



SSIO Guidelines for Social Media

Please familiarise yourself with the contents of this document so that you can be aware of the guidelines, principles and best-practice recommendations for social media accounts created by units of the Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO). Whether your accounts have already been running for years or you are considering launching new ones, it is important for you to be aware of SSIO's policies regarding the use of social media.

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Roles and Responsibilities

The **National Council President** (NCP), under the guidance of the International Media Committee, may form a Social Media team who have a keen interest, relevant skills and the time necessary to sustain the account for which they'll be accountable. NCPs are responsible for content approvals or assigning a team advisor who can monitor and assist as necessary. They should **clearly** advise the Social Media team on the approval process before posting content on social media platforms.

The Zone or National **Media Coordinator** may be tasked with organising the team in lieu of the NCP and may also be the advisor if the role cannot be assigned to someone with experience in public relations and/or media strategy.

Essential makeup of a Social Media team

One person can hold multiple roles, and multiple people can fill one role.

Account Admin – Handles the account's day-to-day activities (i.e. monitoring the account and any comments or replies posted, and managing the calendar of scheduled or draft posts), has a command of the language used on the account and seeks appropriate permissions when using third-party content. The ideal Account Admin is an individual well versed with the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba, has been an integral part of the Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO) for at least one year, and follows protocols.

Content Creator – Provides creative direction for the account and has an eye for design. Depending on the type of content generated, the person should have some working knowledge of both graphic design and video editing. The ideal content creator is someone who has been a part of the SSIO for at least six months and is versed in the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba and policies and procedures of the SSIO.

Community Manager – Supports the Account Admin by monitoring conversations on the social platform. The person should handle negative comments with equanimity and objectivity. They are responsible for checking and monitoring comments and, if necessary, banning users who aggravate or downgrade the conversation.

Analyst – Evaluates various insights/analytics and provides suggestions on maximising audience engagement and reach (e.g. posting times, frequency, language and content type) in order to make the best use of the team's efforts. This role does not require knowledge of SSIO policies

Advisor – Counsels the team on media approach and appropriateness of posts. Ideally this individual has some marketing or media background and is a long-standing member of the SSIO. This individual is responsible for guiding and ensuring consistency with other SSIO accounts. Persons in this role will retain an admin-level access to each account along with other login credentials and will be accountable for all posts made by accounts within their purview. *The advisor should not make changes to the account without discussing the changes with the entire team.*

Teams looking to handle official SSIO accounts should seek approval from the supervising Media Coordinator or contact a senior officer for direction.

Guide to Best Practices on Social Media Channels

Do not pay an external agency to connect with followers for SSIO accounts. Do not pay for likes and followers. Let the content earn its audience, and connect with followers personally. Quality is more important than quantity. The foremost objective of a social media channel is to keep its target audience informed.

- *If there is a need to use **sponsored posts** to publicise an event, please seek approval from responsible SSIO officers. Sponsored posts are a form of advertising and local SSIO policies must be observed. Sponsored posts may also attract some negative reactions from recipients who did not expect to see these posts in their social media feeds.*

Using social media is an investment of time. Before proceeding with creating any number of channels to represent the chosen Centre, Region or Country within the SSIO umbrella, ask the following questions:

- What is the purpose of creating the account? How will your account add value to your target audience's use of social media?
 - There are already International and Regional accounts which probably inform your same target audience about major SSIO-related topics. How will your account be more relevant and useful?
- Is this channel an appropriate platform to convey chosen messages?
 - Instagram requires photographs to accompany every post - will you have appropriate images for the posts or will you keep using pictures of Sathya Sai Baba for each?
 - Twitter is restricted to short sentences - will that be enough to convey the entirety of the information? Will you need to augment this by providing links to your SSIO respective website?
- Using a video service like Vimeo or YouTube to broadcast text-only messages is not advised. Just as Instagram is based on photos, a video service is for videos. Use the channel properly.
- Is the team ready for social media?
 - Generating content takes a lot of effort. Is there a team behind the account or is one individual willing to consistently put in the hours to publish content *consistently* through the channel(s)? What is your contingency plan if that volunteer becomes unavailable for some reason, such as visiting Prasanthi Nilayam and having limited internet access?
 - What is your strategy for posting content that is relevant to your local audience? Followers will drop off and pay less attention if your account is simply a mirror of the major International and Regional accounts, and in time, the social media algorithms may not show your posts due to lack of engagement.
- Who is the account targeting?
 - What platforms do they use most?
 - ◆ Social media
 - ◆ Email
 - ◆ Chat groups and broadcast lists (see [Appendix II](#))

- Are the Social media team members familiar with the platform? Do members have personal accounts or prior experience on that platform? (see [Appendix V](#) for steps to setting up a new account)
 - ♦ When trying out a new feature, it's best to test it on a personal account or some account set up specifically for testing. Any such activity on the official account will result in its followers being notified and poorly executed posts/features will not reflect well on the Organisation.

