UNITED GRAND LODGE
OF ENGLAND

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Summary

Social media platforms have become an increasingly popular channel for communication in the 21st century. They provide ways to share content with a wide audience, and as such are excellent tools for sharing information about Freemasonry and Masonic activities. However, as with any powerful tool, social media need to be used with caution, as incorrect use can have a damaging impact on Freemasonry's public image, and therefore on Freemasonry itself. This document has been written to assist individuals and Masonic units to use these platforms effectively, confidently, and within the compass of propriety.

Social media and Freemasonry

Scope

This policy applies to posts made by Freemasons on all social media platforms, whether those platforms are open to the public (such as Facebook and Twitter), or just to Freemasons (such as Porchway, a web-based portal set up by the Metropolitan Grand Lodge of London). The term 'post' refers to any action taken on social media, whether sharing original content, making a comment on content someone else has shared (including 'liking' Facebook posts and Tweets), or re-sharing content to one's own connections.

Masonic websites do not fall within the scope of this document. The reason for this is, broadly speaking, that web content is static: the creator of the website adds content which can be viewed by others, but not significantly interacted with. While websites provide a one-way method for dissemination of information, social media platforms are by nature vehicles for conversations about any content shared, as anything posted to them can be commented on or re-shared to other members' networks. The purpose of this document is to emphasise the highly public nature of social media channels, and ensure Freemasons use these powerful channels for public conversation in a responsible way.

Digital Ambassadorship

As a citizen every Freemason has a duty not to engage in conduct which is contrary to the law of the land. As a Freemason he also has a duty not to engage in activity which may bring Freemasonry into disrepute.

Excerpt from Rule 179 of the Book of Constitutions

It is important to note that any interactions a Freemason has on social media may be visible to anyone in the world, for, while it is possible to restrict the audience of one's posts, it is not possible to control how someone will react to them. A private post can easily be shared and reposted publicly by anyone who has access to it. Even if an original post is deleted or edited, someone could already have shared it in its original form. As far as social media are concerned, everything one does or says is permanently recorded, and there is no such thing as a truly private post.

Therefore, acting as an ambassador for Freemasonry online is part of a Freemason's duty. Rules (civic and Masonic) and expectations that apply to one's daily conduct apply equally within the digital sphere, as comments may be taken out of context and used as representative of the views of the United Grand Lodge of England.

Here is a list of behaviours and topics to avoid when posting on social media. These apply to personal accounts, as well as to accounts that individual Freemasons may manage on behalf of a Lodge, Province, District, or other Masonic entity. They apply to any Freemason who has identified himself as a Freemason online, whether he is posting in Masonic or non-Masonic channels. This list is not comprehensive, but is intended to act as an introductory guide to topics or behaviours that are considered inappropriate for posting to any audience on social media.

When posting on social media platforms, a Freemason must not:

- produce, link to, or refer to any content that is illegal, defamatory, or likely to offend others
- cause or contribute to any hostile or unproductive arguments, or exercise any private piques or quarrels (that is to say, good-natured debate is fine, but one should be prepared to abandon the exchange if it ceases to be friendly)
- discuss or allude to any of the Masonic Signs, Tokens, or Words (see the Obligation of the First Degree)
- claim to speak for any Masonic body (e.g. a Lodge, a Province or District, a charity or committee, or UGLE) on whose behalf he is not expressly authorised to speak (for instance, membership of a Lodge in London does not give one the authority to speak on behalf of Metropolitan Grand Lodge)
- identify anyone else as a Freemason without his explicit consent
- contain any personal information about any Freemason without his explicit consent, such as address, telephone number, or anything else covered by the Data Protection Act 1998: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents
- attempt to use Masonic channels as a vehicle for personal profit, or for any other form of self-promotion
- criticise UGLE or any other legitimate Masonic authority

Best practice

This section provides some guidance on the kinds of content to share using social media platforms. This is by no means an exhaustive list — rather, it is intended to stimulate the mind to consider what other types of content might be interesting to one's social media audience. That is to say, a Freemason may share content or participate in conversations online as long as the content or conversation presents Freemasonry in a positive light, does not contravene any of the principles outlined in the Digital Ambassadorship section above, and is relevant to the channel in which it is being posted.

