Five Ways to Handle Negative Comments on Social Media

For all its benefits, social media can sometimes be a surly place. Most of the time, the value of promoting your library and being connected to your community outweighs the negativity, but nasty comments online can take the wind out of your sails — and leave you wondering what to do. The OLC's [Marketing and Public Relations Division](#) has created a Top 5 list of ways to handle negative comments on your library's social media pages.

1. Write a social media policy

Develop and post community guidelines for your library's social media accounts. Spell out clear rules for engaging with your library and other followers on your pages. Be sure to have the policy approved by the proper channels - your supervisor, director, board of trustees, etc. Then, post it somewhere visibly on your social media accounts so that those who want to engage are aware of what's allowed and what's not. While this won't deter anyone who is bound and determined to be a nuisance, it will help justify any actions you need to take later.

Examples:

https://cpl.org/aboutthelibrary/usingthelibrary/policy-on-the-use-of-cpls-social-media-sites/

https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/socialmediaguidelines

2. Don't engage

Trolls want attention. So, the best way to deal with them is to make it look like their comments or posts are worthless. When they light up your comment section with negativity, the best way to quickly put out their fire is to ignore them. Don't waste your time responding and arguing with a troll—it is exactly what they want. They want to upset you, don't give them that pleasure.

Now, if someone clearly violates your rules of engagement, use your established policy to remove their posts or hide their comments. Deleting vs. hiding comments is always a judgement call based on the egregiousness of the comment.

Never ignore abuse directed to your followers. Most of the time, it is recommended to just ignore trolls. However, you shouldn't overlook when they direct abuse to your followers. When it becomes personal, then it becomes a different matter. Recent examples of such abuses

include asking followers to invest in a "business" or scheme to comments with a romantic and sexual interest aimed at followers. Remove these harmful posts. This is where your established policy will act as a reminder of the acceptable behaviors for comments.

3. Lean on your fans

More often than not, your supporters will jump to your defense and course correct an outrageous comment. Take a moment and assess the situation before getting involved and adding fuel to the fire. If a library supporter makes the situation worse, then post general comments about your library's approach to civility online, such as:

> "_____ *library requests that all* comments *posted on our* social media *channels* be respectful *and courteous.*"

Remember — most of the time, your fans will take care of the troll for you.

4. Respond with facts

If you find yourself engaging in a conversation that includes a troll, you should be intentional on how you respond and always answer with facts. Avoid emotionally defensive or charged messages that can encourage further bad behaviors.

Limit yourself to respond solely with facts. It's common practice to provide a statement when inaccurate information is being spread, but if it's something that warrants a conversation, try to take it offline or use direct messaging to address it privately.

5. Generate positivity on your page

The more positivity you can build on your page, the less damage someone can inflict with negative comments and harsh reviews. Think of your posts as brand-building and showcase all the positive things your library is doing for your community. Focus less on changing the mind of the "troll" and more on what kind of impression you want to make on others. Flood your page with stories that highlight programs and services for all ages, such as:

- early childhood literacy, Kindergarten readiness, storytime fun
- homework help centers and STEM classes
- job search assistance and training, services for small businesses
- feeding sites for both children and adults impacted by food insecurity
- access to the internet, WiFi hotspots, new tech, makerspaces
- community partnerships and outreach activities
- *and the list could go on and on!*

BONUS: Managing your social media accounts can be time consuming. Prepare now by composing answers to frequently-asked questions.

Examples:

> *"Hello @name, thanks for your interest in _____ program. Please take a look at this page [insert link] on our website."*
>
> *"Thank you for your inquiry @name. Today we're open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. We are looking forward to your visit."*
>
> *"Our library is closed December 24-25, but our library website is open 24/7."*
>
> *"Thank you for reaching out, @name! I'm sorry to hear you're having trouble with _____. Direct message us or call the library at [insert #], so we can help you.*