inform students

Collaborate with units across campus and regularly monitor all key social media channels to amplify information about upcoming campus events and programs, and promote safe, healthy behaviors and choices.
Monitor and, when appropriate, rebroadcast student or fan posts, tweets, photos and videos.
Share official updates during campus emergencies, when appropriate, as informed by the Department of Campus Safety and Security.

Reinforce the reputation

Promote faculty, staff, student, and alumni achievements.
Recognize students involved in civic engagement and leadership development opportunities.
Promote Auburn's role as a cultural resource for the campus and surrounding community by amplifying information about events and other programs.
Promote Auburn's expanding prominence in the state and other regional markets.
Monitor social media channels and, when appropriate, respond to posts, tweets, photos, and videos, or bring them to the attention of the proper campus unit.

Enhance the culture of philanthropy

Share information that educates the audience about the important role private gifts play in supporting students and creating a margin of excellence.
Celebrate those who support the Auburn by making gifts of all sizes.
Working with the Development team to promote content that supports the messaging of upcoming giving opportunities and campaigns.
Promote alumni events and initiatives that engage alumni and friends with the university.

Strategic overview for each flagship account:

Facebook (facebook.com/AuburnU)

Audience
The university's Facebook audience of 354,000+ followers largely aligns with the platform's demographic of almost an equal percentage of male and female followers. The audience's top age groups are:
1. 25-34
2. 35-44
3. 18-24

Most of the university's audience is located in Alabama, with our top following based in Auburn, Birmingham, Montgomery, Huntsville and Mobile. Our audience is most active from 5-7 p.m.

Objectives
As illustrated by the demographic information, the university's page reaches a broad group of Auburn stakeholders. Messages need to serve the broadest possible audience while still engaging with followers and meeting the university's strategic goals. Here are the university's objectives for the Facebook page:
- Build awareness of and generate goodwill toward the Auburn brand.
- Engage, entertain, and inform followers about activities and news related to the university.
- Celebrate institutional, alumni, student, faculty and staff successes and marks of excellence.
- Drive higher enrollment, giving and event attendance numbers.

Content
Facebook wants to host content that keeps users on the platform for as long as possible. Facebook's algorithms highly prioritize live, photographic and video content and tend to restrict content with links that lead users off the platform. The university is increasingly working to create stories that have more photo galleries and videos included in them.
The university avoids using images with text in them as they go against web accessibility standards. The university rarely shares images, memes or GIFs from non-Auburn related users. Facebook users tend to react negatively to content that does not directly relate to the page they follow. The university avoids viral content that is not tied to its stated objectives so as not to devalue the brand.

Posting frequency

Research has shown that posting more than twice a day can hinder the overall reach of a page's posts. Research has also shown that a Facebook page should post content at least three times a week to keep an audience engaged. Based on this data and the need to reach multiple audiences, the university shares one to two posts on Facebook daily. When there are two posts scheduled, one is set for the mid-morning and the second for the mid-afternoon. The timing of these posts correlates with times research has shown there is higher social media usage. Posting about similar topics on the same day is avoided to keep posts from cannibalizing each other.

Voice

The Facebook audience is the broadest the university serves on social media. The university strives to maintain a friendly, conversational tone. The university encourages followers to ask questions and otherwise engage with the page and other followers about the content that is shared.

Analytics

Each month, Auburn produces a report analyzing the previous month's performance. The report shows successes and failures and helps with general plans for future content. The university primarily track the growth rate, number of engaged users, and the most engaging posts. Facebook's native "insights" page is used to gather this data.