Subject matter

A Freemason may publicly share any Masonic content that contributes to a positive public image of Freemasonry, such as charitable work and events, good causes supported by Freemasons, and information about Masonic history.

Social media channels can also be used to share information only relevant to Freemasons, but care should be exercised to use a more restricted channel, such as a closed or secret Facebook group (see the guide in the appendix). Topics that might be discussed here include:

- discussions about Masonic allegory and symbolism (as long as there is no mention of any Masonic Signs, Tokens, or Words)
- background information about other Masonic Orders (as long as it does not ruin the experience for those who are not members)
- unusual visits to other Lodges (e.g. for a special ceremony, or because a group of members of a Lodge, Province, or District have travelled a long distance to visit another Lodge)

Style

A good guide to whether content will be enjoyed by one's audience is the acronym **RICE**: content should be relevant, interesting, concise, and entertaining.

- **Relevant**: posts not about Masonic topics (or not involving Freemasons) do not belong on Masonic social media channels. This includes (but is not limited to) the news, sports, and general history (unless those involved are Freemasons). In addition, Freemasons who are members of multiple Masonic Facebook groups should resist the temptation to share their posts to all such indiscriminately, choosing only to post to channels where the information is of direct relevance to the purpose of the group (for instance, information about appointments within one's Province or District does not belong in a group set up to discuss ritual).
- **Interesting**: posts should include content others would want to read. That is to say, one should avoid posting for no reason, or sharing content that is inaccessible or difficult to digest.
- **Concise**: social media are frequently consumed by busy people who are on the move, so posts should be to the point. If linking to an external site, provide a brief summary of the contents of that site, to enable viewers to decide whether they want to visit the page in question or not. When sharing news or engaging in conversation, keep to the point. Brevity is one of the fundamental principles of all social media platforms: Twitter limits all messages to 140 characters, and Facebook only shows the first few lines of a post by default (these can be expanded, but a casual viewer may not be engaged enough to do so).
- **Entertaining**: social media are, by definition, intended to be sociable. This means that content shared and topics discussed should engage (and in some cases amuse) the reader. Lengthy diatribes about a niche topic are unlikely to fall into this category; although there is nothing wrong with discussing these topics, it is better to do so conforming to the principles above, and provide links to external content for anyone who wishes to read in greater detail.

Appendix

The appendix introduces the concept of social media, and provides a brief explanation of some of the benefits of using social media platforms in a Masonic context. It also contains a guide to getting started with two of the most popular social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, as well as a list of Masonic social media channels to help you see how other Freemasons are using social media.

Introduction to social media

Social media are online platforms for connecting to other people and institutions, and for sharing content with those to whom one is connected. They are typically accessed through a website and/or through an app on a mobile device (smartphone or tablet), and can therefore be consumed anywhere, any time, by anyone with an internet connection. Setting up an account on most social media platforms takes under five minutes and costs nothing. As such, in the past decade, social media have become an immensely powerful and increasingly popular tool for communication.

It should be noted from the outset that the responsible use of social media is encouraged (and practised) by United Grand Lodge of England, as these platforms provide an excellent way for Lodges, Metropolitan, Provinces and Districts, and other Masonic entities (such as clubs and charities) to share information about their work and learn from each other. However, the predominantly public nature of social media means all Freemasons should exercise caution when interacting with them. This section explains how best to engage with social media, so that content one creates may help promote a positive image of Freemasonry within the digital world.

Why to use social media

There are several benefits to using social media in a Masonic context. Broadly speaking, these fall into two main categories: fostering greater communication between Freemasons, and engaging a broader (including non-Masonic) audience.

Communication between Freemasons

Social media platforms provide a simple way for Masons to connect regardless of geographical location, thus making it much easier to find out about Masonic events (e.g. Lodge meetings) and endeavours (e.g. charitable causes being supported) at a local, national, and international level. They also make it possible to engage in discussion about Masonic topics with Freemasons anywhere in the world, thus enabling Masons to make their daily advancement by learning from a far larger community.

Social media also provide an excellent way to engage younger members, most of whom will already use these platforms in their personal and professional lives. In this sense, they can help Freemasonry remain relevant and accessible to young Masons, who will derive great value from being able to access a wide variety of Masonic content, and interact with other Masons like themselves, through the same channels that they already use on a daily basis.