Account Bio/About Information

Your social media bio is the first thing someone sees when they visit your profile. It is the best place to inform your viewers on your “who, what, when, why, how” and can be a place where you highlight SSIO values

- **Website** - link to the Centre/Group page (.org preferred)
- **Contact information** (official email for SSIO purposes)
 - Team members should maintain separate official and personal email addresses, using the official addresses for SSIO communications. Admins should not use their personal email address for official social media activities. Login information for these official email accounts should be provided to the media coordinator and senior leadership as necessary.
 - **Address** – Centre websites may provide the addresses, and a link at their discretion.
 - **Blurb** – this is a public-facing account, be clear in informing what the account represents.

Sharing, Resharing and Reposting

Your account may want to share important announcements or interesting posts that appear on other accounts. Please observe the guidelines below when sharing, resharing or reposting material from other accounts.

- **Don't share everything that seems interesting** – being judicious will help make your content crisper and directly relevant.
- **Sharing is not the solution for having insufficient original content** – at the very least, add value to the shared post by including a note or translation to make the material relevant to your users.
- **Be mindful** whether the reshared material is consistent with SSIO guidelines and Swami's teachings
- **Check the accuracy and credibility** of the material and of the sources
- **Natively share and reshare** within the platform when possible instead of copying the material and posting it as new on your account.
 - Any updates made to the original posting will automatically be seen in your reshared posting.
 - Using the built-in tools allows the original post creator to see how their content fares in online space, and allows your followers to discover other accounts, and followers of those accounts to find yours.

- When resharing major announcements from official accounts, please add a statement that explains the relevance to the followers of your account. If you are simply mirroring another, be aware that you may be oversaturating the feeds of your followers.
 - If the national account mentions an event, your account can include information about who to contact locally for more information.
 - Providing a translation is another way to make the sharing locally relevant.
- **Clearly attribute** the originating account so readers can go to the source of this material. Seek written permission for the intellectual property you're borrowing from the original poster.
 - Do not reshare the graphic again *as yourself* if the post already exists on the official account
- Cross-platform sharing is encouraged when said account has no presence on that platform. For example, they are not on Twitter but you are.

User Interaction and Engagement

- On Facebook, make a Page instead of an individual account. If required or necessary, make a Closed Group.
 - Individual accounts do not provide sufficient features for managing public communications
 - An Open Group is very much like a limited page
- On Twitter and Instagram use a Business Account. These provide more functionality than individual accounts, e.g. longer videos, access to analytics.
- Follow a schedule that is based on a sustainable strategy for creating posts. For example, one day of the week for announcements, other days for something from the service, devotional, or educational wings.
- Share short videos directly by uploading to Facebook, Instagram or Twitter rather than through a YouTube/Vimeo link, unless absolutely necessary. Native videos usually have features that are not available for embedded videos.
- **Be aware** of whom you follow. Followers view your liking or subscription to a group or account as your SSIO unit's acceptance or endorsement of its views
- Be watchful that the Account Admins are not intentionally or unintentionally promoting personal agendas or causes or introducing personal, commercial or political topics.
- Take **responsibility** for the conversations started. Acknowledge and correct any errors that may have occurred and inform followers about the correction.
- Encourage participants to contribute perspective, additional knowledge and expertise. Acknowledge their contributions.
- If the team decides to publish an interesting message someone has received from a reader, it is important to be clear in the post that the email or message is from another person and that the words are not your own. The team must also check the accuracy of the comment and credibility of the source.

Tagging

Tagging an individual or an organisational account is a means of identifying those represented in the post.

- Tag individuals only with their express permission. Depending on privacy settings, being tagged can have images show up on an individual's account publicly and cause problems for those individuals, including legal issues for those who live in societies that have restrictions on religious and spiritual affiliations, or work in professions that do.
- Tag organisational accounts when applicable. If a Centre account takes a picture at a Regional event, tagging the Regional account is obvious. A macro account (National or Zonal account) can tag its constituents (Regions and Centres) represented in the post and is a good method to inform followers about official accounts.
- Excessive tagging is seen as spamming for attention. Be judicious when you tag others. It is recommended to only tag official (Centre, Region, National and, International) accounts, and not privately-run accounts that have no organisational affiliation or oversight such as SBOI, and others. See [here](#) for a list of recognised SSIO accounts.

