There isn’t much room for mistakes when recording live video on social media; you only get one shot. Literally. And when doing a live video at SNA's 2017 Annual National Conference in Atlanta, Liz Roesel made a social media blunder that still makes her cringe in embarrassment.

Roesel, now the marketing manager at Horizon Software International, was working with another company at the time, and had recruited a school nutrition director to stop by that vendor's booth in the Exhibit Hall to participate in a short interview live on Facebook. Roesel had a colleague hold the smartphone to shoot the video and began the interview completely unaware that the phone camera's orientation was streaming the entire discussion sideways. (Did we mention it was live?)

“Once the interview was over, we realized the entire orientation was off,” she recounts. “I thought I could find a way to fix it, and there just wasn't one...I felt awful.” The only solution was to eventually remove the video from the company's account.

Social media mistakes happen to everyone regardless of skill level; it’s an inevitable part of the learning curve. And let's be honest: Social media management is hard, especially if you’re charged with developing and managing multiple accounts for your school nutrition operation. While setbacks often provide growth opportunities, many blunders can be avoided. From Facebook to Twitter, take care to avoid the following common mistakes and pitfalls when managing your team’s social media feeds.

**MISTAKE #1: USE THE WRONG PLATFORM**

Harnessing the power of social media allows for a deeper connection with stakeholders in the community. But you don’t have to try to juggle every platform available! Who is your most important social media audience right now? "People need to focus on who they want to target," explains Kern Halls, chief innovator at Ingenious Culinary Concepts, a company that specializes in marketing for school nutrition departments. What's the best way to reach this group? The best channels for reaching parents, teachers and administrators are Twitter and Facebook. Parents are on Instagram, too, but this photo-sharing platform is also great for reaching students, as is Snapchat.

**MISTAKE #2: THE PHOTO RUT**

“The more you post and engage, the more people will trust your content,” says Halls. The easiest photos to share are of tasty-looking meals on stylized trays. But don’t get stuck in a photo rut. Yes, photos of lunch trays are a great way to showcase your meals, but there is so much else happening in your cafeterias. Mix up your posts with photos of decorations and events, staff assembling meals or, when in doubt, pictures of cute kids always do well. (Make sure you follow district policies regarding parental permission for posting photos and videos of students.)

And we can all agree that you and your team members are school nutrition experts, yes? Then shout that expertise from the rooftops! Social media allows you to share your breadth of knowledge in the field, from nutrition facts...
to meal regulations to food allergy management to the business of school nutrition. You could even take a very popular recipe, pare it down and share it with your followers.

“You can give the parent information on how to go gluten-free at home or the foods to eat after a kid’s soccer game,” explains Halls. "The tray photos are great, but think how you are going to add value to that parent's life.”

MISTAKE #3: PASSIVE POSTING
Are you posting thoughtlessly or with intention? First, keep daily posts to a minimum—one, maybe two—but be consistent about posting every day. Next, use the metrics available to from the social media platform to gain intelligence and insights so that you can take full advantage of this communications tool. For example, you can see when your following is the most active, which coincides with when they’re most likely to interact and engage with you and your posts. “I look at my metrics and see if people have un-followed us or blocked a post. You also can see if someone has hidden a post. It comes back to ‘why?’” explains Jeanne Reilly, SNS, director of school nutrition at Windham Raymond (Maine) RSU 14 Schools.

MISTAKE #4: TOO MANY COOKS
To borrow from a longstanding kitchen cliché, too many cooks in the social media kitchen can result in over-posting or inconsistencies with your messages. The accounts should be managed by one individual with some authority in your program and confidence with social media. “Have someone you truly trust and who knows your program,” advises Stefanie Dove, RD, SNS, coordinator of marketing and community outreach, Loudoun County (Va.) Public Schools. “Whoever is doing it should be truly comfortable and truly understand it.”

Other staff can help by supplying content to you. Task coworkers and employees with being continually on the hunt for content ideas—including photos, memes, helpful resources, tips and so on—to help ensure a steady stream of posts. To simplify the content aggregating process, especially in larger districts, set up a file-sharing account via a service like Google, Apple or Dropbox and enable staff to drop their photos and videos into one designated folder accessible by all. This will allow the social media manager to sort through the options without having to dig into multiple places or clutter his or her own text or email inbox.

MISTAKE #5: DO THE LEAST
Growing a following on social media takes work—it won’t happen solely on the basis of some great images or clever retweets. There are several ways to increase your numbers—and engagement—with the internet version of sweat equity and, occasionally, a little capital investment.

First, tag other accounts, add a geolocation to a post and be sure to hashtag properly. When additional accounts are tagged, they get notified of this mention and can share the post, with their followers too. A geolocation enables people to search through all posts tagged with that location marker. Hashtags are particularly useful for Twitter and Instagram. Develop a hashtag specifically for your program and use other hashtags liberally to get more exposure. In addition, if your budget permits, you might look into some of the paid opportunities to “boost” your post.

But don’t get too caught up in the number of followers. The key to a successful account is engagement. How are people interacting with your posts? Are they liking videos and photos? Are they commenting, sharing and tagging their friends? Even if someone is not exclusively following your department’s account, they can still interact. With people interacting with each post, “that shows a greater return on your investment of what you’re doing than just having people ‘like’ your page,” affirms Dove.

