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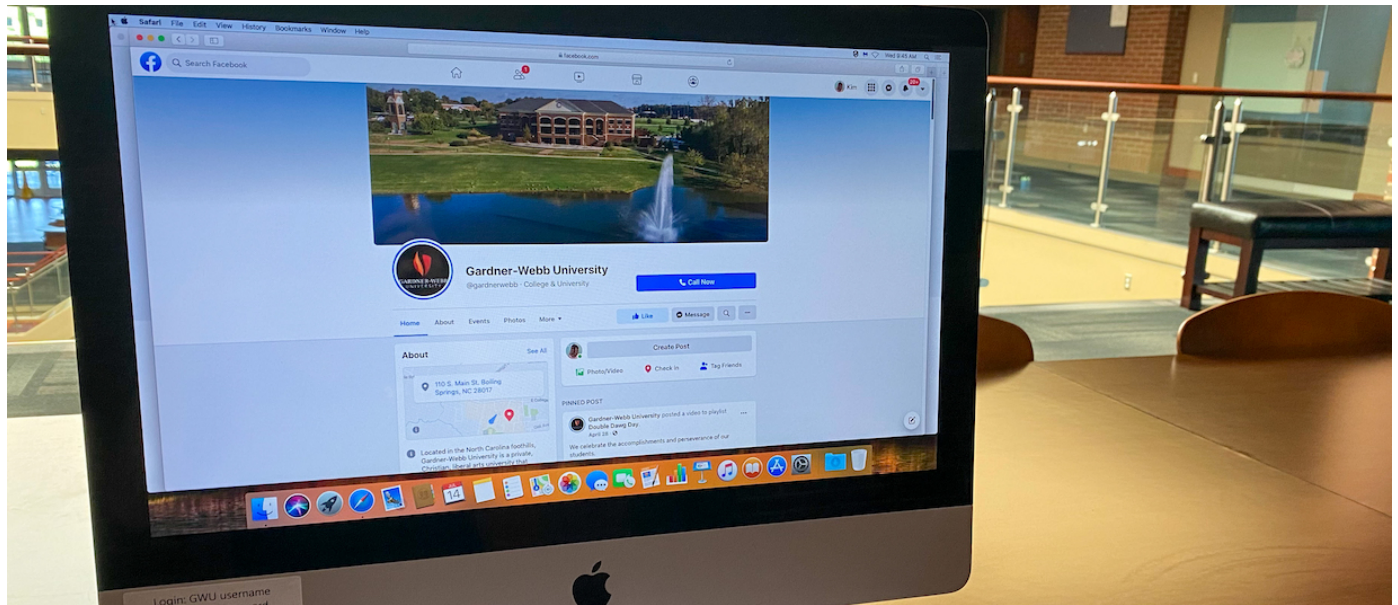
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Four Tips to Create Inclusive and Accessible Content for Everyone in the Social Media Conversation

BY **OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS** ON **JULY 15, 2021**

GWU's Social Media Manager, Kim Kreuzman, Offers Ideas for Accessible Posts

Did you know—people connect on social media for an average of 144 minutes every single day. Whether through Facetime video, a quick text filled with emojis and a few too many exclamation marks, or a direct message (DM) of cute puppies on Instagram to brighten a loved one's day, social media has redefined how people connect and interact with family, friends and the world.

Recently, on #WorldSocialMediaDay, the University joined the global celebration of social media's impact, and its ability to bring people together from all over the world to share memories, movements, support, culture, and trends. Gardner-Webb's social media platforms—LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram—have a combined 52,532 followers.

With more than 15 percent of the world's population experiencing some form of disability, it is more important than ever to consider how we can create inclusive content to ensure no one is left out of the conversation. Gardner-Webb University's social media manager Kim Kreuzman offers four tips to create inclusive posts as you connect on social media.

1. Create accessible content: Include alternative text and consider your audience

Before you hit publish when posting to social channels, consider how screen readers and other assistive tools might read your words. How would someone whose second language is English or a person with a disability interpret words or phrases?

Tips for inclusive text:

- Without compromising your brand voice, when possible, avoid jargon, slang, or technical terms.

