

DEVELOP YOUR SOCIAL NETWORK

Social media is an increasingly popular method of communicating with other people, companies, and organizations. Through social media tools, you can connect with people who are committed to raising awareness of mental and/or substance use disorders and **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)**. Online tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs help to more quickly communicate with a broader audience than by solely using traditional media.

The 23rd annual **Recovery Month** observance this September will celebrate the effectiveness of treatment services and the reality of recovery. **Recovery Month** is sponsored by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, within the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**.

This year's theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It,"** emphasizes that while the road to recovery may be difficult, the benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and/or substance use disorders are significant and valuable to individuals, families, and communities. The theme also highlights that people in recovery achieve healthy lifestyles, both physically and emotionally, and contribute in positive ways to their community. They also prove to friends, family, and others that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

This guide is useful for both beginners and social media experts. It's meant to provide ideas to build your social media program from scratch or to enhance an existing program. If you are a social media beginner, refer to the **"New Media Glossary"** document in this toolkit, which explains relevant terms.

Get Started...

Before you join a social networking website, research the different types of networks to determine the best ones for you or your organization, depending on your needs and the audiences you want to reach. Also, set specific objectives when developing your network. For example, you could aim to increase your number of Twitter followers by 10 percent each month, or to write a new blog post each week.

Social media participation and blogging rely on interaction and networking with others on a consistent basis. Below are some tips that can help you develop support for your Facebook page, Twitter account, or blog:

- Post positive statements on another user's Facebook wall;
- "Like" other Facebook pages;
- Update your Facebook status to promote another page or initiative. By placing the "at" symbol ("@") in front of a user's name on Facebook – for example, **@RecoveryMonth** – you can link your status directly to the **Recovery Month** Facebook page;
- Recommend that your friends visit specific Facebook pages;
- Retweet a positive message about treatment or recovery issues;
- Promote another organization's event on your social media pages to support their efforts;

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- Comment on a blog post that you find helpful, and repost it on your blog;
- “Share” another page’s Facebook status updates to show support;
- “Check in” on Facebook or Foursquare if you are at a place or event that pertains to the recovery community; or
- Join or host a Twitter chat.

Engage Through Blogs...

Creating your own blog is an opportunity to develop a voice within the recovery community and communicate with others who share similar interests and support the same causes. While blogging is a rewarding experience, it can require a substantial time commitment. The most successful blogs are ones that share fresh, new content at consistent and frequent intervals. For example, a blog that has new postings each week will likely have many more followers than blogs that only update content bi-weekly. If this degree of commitment is not realistic for you, engaging with already established bloggers and participating in blog conversations may be a better option.

Before you create a personal blog or one for your organization, research existing recovery blogs and the topics they discuss. After you’ve surveyed the current landscape, create a strategy to distinguish your blog from others, such as offering new content or providing a unique perspective.

To research blogs effectively, use the tools below:

- **Google Blog Search:** Provides real-time search results on what bloggers discuss. Follow the blogs you’re interested in regularly to see the diversity of posts and to begin developing a relationship with the bloggers by adding your comments.
- **Blog Pulse:** Creates a graph of the number of online conversations taking place about a specific topic. This will help you identify ways to positively contribute to the conversation.
- **Technorati:** Searches blogs and ranks their reach and influence in the blogosphere. Technorati provides a comprehensive and current index of who and what is most popular in the blogosphere.
- **Social Mention:** Compiles user-generated content from across the Internet into a single stream of information. This site can monitor a variety of subjects, and allows you to easily track and measure topics that interest you.

If you decide to start your own blog, many websites, such as Wordpress, Blogger, or Tumblr, offer guidance. Once you name your blog and start to post, use Facebook or Twitter to promote it. When creating your own blog, keep in mind the following tips:

- **Be genuine.** Blogs can be a form of self-expression where you can provide your own or your organization’s unique perspective. You have the opportunity to let readers hear your voice, so don’t be afraid to show your passion and expertise. Additionally, blogs can be a form of news and discussion, where users go to learn the latest trends and community happenings.