Engaging a broader audience

As well as allowing Freemasons to communicate with each other, social media platforms also make it easy to engage non-Masons. This makes social media platforms excellent for increasing awareness and attracting potential new members, as shared content will be surfaced to anyone searching for Masonic keywords (active candidates who are trying to learn more), but can also be discovered organically through one's other connections (passive candidates who may have no prior knowledge of Freemasonry). That is to say, someone who is connected to a Freemason on social media may see something Masonic they have shared, which may prompt them to learn more about Freemasonry, and perhaps enquire about membership.

In addition to attracting the interest of potential new members, social media also provide an ideal platform for Masonic publicity in general, i.e. as a way of informing non-Masons about what Freemasonry is and what contributions Freemasons make to society. This is especially valuable, as they can help dispel common myths about Freemasonry as a 'secret society', by enabling anyone who wants to learn more to do so quickly and easily.

Facebook and Twitter

In the interests of relevance and brevity, this section will focus on the two most popular social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter. These platforms are recommended because of their ease of use, broad application for a variety of activities, and very large active user bases (including substantial numbers of Freemasons). This means that focusing Masonic social media activity on these platforms will maximise their audience and potential impact.

Facebook and Twitter should be used in different ways i.e. Facebook for less frequent posts which can go into some detail, whereas Twitter can be active many times a day without annoying users and losing engagement.

Facebook

Facebook www.facebook.com requires users to create accounts identified by their first and last names. Once a user has created an account, they can search for other users they know, and request to connect to them (become their 'Facebook friend'). Each account has:

- a public page ('profile') where users can provide (optional) information about themselves

(picture, employment, location, interests, et c.) and share content (messages, links, images, et c.)
- a message centre for exchanging private messages with one's Facebook connections ('friends')
- a 'news feed', which is a constantly updating list of selected posts created or shared by one's friends (as well as some advertisements)

Once a 'friend request' has been accepted, the two users can view each other's profiles, exchange private messages, see each other's public updates, and share content.

In addition to using Facebook as an individual and connecting to other individuals, it is also possible to create two types of entity useful for organisations: 'pages' and 'groups'.

- Pages are like very simple websites. They are public, so anyone can discover them by searching for them, and view their content. In addition, users can choose to subscribe to pages (by 'liking' them), to receive new posts from their chosen pages in their news feeds. Page administrators can post content to pages, and users who have 'liked' pages can respond to those updates by leaving comments, or by simply 'liking' individual posts to show their approbation. Learn more here
- Groups are more of an open forum than pages, as all members can post content (as well as leave comments on existing posts). By default, groups are open ('public'), so anyone can join. However, they can be made private ('closed') or even hidden ('secret') for extra privacy: users can search for closed groups and request to join them, but cannot search for secret groups (meaning they can only join by invitation). Learn more here

Facebook users can have up to 5,000 friends, like as many pages, and join as many groups as they choose, and can also create unlimited pages and groups. Pages and groups both have administrators, who have the ability to delete content that they do not believe should be on the page or group. Page/group administrators can also designate other admins, so there is no need for a single user to be solely responsible for the upkeep of a Masonic page or group.

Twitter

Like Facebook, Twitter www.twitter.com is used for creating and sharing content (such as text, links, images, and videos) and having conversations. Unlike Facebook, where there is no limit to the size of a post, Twitter posts ('Tweets') can contain no more than 140 characters (this is sometimes known as 'microblogging'). This limitation is intended to force concision, and is therefore most frequently used for brief status updates or headlines, followed by a link to a website with the main content.

Twitter requires users to create accounts with unique usernames ('handles'). Once a user has created an account, they can search for other accounts, view the content shared by those accounts, and subscribe to ('follow') them. Each account has:
- a public page ('profile') where users can provide (optional) information about themselves and share content
- a message centre for exchanging private messages ('Direct Messages') with one's connections
- a 'home stream', which is a constantly updating list of all the content shared by accounts one has chosen to follow

Basic setup

Below is a list of useful articles explaining how to get started with Facebook and Twitter, taken primarily from their own help centres https://www.facebook.com/help and https://support.twitter.com/ respectively, which are excellent resources for any questions not covered here.

Facebook

- Setting up an account.
- Adding friends (connecting to other people).
- Finding more friends.
- Finding pages to like (subscribe to).
- Finding groups to join.
- Creating a page.
- Creating a group.
- Inviting others to like a page.
- Inviting others to join a group.
- Sharing a post you see with one's own connections.
- Promotinga page (setting up paid advertisements to increase the potential audience).