Hashtags

A hashtag (pound sign/number sign) denoted by a '#' symbol, is a means for associating posts with topics. Use of standardised hashtags allows (potential) followers or even yourself to find relevant posts more easily.

Avoid using general hashtags with generic words unless they are specific to your Region. At the very least, add "Sai" to a generic word, and possibly the year if relevant. Look to SSU - @saiuniverse, SYA - @saiyoungadults, RS - @radiosai to see which hashtags they are using for an event or topic, and use the same ones so that your post will show up in the same searches.

Do not use too many hashtags. Hashtag etiquette is essential to making posts not appear desperate for attention. Use up to a maximum of 6 hashtags, and only if they apply.

Commonly used tags (see [Appendix IV](#) for detailed explanations)

#SathyaSai (for all Sai posts)	#SaiYoungAdults (formerly #SaiYouth)	#SaiBhajans (Devotional singing)
#SaiLoveinAction (Service activities)	#SaiYouthFest / #SaiYAFest (YA Festival)	#SathyaSaiArt (Sai Artwork)
#LoveinAction (Public Outreach volunteer projects)	#ServeThePlanet (POC Initiative)	#QotD (Quote of the Day)

Citing Quotes

Everything posted by an SSIO account may be considered by readers to be authentic and official. For this reason, it is important to ensure that quotes are accurate and that Sathya Sai Baba actually said them. Always include the citation for every quote that is shared, and do not merely state “-Sathya Sai Baba” at the end. These citations also allow readers to look up the quote in its proper context and learn more about what Sathya Sai Baba has said on the topic.

- Verify authenticity of quotes by *Sathya Sai Baba*
- Document quotes if citation is not included in post / graphic
- Suggested format of quotes:
 - Source - Month, Year
 - Book, volume, chapter
 - ♦ page numbers can be left out because they vary based on translations and editions

Visit sssbt.info for the complete set of authentic books containing discourses by Sathya Sai.

Tips on Posting

- **Diversify posts.** Don't post only the clips from Centre bhajan sessions, or only share quotes and announcements. Broaden your offerings so that followers stay engaged. Share photos and clips from multiple activities, show volunteers preparing for events, show participants engaged in activities. Find your niche and make the account inspiring, engaging and interesting.
- **Content calendar.** Page followers like to see something from you consistently, and they will be quick to engage via comments and likes. Make a schedule for postings and stick to it, for example a quote every Thursday or a photo every Sunday. Your followers will thank you. The more they engage, i.e. clicking, liking, the more often your posts will show up in the feeds of their friends and others who may be interested in similar material.
- **Quality over quantity.** Don't overstretch. If the team can only share amazing content twice a week, don't post every day. Pace yourself. If the creative team is small, don't overwork them.
- **Platform insights.** Use platform-specific insights to understand the best time to post on each channel. Recognise when page followers will be online to browse through their feed, when there's the least activity so the post will have the most visibility. Several third-party services have free or paid features which can help understand the patterns.

Ingredients of a post

- **Link** – drive traffic to the local Centre's website. Most announcements can't be condensed into a very short social media post, and most social media postings are only visible for a few days. Use your website to provide more detailed information.
- **Graphic/Video** – people respond to visuals, include video clips or graphics such as photographs as much as possible.
- **Hashtag** – allows for searchability

- **Caption** – Provide a good description so people can get the gist of the post in case they don't have time to read it.
- **Geolocation** – tag or check-in to the location relevant to the activity. Searching by locations is another way people find posts and it allows captions to be more concise because you don't have to mention the location – the tag on the post will do that for you.
- **Tag** – tag accounts when it makes sense. Do not tag accounts simply to garner likes and followers for your own account.

Use Common Sense

- **Add value.** Ensure what is posted is helpful and thought-provoking. Remember, it's a conversation, be genuine. Build a community by posting content that invites responses—then stay engaged. The team can also broaden the dialogue by citing others who are posting about the same topic and allowing content to be shared.
- **When you make a mistake, admit it.** Be upfront and be quick with the correction. The team may choose to modify an earlier post — be clear that it has been done.
- Exercise caution, common sense and sound judgement when engaging with the community. **Post meaningful and respectful comments:** Avoid spam or remarks that are off-topic or offensive. Make sure that any humour you used is easily understood and will not be interpreted as sarcasm, and that the humour is appropriate.
- When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep it appropriate and polite. If you find yourself in a situation online that is becoming antagonistic or negative, do not get overly defensive and do not disengage from the conversation abruptly. Feel free to ask the Media Committee – mediateam@sathyasai.org, for advice and/or to disengage from the dialogue in a polite manner that reflects well on Sathya Sai Baba and the SSIO.

