# AFTER HOURS

## Approaches to Social Media Relations After 5 pm

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# INTRODUCTION

After-hours social media relations are non-negotiable in the communications industry. But creating a management system that works for employee work-life balance while maintaining the organization's social engagement goals is possible and can be beneficial for all those involved.

A recent survey of Manitoba communicators showed a lack of established system for after-hours social media relations[1]. One respondent said answering the survey questions made them realize they need a better system for social media management.

While there is an essential requirement for after-hours social media relations in the digital era, it is also necessary to set healthy work-life boundaries so employees avoid burnout and emotional exhaustion. This report outlines various approaches to monitoring and managing social media outside traditional work hours. Manitoba communicators have explained what is and isn't working through a series of interviews and an online survey distributed on January 18, 2023.

# Social listening and relationship building

Over the last decade, social media has grown to be an essential resource for two-way communication with target audiences. Social media allows businesses to interact with audiences, monitor and collect information regarding online brand presence, and build a reputation among consumers.

According to Kepios 2022 Global Overview Digital Report, 58.4 per cent of the world population are active social media users. Those users average more than two and a half hours per day using social media on an average of seven different social platforms each month[2].

Cision's 2023 Global Comms Report outlined the importance of continuously asserting your brand's voice and stories into the public sphere to maintain control of the brand's narratives. While asserting brand narrative is essential for recognition, active listening is also crucial for understanding your brand's role in relation to your audience. Two-way communication takes more time and effort than straight content distribution[3].

According to Cision's report, The Art of Social PR, social listening is integral to identifying a potential crisis and managing it correctly before it escalates[4]. The current online environment means there are many opportunities for small issues to intensify. Responding promptly and appropriately is more important than ever for your brand's reputation and audience relationships.

1. Kate Doer. Managing Social and Traditional Media After Work Hours.
2. 2022 Global Overview Digital Report," Kepios, accessed February 18, 2023, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report
3. "2023 Global Comms Report: A Seminal Moment," Cision, accessed February 1, 2023, https://www.cision.com/resources/white-papers/2023-global-comms-report/
4. "The Art of Social PR," Cision, accessed February 1, 2023, https://www.cision.com/resources/white-papers/2021-social-listening-ebook/

Communications departments are increasingly using social media data and analytics to show internal executives why their role is important and necessary. According to Cision's 2023 Global Comms Report, data is crucial to ensuring communications are considered for budgets, impact, and decision-making[5].

While collecting data is essential, communicators analyze it with an understanding of the social climate and digital landscape it exists within, and then interpret what the data means.

# Why balance is important: Work-life relationships and burnout

While after-hours social media relations may be considered a responsibility for some communicators, employees shouldn't be expected to be accessible 24/7. There are negative impacts for anyone working too often without disconnecting.

According to a Journal of Communication Management study, employees who engage in after-hours communication work, whether voluntary or not, can experience burnout, increased work-life conflict, reduced ability to psychologically detach from job-related issues, and long-term stress impact[6].

On December 2, 2021, the Ontario government introduced a policy on the rights to disconnect from work[7]. According to the policy, organizations with over 25 employees must have a written policy regarding disconnecting from work. This means employees have the right to not engage in work-related communications, emails, telephone calls, video calls, or sending/reviewing other messages, ensuring freedom from the performance of work.

## SURVEY RESULT

**How often do you deal with social media relations outside traditional work hours?**

*Managing Social and Traditional Media After Work Hours Survey*

5. "2023 Global Comms Report: A Seminal Moment," Cision, accessed February 1, 2023, https://www.cision.com/resources/white-papers/2023-global-comms-report/ 5 5
6. Kim, K. H., and Chon, M.-G., "When work and life boundaries are blurred: the effect of after-hours work communication through communication technology on employee outcomes," Journal of Communication Management 26, no. 4 (2022): 386–400, https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-06-2022-0073
7. Government of Ontario, Employment Standards Act, Written Policy on Disconnecting From Work, February 12, 2021, https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/00e41#BK39

The need for government policy regarding employees' right to disconnect from work demonstrates an obvious need for clear work-life boundaries.