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- **Provide a wide scope of content.** Although it's best to focus each individual blog post on a specific topic, enhancing your written post with photos and videos will make your blog more engaging.
- **Link to other blogs.** The blogosphere is an online community built on sharing thoughts and ideas. Building relationships with bloggers who have similar interests and reading other blogs that discuss prevention, treatment, and recovery can provide you with ideas and drive more readers to your site.
- **Blog responsibly and courteously.** Keep in mind that your blog is publicly accessible, so carefully choose the content you post. Always be respectful of others' ideas, and be prepared to partake in thoughtful conversations with others.

If you don't have the time or desire to create your own blog, you can practice blogger engagement to participate in existing conversations about your issue. Consider the following ideas to help you connect with others on blogs:

- **Read and follow blogs that emphasize issues relevant to recovery.** Before engaging with certain bloggers, get a sense for who they are and what they write about. Visit SAMHSA's blog accessed at <http://blog.samhsa.gov/> to stay informed on mental health and substance use disorders, prevention, recovery support, and public awareness efforts.
- **Comment on other people's blog posts.** Let them know about the resources available to help people combat a mental health problem and/or a substance use disorder. Also, direct people to the **Recovery Month** website, accessed at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>.
- **Offer resources and support.** Treatment and recovery services are sometimes offered online and anonymous users may post messages about their recovery journeys. Respond with words of encouragement or helpful information and resources. Educate them about **Recovery Month** activities and ways to get involved to further the campaign's reach.

Activate on Facebook...

- Since its launch in 2004, Facebook has developed into a worldwide social networking website with more than 800 million members, 50 percent of whom log on to the site on any given day. Facebook allows you to create both personal and official page accounts:
- A **personal account** is started by signing up with your name and email address. Populate your account with personal interests, contact information, and other personal information, photos, and videos. You can change the privacy settings on your personal account page to limit or widen the visibility of what you want your friends or other Facebook users to see.
- Use an **official page** if you want your organization to join Facebook. These pages can help promote a company or an initiative and are visible to the public. That means that non-Facebook users can view your page and "like" your organization. On your page, you can post organization news, events, and promotional information.

Once you start a Facebook account, you can:

- Find other Facebook members by using the search function, and then "friend" or "like" any individuals and pages that address similar topics.
- Share resources or link to sites that are helpful to those visiting your page, such as treatment or recovery services in your area.

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- Post pictures of **Recovery Month** events or activities that you attended or helped plan. You can also share videos from events or ones that feature others speaking about mental and/or substance use disorders. The **Recovery Month** YouTube Channel is an excellent source for video content.
- Create an “event page” and send invites to your friends to publicize a **Recovery Month** event.
 - Include the location, time and date, a brief description of the event, and any interesting or related links;
 - Make sure to stress the importance of RSVPing to the event by clicking the “yes,” “maybe,” or “not attending” buttons;
 - You can create an online event, such as a rally or a forum, and invite your Facebook friends who are interested in **Recovery Month** to join and chat with others who actively promote treatment and recovery; and
 - Repost your event invitation to your other social media properties, such as Twitter.

Tweet...

Another popular social networking site is Twitter. This platform can be used to quickly and briefly inform your followers or other users of general updates, events, or anything of interest to the treatment and recovery community. Twitter users communicate with others through “tweets,” which are similar to status updates on Facebook, but are limited to 140 characters and are viewed on your profile page.

The site allows you to choose your Twitter name, or “handle,” write a short biography, and choose an account icon image, or avatar. You can also sort accounts into “lists” to easily locate tweets on certain topics or a specific group of people. To connect with others, you can “follow” them so their tweets will appear on your Twitter homepage. The default privacy setting permits your personal tweets to be publicly accessible to anyone. On your homepage, you will be able to see tweets as they’re posted from all accounts that you follow. However, you can change your settings to lock your profile so that only people you approve as followers can view your tweets.

Below are some ways you can use Twitter’s features to help promote **Recovery Month**:

- Use the **search function** to look up keywords related to **Recovery Month**, and mental and/or substance use disorders to find relevant conversations. When you find Twitter users who have similar interests, follow them and reply to their tweets to gain followers.
- If you come across an appealing or informative tweet, retweet the information to share it with others. To do this, add the letters “RT” in front of the text so other Twitter users realize that it is a retweet, and feel free to add commentary if you support the message. For example, “YourUserName: Saw that, too! Quite a story! RT @**RecoveryMonth**: Just watched an inspiring video on the **Recovery Month** YouTube Channel!” You can also click the “retweet” link under the user’s tweet, which means the “RT” will be added automatically.
- Show support of Twitter users who mention you or your organization in their tweets, by **replying to their posts**. This can be done by using an “@” symbol directly before a Twitter user’s name.