Moderation

Moderation refers to the feature that requires a comment to be approved. If the content is positive and in context to the conversation, then it can be approved. But when the content is disrespectful, offensive, denigrating, and/or completely inappropriate, then the community manager should reject the content.

Trolls

Trolling is when a person is simply trying to incite anger from the account or the people following it. In some cases, the person may have been motivated to make an angry comment due to some frustration.

This person has a need to have their complaint heard, and their unhappy messages will cease once they're satisfied that their issue has been addressed. Trolls only stop when they're forced to, or they get bored.

It can be difficult to discern the difference between trolls and individuals with legitimate concerns. Before taking any action on a possible troll post, listen to what the person is trying to say and think about their motivation.

Dealing with trolls

- **Don't rush to react.** Take a breath before responding.
- **Listen and correct errors.** Whether the individual has a legitimate concern or is trolling, this response is a good practice. Sometimes people just want to be heard. Hear them, try to help, and they'll almost always thank you publicly.
- **Respond factually.** Respond (without any defensive overtones) calmly and courteously if the troll is spreading misinformation. Try to nip the inaccurate information in the bud to prevent it from spreading.
- **Diffuse with humour.** This simple-sounding strategy may be tough to execute. Make light of the situation to diffuse its power. Be careful the use of humour isn't mean and/or sarcastic - people enjoy wit, whereas meanness is likely to result in more nasty messages.
- **Ignore.** Some trolls may go away if their comments are ignored. Online trolls want the attention. They crave the defensiveness. They want the team to get upset. Don't give them the pleasure.
- **Block/Ban when appropriate.** This method can be applied to spammers as well. Most trolls are annoying, but harmless. There are, however, cases where trolls take things too far. Perhaps they've escalated to threats or hate speech. In cases such as these, it's reasonable to consider blocking or banning the user as well as deleting their comments. Report the troll to the social network if the troll's post/comment violates the social network's standards for appropriate content and behaviour.
- **Notify SSIO mediateam@sathyasai.org.** The SSIO have a team ready to help when teams find themselves in a very difficult situation. Provide the entire correspondence, and if the individual has engaged in other posts, include those as well.
- **Respond through private messaging.** Reach out to the troll and pacify the situation by conversing directly with them and making them feel heard.

Appendix I: Types of Facebook accounts

	Group	Page
Used by/meant for	Like-minded individuals discussing a special topic. Geared towards discussions, whether discussions happen or not.	Organisations and special interests sharing about their activities. Not meant for one-to-one discussions and engagements.
Method of joining/subscribing	Submit a membership request; Invite users to join; Directly add users	Pages can be "liked" or "followed" which results in starting a subscription to the content. A subscriber's account may list the pages that have been liked, whereas followed pages are not listed.
Result of joining/subscribing	Posted content becomes visible on the member's feed	Posted content becomes visible on the subscriber's feed
To prevent someone from joining	Do not approve the membership request; keep the group private or closed.	Can be blocked only after they have interacted in some way, e.g. like or comment a post
To prevent someone from reading	Make the group private or closed.	Ban the user
To prevent someone from writing posts	Enable reviewing of posts; restrict posting to entrusted individuals	Disable public posting
To prevent people from commenting	Remove them from the group	Ban the user
Block specific people from sending you messages	Not applicable for a group; individual group members can enable this for themselves.	Disable messaging to the Page; Ban specific people from the Page and they won't be able to send messages.
Delete comments	Yes	Yes
Hide comments	Yes	Yes

Member/subscriber list management	Can add members directly or invite them; can remove members; can change the list of administrators.	Can manage the list of administrators; can block/ban users.
Statistics about posts being read	Simple statistics such as number of members who have seen a post	Many statistics about subscriber demographics and engagement
Posts can be published on a schedule and Regionally targeted	No	Yes

Appendix II: Broadcast chats

Like email lists, chat applications are convenient means of sending short messages, short audio and video files and also web links instantaneously around the world to relatively large numbers via the 'broadcast' feature.