Countries such as France, Italy, and Ireland established the right to disconnect policy before COVID-19[8]. While other governments such as Belgium and the province of Ontario, established a policy after noticing a need to disconnect when work from home became more common during the pandemic. Manitoba does not have an established right to disconnect policy in place or proposed at the time of writing.

For employees to take a break from work, they must be mentally and physically removed from the work situation. This means not interacting with work content or communications.

Emotional exhaustion is the main cause of burnout and results from chronic, prolonged work-related stress[9]. Burnout has been a growing challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic, and researchers have emphasized the role of organizations in managing employee burnout in the workplace.

Burnout and emotional exhaustion are not only detrimental to employees' well-being, but organizations can experience negative effects as well. Burnout reduces employee's motivation in work settings.

Employees may also identify the organization as the cause of their emotional exhaustion which can result in negative thoughts and behaviours toward the organization. The negative consequences of not allowing employees to take a break from work can hurt the employer and the organization's brand reputation.

In the survey facilitated for this report, a respondent said, "I think normalizing not working after-hours is vital for work/life balance. I'm not sure what the solution is in the context of marketing, but I think there needs to be an extremely clear separation."

8. Jack Kelly, "Belgium, Portugal And Other European Countries Prohibit Managers From Contacting Employees Outside of Working Hours," Forbes, February 3, 2022, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2022/02/03/belgium-portugal-and-other-european-countries-are-ahead-of-the-us-prohibiting-managers-from-contacting-employees-outside-of-working-hours/?sh=516-6d2771d00

9. Kim, K. H., and Chon, M.-G., "When work and life boundaries are blurred: the effect of after-hours work communication through communication technology on employee outcomes," Journal of Communication Management 26, no. 4 (2022): 386–400, https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-06-2022-0073

# Approaches to After-Hours Social Media Relations

Three approaches to after-hours communication management came from interviewing Manitoba communicators and survey respondents. The outlined approaches are flex time, publicly signing off, and on-call.

## FLEX TIME

Flex time refers to an arrangement between an employee and the organization to alter or adjust their workday's start and end times around the 'normal' set work hours[10]. This approach is common in the communications industry due to the nature of communications roles, evolving social media platforms, and hours of engagement with audiences.

Depending on your key public's location, it may be more opportune to reach audiences outside of set work hours — which is when they're available to scroll social media or make a personal acquisition or engagement.

Flex time can function differently depending on an organization's size and structure. One thing to remember is to set clear boundaries and guidelines around flex time that work for your organization's resources and circumstances.

### i. Take the time you've earned back

Communicators often have many tasks to manage. Being proactive and predictive can help, but when a media relations inquiry arises or a crisis breaks, day-to-day tasks must be pushed to a lower priority. When unplanned tasks take priority, communicators may feel like they still need to complete set tasks of the day and manage the unexpected one leading to overtime work.

Overworked employees are less productive, accomplish less, and produce lower-quality work[11]. Making clear guidelines about flex time that encourage employees to take back time may help keep employees feeling less overwhelmed and overworked.

Communications Manager at Siloam Mission, Luke Jacob Thiessen, said when he first started in the non-profit sector, working 15 minutes here and there wasn't always a big enough deal to take back time after factoring in his large workload.

"I had so much work to do all the time that I couldn't even really be taking the time back," said Thiessen. Over time he discovered they needed another employee to help manage the workload, and he's been able to set boundaries and create a balance for their team. "It's gotten a lot better. I now take the time back," said Thiessen.