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- Use or create a hashtag (“#” with a key phrase such as your organization’s name) to allow users to easily search for you using this key phrase. Make sure to use **#RecoveryMonth** whenever you want your tweet to link to the **Recovery Month** Twitter account. Hashtags that are often used when discussing **Recovery Month** include:
 - #mentalhealth
 - #prevention
 - #substanceabuse
 - #suicideprevention
- Send direct messages, or private tweets, to another Twitter user if you want to communicate privately. Otherwise, your tweets will be either public or at least visible to your approved followers.
- Include the **Recovery Month** “Twibbon” on your Twitter profile. A Twibbon is a small icon placed on your Twitter profile image (known as your avatar) to promote awareness about a specific cause. A **Recovery Month** icon on your profile will show your support of mental and/or substance use disorder prevention, treatment, and recovery.

To increase your involvement on Twitter, participate in a Twitter chat, which is an organized discussion on Twitter about a particular topic and is reminiscent of a chat room. Chats are usually designated in advance for a particular time and are assigned a unique hashtag to track users and participation. Participants add the designated hashtag at the end of each question or comment they submit to signify their involvement in the conversation. Twitter chats occur “in the open” as public messages appearing in a normal message stream. By searching for the designated hashtag, users can view just the conversation related to that hashtag and can follow the chat by refreshing the page.

Be sure to follow **@RecoveryMonth** for information about upcoming events, Twitter chats, personal stories of recovery, and general conversation about the benefits of treatment and recovery.

Use Other Outlets...

While Facebook, Twitter, and blogs dominate social networking, other social media applications can be used to successfully spread ideas and communicate the **Recovery Month** message through video, photo, and location-based communication. Below is a sample of these applications and how you can best use these tools:

- Use YouTube to post videos you’ve developed that relate to **Recovery Month**, mental and/or substance use disorders, and the benefits of prevention, treatment, and recovery. To grow your fan base and find others who share similar interests, subscribe to different YouTube channels and comment on videos that you enjoy. When uploading videos, choose the appropriate category for your video, and use tags so other users can easily find your content.
- Use Flickr to show images and videos from **Recovery Month** events. Tag and title them with specific keywords, such as your organization or event name, so they can be found easily by using search engines. Join a Flickr group that has similar interests, and comment on the group’s discussion boards or photos. You also can create your own group if you are unable to find one that relates to your organization or interests.
- Use Foursquare to “check in” at **Recovery Month** event locations using applications on smartphones (e.g., iPhone, BlackBerry, Android, Palm) or mobile Internet (e.g., iPads). This action allows other **Recovery Month** supporters to know your specific location at an event or networking opportunity in your community.

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Engage Appropriately...

Social media is a powerful tool for promoting **Recovery Month** and increasing awareness about behavioral health issues. It's important to note that when working with social media, you are writing in a public forum. Keep in mind the following suggestions when communicating through public social media platforms:

- Be positive, and keep your posts or statuses current, optimistic, and thought-provoking.
- If a friend on Facebook or a follower on Twitter is offensive, simply "defriend," "unfollow," or even "block" him or her. If someone's actions are inappropriate or threatening, contact the social media network's administrator to file a report.
- View each social media platform's privacy and security settings and adjust your personal settings if you wish to restrict accessibility to your site.

Participate in Recovery Month and SAMHSA Platforms...

To keep up with the latest news and events about **Recovery Month**, check out the following sites:

- **Recovery Month** Facebook Page, accessed at <http://www.facebook.com/RecoveryMonth>
- **Recovery Month** Twitter Page, accessed at <https://twitter.com/#!/RecoveryMonth>
- **Recovery Month** YouTube Channel, accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/recoverymonth>

To engage with the broader behavioral health community, visit the following sites:

- SAMHSA Facebook Page, accessed at <http://www.facebook.com/samhsa>
- SAMHSA Twitter Page, accessed at <https://twitter.com/#!/samhsagov>
- SAMHSA YouTube Channel, accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/SAMHSA>