- Keep in mind, while Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have developed their own image recognition technology, it is much better to write out the alt text descriptions when using images instead of relying on the automatically generated descriptions which are not always the most accurate. Alt text descriptions should be the length of a Tweet (or 280 characters) or less. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but for screen reader users, a lengthy explanation of the image will leave them waiting for the description to end.

- Use camel case for multi-word hashtags, capitalizing the first letter of each word to make the hashtag legible not only for screen readers, but also to improve understanding and readability for everyone. For example: GardnerWebbClassOf2025
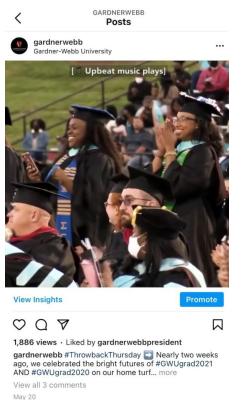
2. Make your content easy to engage with (without sound): Caption your content

For video content, captions of the audio benefit not just those who are Deaf, but also those who are non-native English speakers, and those watching with the sound off. Also, nearly 80 percent of people are more likely to watch an entire video when captions are available.

Tips for captioning your video content:

- Closed Captions are captions that a user can turn on and off, and open captions are embedded into a video and cannot be turned off. Explore the social platform you are interested in using to determine which is best suited for the platform.

- Review any automatic captions for errors. Many social platforms offer captions as a built in tool; however, they are not always accurate.

- Create captions quickly using a third-party app like MixCaptions, which enables you to create captions and edit them for accuracy right from your phone and upload your video to your preferred social channels with open captions.

3. Avoid ableist language: Chose words that don't devalue and divide

Some of our most common, ingrained expressions have damaging effects on populations in our audience. Ableist language is language that marginalizes people with disabilities and often crops up in the slang we use, metaphors, jokes and euphemisms. While they might feel like casual exclamations, it is important to be aware of our lexicon and the damage it can cause on people and communities with disabilities.

Tips for steering clear of ableist language:

- Ableism is bigger than language. It is a tool that we use to make sense of our feelings and environments.

    - For example, you might think to say, "I stand with _____," but consider using "support" instead. This avoids alienating those who are not physically able to stand.

- Keep the focus on the point you are making. If you are critiquing someone's behavior, work, policies, etc., discuss the reasons you agree or disagree with it instead of attacking a person's physical or mental abilities.

    - To avoid further stigmatizing individuals with psychiatric disabilities, instead of describing someone as a "psycho," or "crazy," focus your efforts on the real issue.
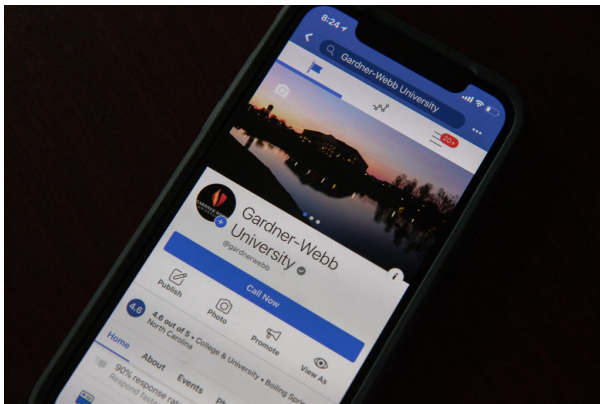
4. Understand your position: Take a step back

National and international hashtag holidays are on the rise. From #NationalCheesecakeDay to #WomensHistoryMonth, hundreds of holidays raise awareness, honor social justice issues, communities, and even food. From humorous celebrations to important issues, it's important to consider your position in the conversation and ensure it is genuine and relevant.

Tips for understanding your brand's position

- Know your why. Before you partake in a holiday hashtag, ask yourself if the holiday fits your audience. What is the goal of using the hashtag?

- Not a subject matter expert? Team up or share content from those who are, elevate their voice, and create inclusive conversation.

Kreuzman summarized, "Despite our best efforts, there are always opportunities to improve. Continue seizing opportunities to learn and contribute to equality and justice. Lean into areas of growth—correct mistakes, recognize exclusion, learn from your followers, and present information in the clearest way possible."

Check out Gardner-Webb's Social Media Account Index. →

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university, Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.