Growth strategy

In addition to growing its Facebook presence organically through the posting of interesting and relevant content, the university utilizes Facebook's native advertising suite. Facebook Blueprint is an online tool that allows users to learn about running ads through both Facebook and Instagram. Auburn will also seek to expand its Facebook following and grow engagement with that base in the coming year, with a specific goal of pinpointing targeted audiences based on strategic advancement goals (donors, alumni, businesses, fans) by way of paid promotions (using specific email lists/lookalike audiences/profile targeting by age, gender, location, interests), and non-paid engagement tactics (researching key constituents to determine if they follow Auburn in social and, if not, sending them an invite and following up afterward with specific messaging based on their social profile interests). To accomplish this initiative, we recommend the acquisition of a strategic social media management system (see details at bottom of this document). Budgeted funding will also be needed to support any ongoing initiative of paid posts.

<u>Instagram</u> (instagram.com/AuburnU)

Audience
The university's Instagram audience of 158,000+ is young and primarily female. The audience's top age groups are:
1. 25-34
2. 18-24
3. 35-44

Most of the university's audience is located in Alabama, with our top following based in Auburn, Birmingham, Huntsville, Atlanta (GA) and Montgomery.

Objectives
Based on the demographics of its followers, the university's primary goal on Instagram is to reach prospective students, current students, and young alumni. Here are the main objectives:
- Build brand awareness and goodwill.
- Engage and grow the audience.
- Create stories letting users know about events and activities taking place at Auburn.
- Share engaging images of campus, featured individuals and events.

Content
Instagram is a visual medium first and foremost. For the feed, the university shares photos and short videos that give users a glimpse into what is happening at Auburn. Analytics show the best posts are photos of campus, athletics-related material and videos of Samford Hall. The university has also been sharing short, looping videos and has seen high engagement from them. Links to events and stories on the platform are shared via Instagram Stories.

Posting frequency
The university posts four to six times per week. For Instagram Stories, the goal is to have at least one slide up a day during the work week. Stories are primarily used on the weekend for event coverage/live content. University followers are most active in the evening, so the account begins posting in the afternoon. If multiple posts are shared a day, they are spaced out by at least a couple hours.

Voice
To create content Instagram users want to see, the university has a lighter tone than it would on other platforms. On Instagram stories, the account is much quicker to share memes, gifs, and stickers than the university would on Facebook or Twitter. Humor and puns are used when appropriate, hashtags are used frequently and users are tagged whenever possible. Even still, the university takes great strides to not come off as overly irreverent about the brand and avoids chasing the newest viral craze. Posts

about academic success and research are generally presented as originally posted in the Newsroom.

Analytics

Each month, Auburn produces a report analyzing the month's performance. In it, successes and failures are noted as well as general plans for future content. Growth rate, average number of likes and average number of comments are the main numbers gathered. Instagram does not offer as robust of an analytics backend as Facebook does, so much of this material is gathered manually. Information on demographics and growth can be obtained for business account users on the application itself.

Growth strategy

The university has allowed the account to grow organically by posting content relevant to young alumni and current and prospective student audiences in a manner consistent with the social media channel's best practices. Auburn will also seek to expand its young alumni and donor audience on Instagram and grow its engagement with that base in the coming year, with a specific goal of pinpointing targeted individuals/groups based on strategic advancement goals via paid promotions (using specific email lists/lookalike audiences/profile targeting by age, gender, location, interests), and non-paid engagement tactics (researching key young alumni to determine if they follow Auburn in social and, if not, send them an invite and follow up afterward with specific messaging based on their social profile interests). To accomplish this initiative, we recommend the acquisition of a strategic social media management system (see details at bottom of this document). Budgeted funding will also be needed to support any ongoing initiative of paid posts.

Twitter (twitter.com/AuburnU)

Audience

In general Twitter attracts a slightly older demographic than Instagram and a slightly younger one than Facebook, though it trails far beyond both in total audience size. With 136,000+ followers, the flagship account's audience is comparable in size with its peer institutions and comprises a variety of key stakeholders including alumni, students and staff, students, friends of Auburn, media and institutional accounts representing groups on and off campus.