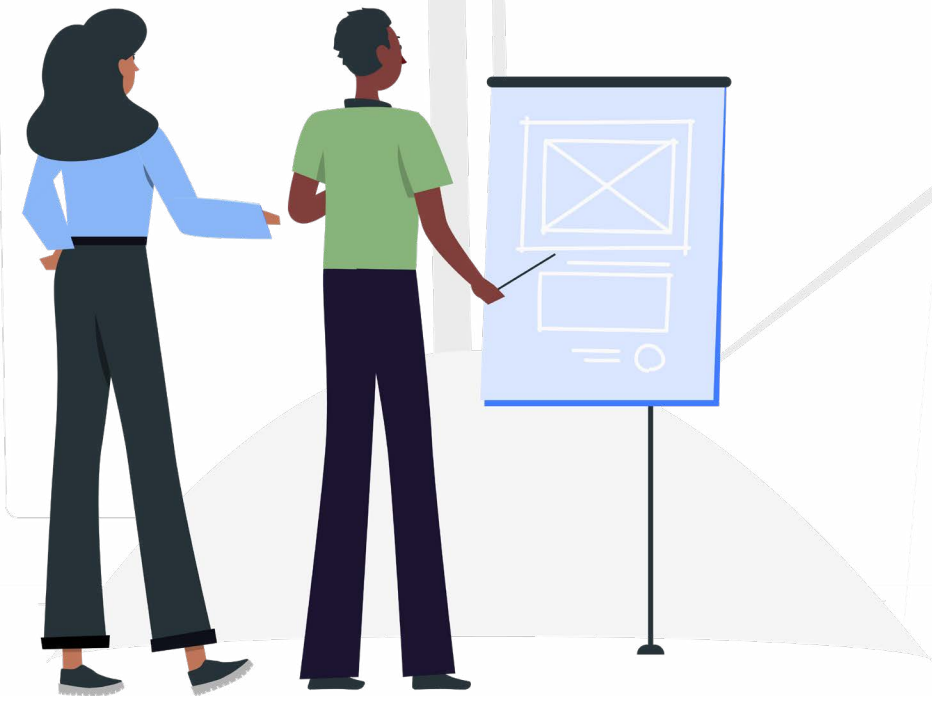
10. UCDavis (website), last modified September 2, 2022, https://hr.ucdavis.edu/departments/worklife-wellness/flexiblework/flextime
11. Shayna Waltower, "50-Hour Workweeks? How to Cut Back on the New Normal," Business News Daily, February 21, 2023, https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/8357-longer-work-weeks.html

## ii. Interdepartmental knowledge and awareness

Departments outside of communications may need help understanding communicators' roles and the hours they put in after others clock out. Managers can set a precedent with their whole team to let non-communicators know that work is done while they're not around to see it. That way, when communicators come in a little late or leave early, their colleagues in other departments know they aren't late or skipping out — they've earned that time back.

Thiessen said letting other departments know about how his communications team functions has been helpful.

"As a team, we've realized that [working after-hours] is always happening," said Thiessen. "Everyone needs to be okay with the fact that sometimes the communications team is coming in later or leaving early because they had other things going on."



# SIGNING OFF

A public sign-off on social media may be the best option for your organization's time and resources. If you experience few inquiries or don't provide a service that will lend itself to two-way audience communication, prioritizing hours for social media management and engagement during the day might be your best use of time. There are some things to keep in mind when signing off.

## i. Let your audience know

Communications is about sharing information and relationship building between a business and an audience. Letting your audience know where you are, where you're going, and when you'll be back is an effective way to build trust and mutual respect. No one wants to be ghosted – don't ruin your audience relationship by leaving them in the dark.

## ii. Case Study — City of Winnipeg

The City of Winnipeg's Twitter account[12] sends out a Tweet every evening saying they are signing off social media for the day, they'll be back in the morning, and in the meantime, this is how you can contact them. Each morning they tweet they are back online and ready to chat.

Felicia Wiltshire, City of Winnipeg Director of Customer Service & Communications, said 311 manages the interactions and conversations on the City of Winnipeg's Twitter account. There are not enough 311 staff to monitor, track, and respond on Twitter specifically after hours, but its staff is still answering email and phone requests.

Wiltshire said the City of Winnipeg's Twitter account used to just put the absence message in the bio of its account, but they've found signing off for the night acts as an accountability piece or something to point back to.

