



SOCIAL MEDIA IN VET COURSES

INTRODUCTION

The use of various forms of social media for individuals, groups and organisations is now commonplace. Individuals use it to update friends and family on their experiences, groups use it to inform their members of relevant information, and organisations use it to market their services and products. With many current and future students already familiar with social media platforms, could there be a use for social media in vocational education and training (VET)?

HIGHLIGHTS

- Social media is used in VET as a tool to provide course information and for asking questions, to collaborate on group assignments, and to demonstrate skills that have been learnt.
- The use of social media in VET courses can lead to higher levels of student engagement and promote more collaborative learning and may encourage increased rates of course completions.
- Based on their past experiences, teachers recommend the development and promotion of guidelines for social media usage to help students understand its appropriate use and privacy issues. Teachers also believe they should control the administration of any group set up for their course to ensure regular monitoring of content.
- Some teachers may be more willing to use social media in their courses if their institutes provided clearer examples about how and in what way it can be used in teaching and assessment.

This good practice guide is based on research by Victor Callan and Margaret Johnston, which looked at how social media is being incorporated in VET training and assessment. The researchers undertook interviews with teachers, students and employers across three different training organisations. The research is largely qualitative and limited to selected case studies, yet it helpfully breaks new ground in illustrating how social media is being infused into VET teaching practice.

Social media and student outcomes: teacher, student and employer views are available from the NCVER Portal at www.ncver.edu.au.

WHAT TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA ARE BEING USED IN TEACHING AND LEARNING?

Many different forms of social media are currently available. The most common forms being used by teachers are Facebook and YouTube, with some use of blogs as well. There is limited use of Instagram, LinkedIn, Tumblr and Pinterest.



Facebook

Facebook is a popular social networking tool and is used by VET teachers because it is free, accessible and easy to use. Facebook is introduced into VET courses in three main ways:

- Organisations have an institutional Facebook site that is used by teachers and the online and distance students.
- Closed Facebook groups are set up and administered by teachers for their courses.
- Students establish Facebook groups for their courses and invite other students in the same course to join.



YouTube

YouTube, a video-sharing platform, is used in VET courses to share webinars, recorded lectures, talks and YouTube presentations by industry experts, the aim being to explore a subject in depth. Students can also share videos of themselves performing a task. Teachers also found that they could pair online quizzes and discussion boards with the videos to test student knowledge and give feedback.



Blogs

While not as commonly used as Facebook and YouTube, blogs can be used when students need to reflect on lessons or field trips, document research for a project and illustrate their thoughts with photos or videos. These blogs can be shared with other students, who can add comments. Blogs are more appealing to those students who have higher levels of reading and writing skills.

Box 1: Examples of different uses of social media in teaching and assessment

Videos are used by students to demonstrate their skills. For example, trade apprentices film themselves completing a new task, such as hanging a door, while real estate students are filmed conducting mock auctions with family and friends. These videos are shared with teachers and sometimes other students to demonstrate the completion of a competency.

Facebook and Twitter are used by marketing students to enable practice in the promotion of products and activities. This is a useful skill for them to have experienced and practised, as social media is widely used as a tool in marketing by organisations.

Institute Facebook pages and course Facebook groups are used to provide information to students such as announcements, reminders for assignments and notices regarding workplace training (i.e. for apprentices).

Students use Facebook groups to stay connected with their classmates for group assignments.

BENEFITS AND PITFALLS OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Teachers, students and employers reported a number of benefits and pitfalls to using social media in VET courses.



Benefits

- Students felt more connected to other students, resulting in more collaborative learning.
- Employers felt more connected to the theory side of learning and believed social media helped the transitions between TAFE and work to progress more smoothly.
- Teachers found that:
 - students were more willing to ask questions online
 - they had an improved connection with students
 - social media contributed to increased levels of attendance of classes by students and higher rates of completion.



Pitfalls

- Teachers found that some students had little understanding of the privacy settings of social media, such as the material that could be viewed by everyone and that which could only be viewed by people within the course.
- Some students had the habit of oversharing information, such as their emotions and emotional challenges they might be experiencing.
- Teachers reported the risk that some students may not think for themselves when it came to assignments, potentially copying information that other students had shared on Facebook groups.
- Not all students will engage with the social media being used, so teachers need to ensure all students are receiving the same information and level of help.

Box 2: Social media versus learning management system

The institute's learning management system records all of the information required for audits. Key information can be lost to teachers and for audits unless teachers are vigilant and copy materials from class social media (such as Facebook groups) to the learning management system. This results in the double-handling of information by teachers.

TIPS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN TEACHING

The teachers interviewed during the research discussed their learnings from having used social media in their courses. Based on this, the following tips can help VET teachers willing to use social media in their teaching and assessment practices:

- Teachers should act as the administrator of any social media group set up for their course, including those initiated by students. This will enable teachers to regularly monitor the page and ensure that all students receive the same information.
- Guidelines need to be provided to students on the appropriate use of social media. These guidelines can cover aspects such as privacy issues and relevant content. Some institutes may have existing guidelines, which can be built upon and promoted.

- To encourage use by students, the medium of social media chosen should be relevant to the future jobs of the students. For example, YouTube is preferred by many students, including apprentices, as it allows them to demonstrate the skills they have learnt to a wide audience.
- Employers need to be made aware of why social media is being used as part of the course and in what capacity. This helps them to understand why the student may be accessing social media during their time in the workplace and enables them to become more involved (i.e. viewing students' videos of them completing a task, allowing employers to see what has been covered by teachers in class).

INSTITUTIONAL FIRST STEPS NEEDED TO SUPPORT SOCIAL MEDIA IN VET

Importantly, social media has the potential to improve student engagement in and completion of VET courses. The research found evidence that the take-up of social media across VET was limited to a small number of institutions. A common characteristic of those institutions where it had been adopted was evidence of a strong institutional policy for social media use. However, despite the policy guidelines offered by their training organisations, some teachers remained confused about social media usage in their institute, including which elements to adopt in their teaching practice. To help progress the use of social media in VET courses, the following four steps should be introduced at the institutional level:

- *Clear institutional policy*: introduce a coherent policy and supports for social media practice in teaching.
- *Promotion and training*: institutes should promote their social media guidelines to teachers to specify how and when social media can be used in their courses. This promotion could be supported by staff workshops and showcases of teachers who are making innovative use of social media in their VET courses.
- *Regular annual updating of social media guidelines*: this is recommended, as guidelines will need to evolve as new forms of social media are introduced.
- *Guideline coverage of social media and audits*: the institutional social media guidelines need to be extended to cover whether social media is acceptable for regulatory audit purposes, and in what format, and how to harvest the social media exemplars for audits. This will help to guide teachers to meet the institute processes and the evidence requirements of regulators.



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