Objectives

Due to the wide variety of stakeholders on Twitter and the nature of the medium, the university shares more and varied content, at a higher frequency, and a wider variety

of content than on any other social media platform. These are the main objectives of the account:

- Provide timely updates to students and faculty/staff about campus news, traffic, emergencies, etc.
- Offer general customer service for the university by engaging with stakeholders, including alumni, students and prospective students and their parents, who may have questions or concerns.
- Provide an ongoing conversation about the university and the things happening on campus.
- Build awareness of and generate goodwill toward the Auburn brand.
- Engage, entertain and inform the account's followers.
- Celebrate the university's successes and marks of excellence.
- Drive higher enrollment, giving and event attendance.

Content

Twitter began as a channel best suited to report time-sensitive news. It is now used in a variety of ways depending on the user. Experts share commentary and engage with followers. Celebrities promote their activities and brand. Athletic teams highlight stars and provide running commentary of competitions. The university uses a variety of content to meet its strategic goals outlined above due to the wide range of people and institutions who can be found on the social media channel. Twitter allows for some versatility in postings, though almost all of the university's tweets include a multimedia element to better attract notice. The university tweets story links, photo galleries, polls, videos, Twitter threads (linked tweets elaborating on a theme) and GIFs. To a lesser extent, the university also posts live videos and does live tweeting from events such as important athletic contests and major campus events. Through retweets the university amplifies the voices of various units across campus and external sources that share positive news about the university.

Posting frequency

The university tweets between four to six times a day with about half as many retweets, from roughly 7 a.m. into the evening hours, taking advantage of peak hour usage. This frequency is compatible with Twitter's algorithm, which provides a lifespan for each tweet of under 20 minutes. This makes Twitter a much more ephemeral medium than other social media channels like Facebook and Instagram. The constant churn enables the university to share a diverse set of content that targets its many stakeholder audiences.

Voice

Auburn utilizes a conversational but professional tone when tweeting, integrating hashtags and Twitter handles where appropriate to gain followers and to extend the reach of posts. Auburn's social media manager edits all tweets to maintain the integrity of the institution's voice. Twitter's character limit requires that tweets are

concise. The university strives for clarity and uses links, multimedia and threads when appropriate to expand on the original message. When appropriate, a lighter tone is taken when engaging with prospective students, current students and alumni with heavy use of relevant hashtags.

Analytics

Using Twitter's native analytical tools, the university tracks impressions, overall engagements, retweets, likes, link clicks, impressions per tweets and engagement rate. The social media manager also tracks which tweets are gaining traction, which type of content is drawing the most and least engagement, and which tweets are leading to clicks. Tracking the latter also informs the university's strategy in promoting online content such as stories and videos.

Growth strategy

Overall, Twitter had suffered multiple quarters of decreases in active users prior to a modest increase again in early 2019. The @AuburnU account has matured and continues to show steady growth. The university uses a variety of strategies to increase its following, thereby expanding the reach of its tweets and messaging:

- Include hashtags and Twitter handles when appropriate in order to expand the reach of tweets and spread awareness to potential followers.
- Engage with users by retweeting, liking and replying to relevant tweets.
- Post content relevant to important stakeholder groups, particularly students and alumni.
- Promote the Twitter account in online and print materials.

Auburn will also seek to expand its number of Twitter followers and engagement with key constituents in the coming year by pinpointing targeted audiences based on strategic advancement goals (donors, alumni) by way of paid promotions (using specific email lists/lookalike audiences/profile targeting by age, gender, location, interests), and non-paid engagement tactics (researching key constituents to determine if they follow Auburn in social and, if not, sending them an invite and following up afterward with specific messaging based on their social profile interests). To accomplish this initiative, we recommend the acquisition of a strategic social media management system (see details at bottom of this document). Budgeted funding will also be needed to support any ongoing initiative of paid posts.

