



## Building up your school's online profile

Social media gives schools unlimited potential to reach existing and prospective stakeholders. However, if it's used badly, social media can have devastating and damaging repercussions. We've put together this handy guide, highlighting some common mistakes that you should avoid.



## Why do schools need a reputation online?

Regardless of your school's history, the age of your school or the type of students you enrol, your reputation should be important. Parents and students don't just rely on prospectuses and open days when choosing a school. Instead, there is more emphasis on word of mouth and your online reputation, formed from online reviews, your website and social media presence – or lack of.

Sometimes having no reputation online can also be detrimental to your school. Moulding a positive profile using your school website and social media can really pay dividends in the future.

# What can affect your school's profile?

Various factors can affect your standing online and in the local community. To ensure you are able to manage all outlets, we've compiled this list of internal and external factors you should bear in mind.

## Internal

- **Intermittent school updates, or none.** This includes social posts and website updates – if parents and students don't know what your school is getting up to, how will they know about all the great stuff going on? Sharing your school news and promoting exciting activities can not only rally support from current students, but also make your school look appealing to potential pupils.
- **Mismatched brand voice across various channels.** You may use several different marketing outlets to promote your school and communicate with parents, so ensuring one tone of voice is vital. Focusing on too many values or confusing your stakeholders could damage your brand and complicate your message. Clearly defining your ethos is a great place to start, and can help to solidify your positive message online.
- **Not cross promoting your social channels or school website.** Having so many marketing tools at your disposal is both a good and bad thing. As we have mentioned, neglecting them is not a great idea, as is not cross promoting your website across Twitter, and visa versa.

## External

- **Not effectively dealing with negative news.** In the unfortunate and unlikely event that negative news is circulated about your school, you should have a pre-determined way of dealing with news. This range from news stories in the local press to negative reviews on forums.
- **Not responding to negative Ofsted inspections on your school website.** Ofsted inspections can be stressful, and receiving bad news is never easy. Something as simple as updating your website homepage with a note from the headteacher, highlighting the improvements you're making can help, and make your stakeholders feel confident that you're dealing with the situation

## Building up your school's online profile



### Assessing how your school is currently perceived

Carrying out research to establish how students, parents and teachers perceive your school can help you understand your current profile, and where you need to improve certain areas. This is known as a stakeholder analysis, and will traditionally contain a range of questions including their perception of your school, it's competitors and any areas of online communication they think need improving.

Sampling as many stakeholders as possible is the best way to gain a representative sample and the most accurate perception of your school's online profile. Using Google or Twitter to search for comments on your school can also be a great resource.



### What to do with your results

To take your analysis one step further you could invite some stakeholders to take part in focus groups, discussing the answers and helping you to gain a deeper insight into your schools online reputation. These results can help you define your new online communications plan, and outline what steps you need to take.



### Next steps: maintaining your schools reputation online.

Below we've outlined the next steps you should take following your stakeholder analysis.



If you haven't already, set up a school marketing department. Appointing a teacher and group of students to manage marketing can help you take charge of your school's online profile.



Define a marketing plan and post schedule. Once you have established your marketing team and your tone of voice, it's best to set up your plan of action of the upcoming months. Scheduling tweets and newsletters is a great place to start, to ensure you have a solid base to add additional, reactive marketing to.



Focus on both current and prospective students and parents. You have more than one audience at your school, so your new marketing team will have to create communications that cater to this.



Plan for the future. Reactive marketing requires your school to respond to short notice news or comments, both positive and negative. Pre-empting any news stories, school events or Ofsted inspections with easy to edit press release templates and a plan of action can help your school manage your online profile.