- Use of a WhatsApp broadcast list is recommended instead of a group because the privacy of all recipients is protected by not exposing their phone numbers
 - ♦ Replies are only sent to the list administrator and not the entire list, thus reducing message overload to everyone else

The messages are sent directly to the recipient and you can set up a system by which some recipients send the messages to subgroups. For example, the Sai Spiritual Education coordinator can forward messages to parents.

Requires:

- A responsible and reliable chain of people from the Zone Media Coordinator onwards.
- A clear understanding by all of the limited use of this tool.
- A system of oversight, which can be obtained if an SSIO Officer or a Media Coordinator is a member of each broadcast group in the Zone/Country.
- A means for transferring chat admin/ownership when the local person in charge changes.
- Text messages are easily edited and modified, and it is difficult to verify the authenticity of forwarded messages. It is recommended to use graphics, audio or video because these cannot be easily altered.

Appendix III: Posting Checklist

General account checklist

- Is the SSIO account set up correctly?
- Is each post the best it can be, i.e. accuracy and appeal?
- Has all content has been reviewed and approved
- Post when it's most likely to be seen by your audience
 - Use platform analytics to determine best day and time

Post-specific checklist

- Have appropriate tags been included?
 - Geo-tag (tagging the location of the activity)
 - Hashtag
 - Profile tags (no individuals)
- When quoting Sathya Sai Baba please include source (see citation section)
- Follow conversations on your posts closely
 - Reply within 12 hours
 - Am I being trolled? (see moderation section)
 - Use common sense
 - Do not engage if confrontational
 - Notify SSIO
 - Block/ban if needed

Appendix IV: Hashtags

Some of these hashtags have been in use for years. Each hashtag has been researched and does not conflict with a tag used by another group or event. Note the capitalisation of each word makes for easier reading. Also note the lack of capitalisation for words beginning with 'i' because a capitalised 'i' can be mistaken for a lowercase 'L'. As members of the SSIO see these hashtags in circulation they will use these more often and be less confused about which ones to use.

#SathyaSai	For all posts relating to Sathya Sai Baba (except POC related where the name and form is kept keep the off all content). Consider using this hashtag if you have difficulty thinking of any other hashtag
#SaiBhajans	Posts related to any devotional singing (bhajans)
#SathyaSaiArt	Artwork related to Sathya Sai Baba or any of the wings in the SSIO
#SaiLoveinAction	Service projects
#LoveinAction	Volunteer projects (part of Public Outreach)
#SaiYoungAdults	Formerly #SaiYouth , use this hashtag for posts relating to Sathya 'Sai Young Adult activities
#SaiSpiritualEducation	Posts related to SSE (except spell it out). <i>Not</i> #Balvikas
#QotD	Tag 'Quote of the Day' for any quotes by Sathya Sai. Does not require the account to post quotes daily
#ServeThePlanet	Activities that are part of the 'Serve the Planet' Public Outreach programme
#ProtectThePlanet	A 'Serve the Planet' Initiative. Public Outreach programme
#ReflectTheLove	Posts relating to the 'Sadhana of Love' programme
#SSILP<insert year>	Posts relating to the 'Sathya Sai International Leadership Programme'
#SaiYAtalent	Posts relating to 'Young Adult Talent Development' programme and their Workshops
#LASA	'Love All Serve All' initiative (part of Public Outreach) - music on Human Values

To increase the effectiveness of the hashtags listed above, do not use alternate hashtags

Appendix V: Setting up an account

Ready to create an account? Here's how.

Facebook

To create a Facebook Page:

1. Go to facebook.com/pages/create.
2. Click to choose a Page category.
3. Select a more specific category from the dropdown menu and fill out the required information.
4. Click **Get Started** and follow the on-screen instructions.

To Create a Facebook Group:

5. Find "Add Group" From your "home page" on Facebook go to the Groups section on the left side menu & find **Add Group**
6. Click Create New Group
7. Name Your Group
8. Add Members
9. Choose Privacy Setting
10. Click **Create**

Twitter

To create an account:

1. Go to twitter.com/signup. Enter your full name, phone number, and type a strong password.
2. Click on "Sign up for Twitter"
3. Follow on-screen instructions
4. Once you've clicked **Sign up for Twitter**, you can select a **username**

Note: An email address can only be associated with one Twitter account at a time.

Instagram

To create an account:

1. Go to instagram.com.
2. Enter your email address, create a username and password or click **Log in with Facebook** to sign up with your Facebook account.
3. If you register with an email, click **Sign up**. If you register with Facebook, you'll be prompted to log into your Facebook account if you're currently logged out.



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