## iii. Response rate

Facebook manages your response rate. If you're not responding quickly and consistently Facebook takes note and lets your audience know. Response rate is the percentage of messages that your page managers respond to[13].

On a Facebook business page, it will say "typically responds in blank hours" or "very responsive." Leaving messages unanswered for a long period will decrease your response rate. Manual and automated messages are included in calculating your rate.

If a higher response rate is important for your organization's communications goal, be sure to set an appropriate automated response when you know you won't be able to manually respond.

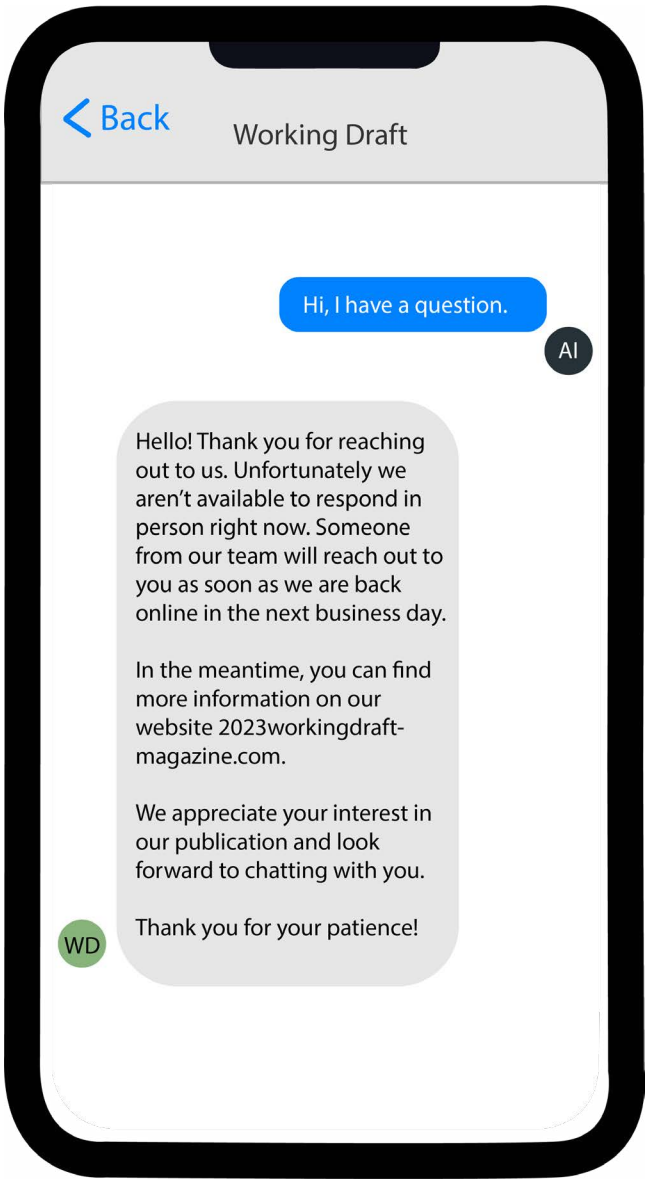
12. City of Winnipeg (@cityofwinnipeg). Twitter page, https://twitter.com/cityofwinnipeg?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor
13. Facebook Help Centre, "Learn how response rate and response time are defined for your Page," https://www.facebook.com/help/1625715647696553

# iv. Automated messages

Automated messages are a helpful tool to relay an organization's absence or information without a manual response. Automated messages should be used strategically and only when necessary. Crafting an automatic message that matches your brand voice and provides valuable information can help automated messages feel more personal. Ninety per cent of consumers find personalized content very or somewhat appealing[14].

There can be a perception that public relations and communicators are trying to craft a message before replying — which is true — but it isn't with malicious intent. Letting people know you aren't available to get back to them at that moment doesn't mean communicators are finding ways to skirt their inquiry; it may be because they either aren't available or are trying to find the correct information to relay.