MISTAKE #6: WORK ALONE
Remember, most parents will follow a school district’s main feed before they start following the school nutrition program’s feed. And if your district is large enough to have multiple social media account managers working at different schools or in different departments, these should be your first connections.

Not only should these related sites be tagged in your posts, their coordinators should be made aware of the post in advance, suggests Roesel. Before your post goes live, send an email to the account manager and give them the text and photo, as well as instructions to share on their pages, along with a link back to your department’s account. The cross-promotion allows for easy growth and reaches the audience you want.

“Don’t just do it for copy and paste,” adds Roesel. “If you only give them a link and say, ‘Here share this,’ they will have to think to negative comments, you’re showing appreciation for the individual—and the rest of your followers—that you care about this
online community and want to promote dialogue and interaction. “By commenting back, you can change and own the situation,” says Halls. “You need to show them that they can trust you.”

Don’t ignore positive comments, either. Be sure to express your thanks! Again, by interacting with your followers, you’re communicating a more genuine brand.

**MISTAKE #8: UNDERESTIMATE VIDEO**

Videos have become the go-to way to reach social media audiences. According to Social Media Today, 55% of online users consume videos thoroughly—the highest percentage for all types of content. In fact, more than 8 billion videos (or 100 million hours of videos) were watched on Facebook every day in 2017.

There are many great ways to use videos to showcase your school nutrition department: online tours of your facility, new renovations or equipment; behind-the-scenes interviews or chats with special guests, like the superintendent; recipe demonstrations; kitchen safety tutorials; and more. “Talk about what you’re doing in your kitchens,” suggests Dove. “When you talk about it, you get excited and your enthusiasm and passion show through. That’s really the shining star.”

Keep videos short, sweet and to the point. Social Media Today recommends they be no more than two minutes in length, and Facebook is rated as the most impactful social media channel for video. Videos in Instagram Stories should be kept under 15 seconds, while videos in an Instagram feed can be up to 60 seconds long. Twitter videos can be 140 seconds in duration. (And remember, phone orientation varies by platform; check the setting on your phone before going live.)

There are also many video editing apps (both paid and free) available to enable easy editing directly on or off a phone. Dove recommends shooting video first, but waiting for the editing process to add voiceover; this ensures

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**6. ___ is the most important outcome defining your social media success.**

- The total number of followers
- Your total number of posts
- The rate of engagement
- All of the above

**7. Parents are likely to follow the district’s main social media feed first, before the school nutrition department’s channels.**

- True
- False

**8. Any negative comments or posts should be ___ .**

- defended vehemently
- ignored completely
- deleted immediately
- none of the above

**9. Consumers viewed ___ hours of video on Facebook every day in 2017.**

- 14 gazillion
- 8 billion
- 100 million
- none of the above

**10. Video clips posted to Instagram Stories should be longer than those in an Instagram news feed.**

- True
- False
the script is more precise. (And it removes the hustle and other “white noise” generated in kitchens!) “If you have poorly controlled audio, it just doesn’t work,” cautions Dove.

**BE MISSION-DRIVEN**

Mastering social media may feel like an overwhelming task in an already time-crunched profession, but know that this effort will pay dividends in the end. Posting to social media is a way to tell the stories behind the doors of every school’s kitchens. “You want to post about events, meals and your menus,” says Reilly. “You want to be relevant to your program... Trust the process.” **SN**

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**STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION, 2018**

*School Nutrition*, (Pub. #0483-8880)  
Date of Filing: October 1, 2018

**Frequency of Issues:** 11 times per year; June/July is a combined issue  
**Annual subscription price:** $100 for non-members; $2 for members  
**Mailing Address:** 120 Waterfront Street, Suite 300, National Harbor, MD 20745-1142  
**Publisher:** Patricia Montague, 120 Waterfront Street, Suite 300, National Harbor, MD 20745-1142.  
**Editor:** Patricia L. Fitzgerald, 120 Waterfront Street, Suite 300, National Harbor, MD 20745-1142.  
**Owner:** School Nutrition Association; no other owners  
**Average net press run during preceding year:** 56,295. Actual net press run of issue published nearest to filing date: 56,421. Average dealer sales during preceding year: 0. Actual dealer sales of issues published nearest to filing date: 0. Average paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions during preceding year: 55,275. Actual paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions of issue published nearest to filing date: 55,181. Average paid in-county subscriptions during preceding year: 0. Actual paid in-county subscriptions of issue published nearest to filing date: 0. Average free distribution during preceding year: 0. Actual free distribution of issue published nearest to filing date: 0. Average total paid/requested circulation during preceding year: 55,275. Actual total paid/requested circulation of issue published nearest to filing date: 55,181. Average free distribution during preceding year: 0. Average total distribution during preceding year: 55,275. Actual total distribution of issue published nearest to filing date: 55,181. Average number of copies not distributed during preceding year: 1,020. Actual number of copies not distributed of issue published nearest to filing date: 1,240. Average total copies during preceding year: 56,295. Actual total copies of issue published nearest to filing date: 56,421. Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 100%; actual no. copies of single issues published nearest to filing date: 100%.

*Address changed to 2900 S. Quincy Street, Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22206 as of December 2018.*