LinkedIn (linkedin.com/company/auburn-university)

Audience
LinkedIn attracts a professional and highly educated audience. The university's page has 215,000+ followers.
The audience's top seniority groups are:
1. Entry (young alumni)
2. Senior (donor targets)
3. Director

The highest job category for the university's followers is higher education, but there is strong representation from the health care industry, construction, IT services and financial services. Most of the university's audience is located in Alabama, with our top following based in Auburn, Atlanta (GA), Birmingham, Montgomery and Huntsville. Our audience is most active from 7-9 p.m.

Objectives
Based on the nature of LinkedIn and the university's following, the main objectives are to provide content and resources that connect with alumni, career-minded prospective and current students, and potential recruits for university jobs.

Content
The university shares points of pride, student and alumni success stories, online and print stories showcasing scholarship and civic engagement, and other posts promoting the value of a degree from Auburn University.

Posting frequency
The university posts or shares content about five times a week.

Voice
Auburn utilizes a more formal, but still conversational, tone on LinkedIn compared with the one used on other social media channels. This matches the audience and the channel, which is primarily used by professionals and college students as a career networking tool. LinkedIn content is much less focused on the "social lives" of followers; therefore, the university rarely shares more light-hearted content that would be common on Instagram or Facebook.

Analytics
The university tracks metrics on its non-job ad related posts. Specifically, these include impressions, clicks, various forms of engagement (comments, shares, etc.), and click-through rates. The university also uses LinkedIn's native analytical tools to spot trends among visitors to the university page and to gain a sense of the overall follower demographics.

Growth strategy
The university has allowed the account to grow organically over the years, by posting relevant content, by maintaining a brand-appropriate presence through LinkedIn various changes and by engaging with followers who comment on the university's updates. Auburn will also seek to expand its LinkedIn audience and grow its engagement with influential business leaders in the coming year by pinpointing targeted audiences based on strategic advancement goals (donors, alumni, businesses) by way of paid promotions (using specific email lists/lookalike audiences/profile targeting by age, gender, location, interests, salary), and non-paid engagement tactics (researching key constituents to determine if they follow Auburn in social and, if not, sending them an invite and following up afterward with specific messaging based on their social profile interests). To accomplish this initiative, we recommend the acquisition of a strategic social media management system. Budgeted funding will also be needed to support any ongoing initiative of paid posts.

SOCIAL MEDIA BEST PRACTICES

TOP 10

1. Be consistent using the Auburn University brand guidelines. Only use approved logos, official colors and fonts. Certain social channels have very limited font options, so we can provide you with acceptable substitute fonts from the channel's available options.

2. Know and research your audiences: demographics/psychographics are key to understanding the content that will resonate (or not).

3. Build a presence on the social media platforms that reach your audiences—you may not need to have a presence on every platform.

4. Utilize one universal handle across platforms as this will establish credibility and familiarity.

5. Optimize your bio section to have your auburn.edu website and accurate "about" information. Use the word "official."

6. Have a content strategy and calendar. Being strategic with posts is more important than being clever.

7. Optimize graphics, photos and videos for each platform's requirements. This includes resolution, sizing and length. Remain in accessibility compliance in these areas, including fonts in graphics, alt text, captions and hashtags.

8. Use appropriate hashtags and Auburn verbiage. Write your posts for your specific audience to read.

9. Use social listening and pay attention to your audience's feedback. Allow your audience to police themselves during any public discourse.

10. Check your accounts daily—delete and report spam. Monitor comment sections and stay aware of what is happening nationally and locally to avoid appearing tone deaf.

TOP 5 IN COLLABORATING WITH OCM SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Allow the main University social media accounts to post news stories first. We can coordinate with you to provide content calendar details.

2. Repost and share any official University news posted by the main Auburn accounts.

3. Tag @auburnu in your posts so our accounts will receive a notification and can interact with you.

4. Rewrite captions for your specific audience when reposting a news story from your college.

5. Follow other official University accounts and interact with them to foster the online Auburn community.