

# CONNECTING VET DIGITAL SKILLS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

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Digital technologies are increasingly interwoven into all parts of our lives and impact on the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of individuals as private citizens and as workers. As digital skills become essential in all work settings, there is an assumption that people training for and entering higher-skill occupations already possess the necessary digital skills. It is increasingly evident that the general workforce, including those engaged in low-skilled occupations, requires digital skills to navigate through workplaces that are becoming highly mechanised and digitised. This inevitably shapes the ways in which trainers, workers and employers come to perceive and define digital skills.

The digital skills training need is evident for all occupations across all sectors and at all levels. Interestingly, there appears to be substantial digital skills content in the lower-skills occupations; that is, in operational and non-supervisory as well as in higher-skills occupations such as managers. It is also evident that employers tend to conceptualise and articulate digital skills from a tools perspective. Instead of listing the skills they require, they simply describe the tools they would like prospective employees to be able to use and operate.

One aspect of digital literacy is the basic use of computer hardware and software in processing data and information from organisational databases, as well as for sourcing information and social media. Social media is used in Vocational Education and Training (VET) as a tool to provide course information and for asking questions, to collaborate on group assignments and to demonstrate skills that have been learned. The use of social media in VET courses can lead to higher levels of student engagement and promote more collaborative learning. It can raise rates of course completions. It can also equip VET students with the digital skills needed in the workplace.

The recent National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Good Practice Guide on social media in VET courses by Victor Callan and Margaret Johnston, shows how social media can be added to VET training and assessment.

Many forms of social media are currently available. The research shows the most common forms used by VET teachers are Facebook and YouTube, with some use of blogs. There is limited use of Instagram, LinkedIn, Tumblr and Pinterest. To boost use by students, the medium of social media chosen should be relevant to the future jobs of the students. YouTube is preferred by many students, including apprentices, as it allows them to prove the skills they have learned to a wide audience.

Further hints from NCVER Good Practice Guide include:

- It is best to approach your institution for support from the outset, use institutional guidelines and work within institutional policy for social media use.
- Teachers should act as the administrator of any social media group set up for their course, including those initiated by students. This will enable teachers to regularly monitor the page and ensure that all students receive the same information.
- Guidelines need to be provided to students on the appropriate use of

social media. These guidelines can cover aspects such as privacy issues and relevant content. Some institutes may have existing guidelines, which can be built upon and promoted.

- Employers need to be made aware of why social media is being used as part of the course and in what capacity. This helps them to understand why the student may be accessing social media during their time in the workplace and enables them to become more involved (i.e. viewing students' videos of them completing a task, allowing employers to see what has been covered by teachers in class).
- For regulatory audit purposes, teachers should plan in advance in what format, and how to harvest the social media exemplars for audits. This will help to guide teachers to meet the institute processes and the evidence requirements of regulators.

For more guidance please consult NCVER Social Media in VET courses Good Practice Guide.

## References

Callan, V, Johnston, M 2017, Social media and student outcomes: teacher, student and employer views, NCVER, Adelaide. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/publications/all-publications/social-media-and-student-outcomes-teacher,-student-and-employer-views>

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