Twitter

- Setting up an account.
- Following (connecting to) other accounts.
- Finding more accounts to follow.
- Posting a Tweet (update).
- Retweeting a Tweet (sharing someone else's Tweet with one's own connections).
- Replying to posts and mentioning other users.
- Promoting Tweets (paying to increase the potential audience).

Using social media

Sharing

Sharing content with a social media channel, it is as simple as going to your Facebook page/group or Twitter feed, writing an introduction, including the content (e.g. a link or an image), and posting. However, it can also help to employ certain built-in features to help you reach the right audience:

- **Mentions** (with @, also called @-mentions): typing @ followed by the name of a person or page (on Facebook), or a handle (on Twitter), will cause the content to be shared with that person/page. This not only means that they will receive the content, but also that it will be shared with that person's/page's network. This can be a good way to connect with audiences that may be interested in the content, but which are perhaps unaware of the existence of one's own social media channels.
- **Hashtags** (with #): typing # followed by any keyword (as long as it does not contain spaces), will cause the post to be discoverable by anyone searching for that keyword. This can be used to participate in global conversations with people to whom one is not connected, which might also boost one's audience, as people may read one of a tagged post then discover the page (Facebook)/account (Twitter) to which it was originally posted.

For instance, to write a Facebook post linking to an article about the MCF in *Freemasonry Today*, one might say the following:

> *Great interview with the Pro Grand Master on the @Masonic Charitable Foundation in @Freemasonry Today: http://ow.ly/Xsl1g #freemasonry #charity #mcf*

On Twitter, the same post would look like this:

> *Great interview with the Pro Grand Master on @Masonic_Charity in @Freemasonry2day: http://ow.ly/Xsl1g#freemasonry #charity #mcf*

This is because the Twitter handles for the accounts in question are different from the names of the pages on Facebook (there is a list of some Masonic accounts to start following below).
The above posts would be visible to:

- the author of the post
- anyone who likes the author's Facebook page/is a member of the author's Facebook group/follows the author's Twitter account
- anyone who is searching for #freemasonry, #charity, or #mcf

Clicking a mention will take the viewer directly to the accounts in question; clicking a hashtag will take the viewer to a view of all recent posts featuring the same hashtag.

The previous sample posts also use a link shortener (in this case, http://ow.ly, although http://bit.ly is a popular alternative). Use of services like this is strongly recommended, because many links are very long, and it is important to keep social media posts short (especially on Twitter, where there is a hard limit). For example, the original link in the example above http://www.freemasonrytoday.com/freemasonry-cares/insight-from-peter-lowndes-on-the-new-masonic-charitable-foundation, which is 117 characters long. This would not leave much space for any additional comment on Twitter! By contrast, the shortened link is only 18 characters long, leaving far more room for comment.

The following guides provide useful information to help write a good Facebook post or Tweet:

- https://www.postplanner.com/7-no-brainer-tips-to-write-awesome-facebook-post/
- http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/tweet-formulas-to-get-you-started-on-twitter

Showing approbation

Social media allow participation in a large online community where many millions of people share content frequently. This means that there is an enormous amount of content, so part of one's role as a user of social media is to select especially interesting content and mark it with one's approval, so that other users have an idea of whether or not it is worth viewing.

On Facebook and Twitter, the way to show approval is to click the 'like' button associated with the post in question (marked with a thumbs-up sign on Facebook, and a heart on Twitter). When someone else sees the post, they will see the number of people who have liked it (and may choose to view their names as well), and may use this information to decide whether to view it or not.

To publicise the content even further, one can share it with one's own network. This is a perfectly acceptable action on social media platforms, and it does not require the permission of the original author to do so—it is seen as a compliment, and provides the author with extra publicity. Content can be shared by clicking the 'Share' button on Facebook (marked with an arrow), or the 'Retweet' button on Twitter (marked with two arrows forming a rectangle).

Authors of posts receive notifications when their posts are liked or shared. This allows them to keep track of which posts are most popular, which may help them decide what kinds of content are most interesting to their audience. It is generally recommended to like and share posts often, as so doing can increase one's audience, and will encourage others to reciprocate. However, it is important only to like/share appropriate and interesting content, as it is possible to see who has liked/shared which content, so a Freemason should only like/share content that he is happy to be associated in some way with his account, and that does not contravene any of this policy.