Writing a transparent and personal automated message with useful information for your audience can help you maintain a good relationship with your audience when you aren't available to communicate in real time on the organization's behalf.




14. Mailchimp, "Email Automation," https://mailchimp.com/en-ca/marketing-glossary/email-automation/

## v. Case Study — Siloam Mission

Siloam Mission's after-hours communications frequency correlates with their busy times of the year — which usually revolve around weather events and seasonal changes. Luke Jacob-Thiessen, Communication Manager at Siloam Mission, said most of its after-hours' inquiries are from their clients inquiring about service hours or availability. Sometimes, the communicator doesn't necessarily have all the details readily available, but they want to respond to the client and let them know they're working on it. Thiessen said they try to respond even if they don't know the answer and often try to relay resources that can lead them to an answer.

Siloam Mission's communications team achieves this balance with the help of automated messages. They set automated message hours for specific times during evenings, weekends, and holidays. The message includes emergency numbers and email addresses so at the very least someone can get help if they urgently need it.

It is important to craft a personal automated message that can apply to various inquiries. Use your brand voice to add a personal touch and understanding of their assumed frustration.

People who directly message you usually need something. Those who are reaching out to Siloam Mission directly are asking questions like, "is there any shelter room available?" or "what time is dinner being served today?" Addressing that need in a timely manner is important for your two-way communication relationship. Let your audience know that even though you might not have read their message yet, their voice is important and matters to your organization. And be sure to personally answer their inquiry as soon as you are available.

## vi. Case Study — Primaris REIT

Corey Quintaine is the Marketing Manager for Kildonan Place and Grant Park Shopping Centres in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Sunridge Mall in Calgary, Alberta. The three shopping centres are owned and managed by Primaris REIT.

Quintaine is a one-person marketing team — so what happens when he wants to go on vacation? Quintaine said he plans all scheduled social media content before taking a vacation, but he contracts a trusted third party to take over the social accounts for media monitoring.

Quintaine said this approach works well for his circumstance. It allows him to log off and enjoy his vacation without the need to check his phone or think about work-related content while he's away.

# Freelance Social Media Management Resources

If you don't already have a roster of trusted freelancers at the ready, the resources below are a starting place. Good relationships with freelancers are built with mutual respect over time. Investing resources in these relationships may be what you need to ensure better work-life balance for yourself and your team.

- **LinkedIn**
- **Upwork**
- **Fiverr**
- **Freelancer**
- **Hubstaff Talent**
- **Guru**

# ON-CALL

On-call work refers to any arrangement where staff are on schedule to respond to workplace needs at any time during a set period[15]. Demands may vary from an online social media crisis to a simple inquiry. What an on-call structure looks like will depend on the type of organization, what service it provides, and the relationship it has with its audience.

## i. Case Study — Manitoba Hydro

Luke Rempel is the former Social Media Analyst and new Content Strategist for Manitoba Hydro, an organization that operates after-hours communications through an on-call communications media rotation structure. It has a larger communications team and can have a different person on call each day of the week.

There are approximately six communicators on the rotation, and they mainly handle urgent social media questions and emergencies. Their focus is usually communicating Manitoba Hydro outage information. They communicate with Manitoba Hydro crews working on outages and relay messages to the public via social media, while answering questions that come in. Tweeting updates about the status of outages is important information for their audience.

Rempel said they considered having a customer service person on-call to respond at one point but decided against it because they wanted the first point of contact with a customer on social media to be a communicator. This decision demonstrates how vital communicators are in delivering an organization's messages effectively and correctly.

15. Indeed Editorial Team, "What Is On-Call Work? (Definition, Benefits, and Examples)," Updated November 17, 2022, https://ca.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/what-is-on-call-work

## ii. Case Study — Winnipeg Airports Authority

With a smaller communications team, having a rotating on-call media rotation may be difficult. Michel Rosset works as Communications Manager for Winnipeg Airports Authority. There are two people, including Rosset, on Winnipeg Airports Authority communications team. Winnipeg Richardson International Airport runs 24/7, 365 days a year. Managing the social communications between two people is a big undertaking, but Rosset says the system they have in place works well for their team.

