



This article presents general guidelines for Ohio nonprofit organizations as of the date written and should not be construed as legal advice. Always consult an attorney to address your particular situation.

Guidelines for Responding to Negative Social Media Posts

Robert Casarona, Esq., *Casarona Legal Services, LLC*

Social Media provides an opportunity to communicate about and market a nonprofit. Unfortunately, it can and often is used in a manner that may negatively impact an organization. It can be used to harass, provide false and disruptive information, or simply to vent (“negative posts”), all potentially harming the nonprofit’s reputation and mission. This article contains guidelines for responding to such negative posts.

Consider Objectives and Potential Outcomes in Your Response

Each circumstance is different, so this article provides guidelines and considerations rather than recommendations for a definitive response. Many factors may influence a nonprofit’s response to negative posts. The severity of the post(s), based upon impact to the organization and the prevalence of the post(s), is probably the most important consideration. Your objective will guide your response.

A nonprofit’s potential objectives may be to:

1. Stop the poster from continuing the negative posts
2. Remove negative posts
3. Avoid unwanted attention
4. Hold the poster accountable
5. Satisfactorily address the negative posts that have some legitimacy
6. Resolve misunderstandings

These objectives are not individually exclusive. Often, they can and should be combined.

Approaches to Responding to Negative Posts

The approach to a negative post should consider that the response has the potential for the post to be more publicized if more attention to it is created by the response. The response has the potential to “fan the flames” and exacerbate the negative post(s). Thus, there may be instances where monitoring the post and ignoring it are warranted. In most instances, however, a response, even if a minimal clarification, should be made to the negative post.

1. Evaluate Motivation

As an initial step, evaluate the poster’s motivation and the severity of the negative post. Is it likely to be a one-time post? Is the poster just venting? Do they seek an apology or some retribution? Are they disgruntled clients, employees, or volunteers? Once you have evaluated the poster’s motivation the best you can, attempt to take the person “offline” to discuss their concerns privately.



2. Draft Your Response

Regardless of whether you take the response offline or if you must respond online, the response should be positive, professional, and constructive. For instance, if online, you can politely refute the statement and offer an opportunity to discuss the issue by providing a telephone contact. If successful in engaging the negative poster offline, ask the poster to take down the post and perhaps say something positive to refute the negative post.

The response to a negative poster on behalf of the nonprofit should be from one source to maintain consistency.

Proactively, you can flood the site where the negative post occurred with positive posts from friends of the organization. Be careful not to start a debate over the issue posted if you choose to post positive posts. The use of general positive posts that do not further engage the negative poster are best. Of course, if the post warrants it, you may have to refute the post directly and aggressively.

3. Investigate the Platform's rules

Each social media platform (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Next door, Instagram, TikTok, etc.) has rules for removing posts and even blocking posters. If the post warrants removal these platforms can be contacted, and removal can be requested.

Considerations for Ongoing Incidences

The negative posts and response(s) to it must be preserved. If the issues escalate, the negative poster returns or moves to another platform, or the post ends up causing significant damage, the information will be critical to evaluating next steps. Document the time, poster name, platform and response(s) surrounding the negative post. While there is software to capture online content, it may be sufficient to take screen shots of the posts.

If the post is egregious, or if the negative poster is making claims that implicate potential legal liability to the nonprofit (i.e. discrimination, theft, or other unlawful conduct) contact your legal counsel immediately to assess your next steps. This may include potential investigation of the claim(s) internally, or written communication to the negative poster.

Need Legal Advice?

If you are a PBPO client and have questions regarding the content of this article or need legal assistance, please contact us at info@pbpohio.org or (513) 977-0304.

Not a Client? Apply to become a client by submitting a [Request for Legal Assistance online](#), or contact us at info@pbpohio.org.

About the Author:

Robert B. Casarona is an attorney at Casarona Legal Services, LLC, in Cleveland, OH. He has a general practice where he primarily works with small and mid-size businesses. He also has expertise in environmental law and commercial litigation.