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OPSEC, AF core values vital in social media

(Courtesy of Air University Public Affairs)

While Airmen are encouraged to tell the Air Force story, they should be mindful to do so in ways that lend credit to themselves and the service, officials said.

With the emergence of social media, information sharing has changed in unprecedented ways. It continues to be dynamic and evolving.

Now a cultural norm around the globe, social media is part of the daily activities of Airmen and their families, who use social media sites to stay connected.

The Air Force has specific guidance related to social media. In particular, Airmen should remember to heed both operational security and Air Force core values as they exercise the privilege of accessing social media, officials said.

“A helpful reminder for Airmen is to use our core values as a filter before engaging in a public forum,” said Col. Steve Clutter, the Air Education and Training Command public affairs director.

“Core values will guide them to be cautious before crossing the line between funny and distasteful, or sharing good information without creating an OPSEC violation. We must reinforce to our Airmen to use good judgment when using social media sites as there may be consequences with what is posted.”

Careless use of social media can jeopardize the mission. An OPSEC violation was detailed in an article written by Airman 1st Class Precious Yett, with the 502nd Air Base Wing OL-B Public Affairs at Joint Base San Antonio – Randolph Air Force Base.

“I had a situation with a member who was deployed downrange in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom,” said Tech. Sgt. Darrell Williams, the 902nd Security Forces Squadron Military Working Dog section NCO in charge. “I logged onto Facebook one morning and noticed he had checked-in to his search pit on the base.

“He wasn’t thinking that by doing so, he’s broadcasting the grid coordinates to a strategic location on base via an unsecured medium,” Williams said.

“Anyone with hostile intentions could have utilized those coordinates to not only locate an entry point into the installation but target those who work there. Additionally, the deployed member had posted what equipment was currently in use and identified these pieces of equipment by name.”

Williams said he immediately sent the airman a Facebook message and reminded him of operational and communication security procedures. The post was deleted, but with the information already online, the damage could have already been done.

The Air Force pamphlet "Social Media and the Air Force," located online at (<http://www.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-091210-043.pdf>) and produced by the Air Force Public Affairs Agency Emerging Technology Division, states, "Airmen should note that anytime they engage in social media, they are representing the Air Force and therefore should not do anything that will discredit themselves or the Air Force."

It goes on to say, "Airmen must abide by certain restrictions to ensure good order and discipline. All Airmen are on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and all actions are subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Even if Airmen state they are not representing the Air Force, other audiences may not interpret the information that way.

Officials advise Airmen to be careful of the details, text, photos and video posted to profiles on MySpace and Facebook and other social networks. Employers and adversaries can search these sites, and there are numerous examples of people losing a job due to their inappropriate photos or comments.

"Airmen, by the nature of the business, are always on the record and must always represent the core values, even on the Web: integrity first, service before self and excellence in all that is done," the pamphlet stated.