Moderation

There are times when it may be beneficial or desirable to remove social media posts. The action available is as follows:

- If you post something on Facebook or Twitter then decide you want to change it, you can edit or

delete your Facebook post, but you can only delete a Tweet, as it is not editable (but it is important to remember that someone may already have shared the original content, and you cannot undo this action yourself)
- If someone posts something on your Facebook page, or in a Facebook group of which you are an administrator, you can delete the whole post, or the individual comment
- If someone mentions you in a Facebook post, you can remove the mention (known as 'untagging') and/or report the post to Facebook
- If someone mentions you in a Tweet, you cannot delete it, but you can report it
- If you find you are consistently experiencing trouble with a specific user on Facebook or Twitter, you can block them (so that they cannot see your content, and you cannot see theirs) and/or report them to the platform in question

Examples

Below is a list of some of the United Grand Lodge of England's social media presences. Liking these Facebook pages and following these Twitter accounts is recommended, as they will provide a good introduction to Masonic use of social media, and will also facilitate discovery of other Masonic social media accounts.

- United Grand Lodge of England
  - https://www.facebook.com/UnitedGrandLodgeofEngland/
  - https://twitter.com/UGLE_GrandLodge
- Supreme Grand Chapter
  - https://www.facebook.com/SupremeGrandChapter
  - https://twitter.com/GrandChapter
- The Freemasons' Grand Charity
  - https://www.facebook.com/TheFreemasonsGrandCharity
  - https://twitter.com/TheGrandCharity
- Masonic Charitable Foundation
  - https://www.facebook.com/themcf
  - https://twitter.com/Masonic_Charity
- Masonic Samaritan Fund
  - https://www.facebook.com/msfund.org
  - https://twitter.com/MS_Fund
- Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution
  - https://www.facebook.com/thermbi
  - https://twitter.com/thermbi
- Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys
  - https://www.facebook.com/rmtgb
  - https://twitter.com/RMTGB
- Freemasons' Hall
  - https://www.facebook.com/FreemasonsHall/
  - https://twitter.com/FreemasonsHall
- Freemasonry Today
  - https://www.facebook.com/FreemasonryToday
  - https://twitter.com/Freemasonry2day
- David Williamson PAsstGM
  - https://twitter.com/UGLE_DKW https://twitter.com/SGC_DKW
- David Wootton AsstGM
  - https://twitter.com/UGLE_wootton

There are several Provinces and Districts with Facebook pages/groups and Twitter accounts—these can be discovered by searching for *Provincial Grand Lodge* or *District Grand Lodge* on Facebook or *PGL* or *DGL* on Twitter. One can then view these accounts' subscribers/members/followers to find more Masonic accounts to which to connect. @UGLE_GrandLodge follows every Province and District, so it might be easier for new users to go through the UGLE list than trying to search: https://twitter.com/UGLE_GrandLodge/following

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- The Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution https://www.facebook.com/thermbi https://twitter.com/thermbi
- Metropolitan Grand Lodge of London https://www.facebook.com/met.grandlodge https://twitter.com/MetGrandLodge
- Provincial Grand Lodges:
  - Devonshire https://www.facebook.com/PGLDevonshire https://twitter.com/PGLDevonshire
  - Durham https://www.facebook.com/durhamfreemasons https://twitter.com/PGLDurham
  - East Kent https://www.facebook.com/FreemasonryProvinceOfEastKent https://twitter.com/EastkentProv
  - Essex https://twitter.com/EssexFreemasons
  - Hampshire and Isle of Wight https://www.facebook.com/HampshireMasons https://twitter.com/HantsMason
  - Leicestershire and Rutland https://www.facebook.com/LeicestershireRutlandFreemasons https://twitter.com/LeicsFreemasons
  - Shropshire https://twitter.com/ShropshireMason
  - Surrey https://twitter.com/PGLSurrey
  - Wiltshire https://twitter.com/wiltspgl
- District Grand Lodges:
  - East Africa
  - Jamaica and the Cayman Islands https://www.facebook.com/dgljamaica https://twitter.com/dgljamaica
  - South America, Southern Division