

Facebook for Chapters

One reason for Facebook's breakout success is its ease of use. Creating a Group or Page takes only a few minutes, even for those who wouldn't normally describe themselves as computer savvy. We encourage chapter leaders to use Facebook to build community among members, to reach out to alumni from the area, and to promote chapter events. And, of course, we also encourage you to have fun while you're at it. Another reason for Facebook's success is that it doesn't have many rules, and we certainly don't intend to institute new ones of our own. Rather, we want to offer a few best practices.

For the Texas Exes' Benefit

1. Please notify Courtney Ratliff after you've created your Group or Page so that we can promote it from the Texas Exes website.
2. Please use your chapter logo as the profile image for the group or page you create. If you need your chapter's logo please contact Courtney Ratliff and they can provide you with the logo.

First Decision: Group vs. Page

If you Google "Facebook Group or Page" you will find a great deal of advice, much of it inaccurate and out of date. In early 2009, Facebook made some key changes to their Pages, making them more like personal profiles. This further complicates the decision of how to best reach and involve chapter members online. Here's the official word from Facebook:

How are Pages different than Facebook Groups?

Pages can only be created to represent a real public figure, artist, brand or organization, and may only be created by an official representative of that entity. Groups can be created by any user and about any topic, as a space for users to share their opinions and interest in that subject. Pages can be customized with rich media and interactive applications to engage Page visitors. Applications can't be added to groups.

Pages are designed to allow Page admins to maintain a personal/professional distinction on Facebook, while groups are a part of your personal Facebook experience. If you're a group admin, your name will appear on that group, while Pages will never display their admins' names. Additionally, when you take actions on your group, such as posting on your group's wall, these actions will appear to come from you as an individual. However, if you post or take other actions on a Page you own, it will appear to come from the Page.

As long as a group is under 5000 members, group admins can send messages to the group members that will appear in their inboxes. If the group exceeds 5000, admins can't send messages to all members. It's also possible to restrict access to a group, so that new members have to be approved, but access to a Page can only be restricted by certain ages and locations.

Key distinctions:

Admin status: If you create a Group, you will be identified in your postings and communications by your real name, just as if you were posting a comment on a friend's wall. If you create a Page, your personal identity will be subsumed by the identity of the chapter. On that Page, you will become, say, "Texas Exes Dallas Chapter" and your picture will be replaced by whatever photo you've uploaded to represent the chapter (preferably the official chapter logo).

Communication: Groups allow you to send notes to all members. If you message a Group (up to 5,000 members), it will appear in each person's Facebook in-box. Page administrators can only contact fans of that page by posting a status update, which will appear on fans' front pages just like any other friend's update, but only if the person has visited the page frequently enough.

Applications: Pages allow you to use a variety of tools and applications that are unavailable to Groups. A word of warning, though: Many of these applications work better in theory than in practice.

Membership Restrictions: In general, anyone can become a fan of a Page; membership of Groups can be more tightly restricted.

So which is best for an alumni chapter?

Groups and Pages both feature the same essential tools: events, places to post links, notes, photos, and videos. Pages allow any group member to start a discussion board which cannot be done on a Group. Groups lend to a smaller (5,000 or less) group of people and may create a closer community feeling than a page. We recommend you choose the option that best mirrors the size and personality of your chapter. It also depends on how the chapter wants to use Facebook. If the chapter wants to use Facebook to push information out, then a Page is probably the best choice. If however, the chapter wants to use Facebook as a two way communication between members and the chapter then a Group is probably the better option. Large chapters may find Pages to be more useful and smaller chapters may find that Groups better suit their needs. If you have additional questions, please contact Erin Huddleston, Director of Public Relations for the Texas Exes at huddleston@alumni.utexas.edu or Sally Bage, Social Media and Email Coordinator, at bage@alumni.utexas.edu.

Getting Started

Facebook offers useful and succinct how-to information, and given the frequency with which they update

their tools, it's best to simply follow their advice.

Groups

General Information: <http://www.facebook.com/help.php?page=414>

Creating and Running a Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/>

Pages

General Information: <http://www.facebook.com/help.php?page=175>

Best Practices

Online communities don't just happen. If you decide to create a Page or Group for your chapter, don't assume it will spontaneously and organically grow into a useful resource. Check in frequently. Respond promptly to comments and questions. Welcome new members.

Avoid message fatigue. Facebook users will voluntarily join your Group or Page, and presumably they will do so because they *want* to hear from you. But don't overwhelm them with emails (in the case of Groups) or Page updates.

Practice wise discretion when moderating comments. We've all seen online discussions get out of hand. Although it's unlikely to happen, as the administrator, you might be called upon to remove or edit a member's comments. Please keep in mind that your Group or Page *does* reflect on – even if unofficially – the university and the Texas Exes.

The Texas Exes Facebook Application

The Texas Exes launched a Facebook application a little over a year ago. The application was created for us by an outside company for the purpose of connecting alumni and sharing Texas Exes and university-related information. The application must be downloaded by users. Features on the application include a forum, a newsfeed, classifieds postings, alumni notes, events listings, trivia challenges and a “pin yourself” feature to locate events and alumni in your area.

To download the application, visit <http://apps.facebook.com/texasexesapp/>.

This application is not widely used but certainly can be. The events page of the application is set up to pull events from the Texas Exes system automatically. Chapters who are currently using a website hosted by the Texas Exes will have events posted on their website pulled in to the events feed on the

application automatically. Chapters who do not currently use a website hosted by the Texas Exes as their main website, will need to request a beta site from the Texas Exes so that they can enter events in to the Texas Exes website in addition to their website to have them appear on the application. If you have questions about this, please contact Courtney Ratliff at Ratliff@alumni.utexas.edu.