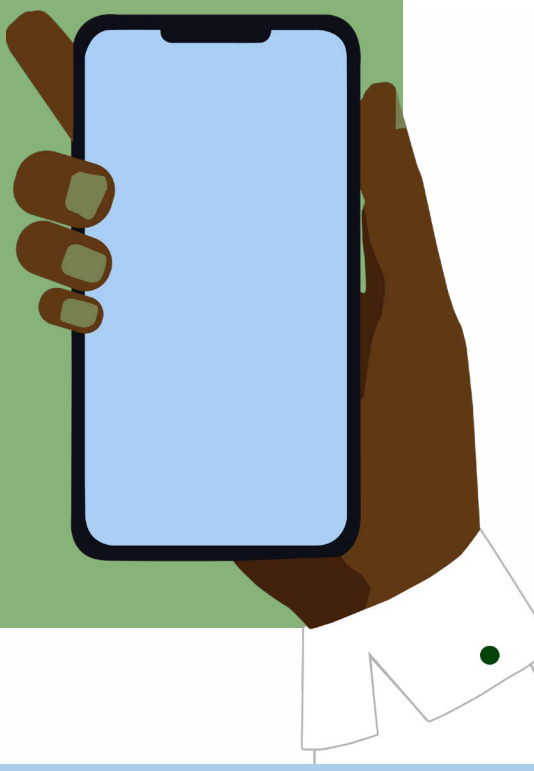
The two communicators alternate the evening/weekend on-call position in weeklong periods. Rosset says it works best for ongoing conversations with customers and travellers.

"If you have a conversation with somebody that started say, in the middle of the day, and it kind of trickles into the evening or into the next day, you have an idea of what that conversation is or how we can help that customer or traveller," said Rosset. "[When] switching every day, you're kind of starting from square one."

Switching hands every day has the potential to waste time for all members of the team. Taking time to read the past conversation or ask your co-worker questions for more context and detail will set back the communication process.

In addition to their one-week-on, one-week-off system, Rosset said the two communicators have an open dialogue regarding their work-life balance. When someone has personal needs, they discuss and work out a convenient schedule.

"We have that relationship to be like, you know what, that [few days] was busier, now let me take this over for a day or two," said Rosset. "So, you can kind of relax and reset, and then pick it back up again for the weekend to finish off your week."



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

There are no one set of rules on how to manage your after-hours social media relations. Team sizes, organizational structures and purposes, and audience needs should influence how your team organizes its management style. Here are a few key takeaways to keep in mind when finding a structure that works best for your after-hours social media management.

1. Set a clear policy for after-hours work obligations and structure. Having clear expectations of employees after traditional work hours will help prevent confusion on who is responsible and will ensure your team is in a good position to respond when something arises.

2. Ask for input from your communications team. The employees participating in the after-hours work are the best people to give you feedback on what's working and what isn't. Having an open dialogue where people feel comfortable expressing the strengths and weaknesses of after-hours structures will give you the best feedback to make decisions that will benefit everyone.

3. Give employees the ability to actually log off. Everyone needs a break. Don't let employees get to a place of burnout or emotional exhaustion. Employees' mental health and well-being will positively impact your immediate work culture and brand reputation.

# SURVEY RESULTS

The "Managing social and traditional media after work hours," survey was distributed on January 18, 2023, and shared on my personal LinkedIn and Twitter account. The survey was intended to gather testimonials and information about how Manitoba communicators manage their social and traditional media relations outside of 'regular' work hours.

Please follow the link to see the survey responses.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14ocBwSdyCXjC6oeNomPPY4G63oT3eN-WzS-Ft_6CsPU8/edit?usp=sharing

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Interview with Michel Rosset, November 25, 2022.

Interview with Corey Quintaine, November 22, 2022.

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Interview with Luke Jacob Thiessen, November 10, 2022.