TIPS & TRICKS

www.legion.org/nalpa

The mission of the National American Legion Press Association (NALPA) is to inform and educate its members so that they can effectively promote the American Legion Family, its activities, programs and more at the grassroots level using all forms of media.

This guide contains useful tips and tricks that NALPA members can use to promote activities at the post, district and department levels. The information was taken from previous NALPA newsletters, which are distributed to members each quarter.

To learn more about membership in NALPA and its other benefits, please visit **www.legion.org/NALPA**.

Table of Contents

Effective communication starts with a calendar 2
Legion Vimeo channel 3
Promote your post by localizing national press releases 4
Facebook: Know your audience 6
Use LinkedIn to widen circle, fill post officer positions 8
Communication tools: LinkedIn and IFTTT 8
Starting a department press association 10
How to use your NALPA press card 11
American Legion style guide ready to download 12
Compilation of hashtags throughout the year 13

Effective communication starts with a calendar

When it comes to an effective communications strategy, the first place to start is with a well-organized and detailed calendar. It doesn't matter if the calendar is digital, on paper, a whiteboard or Post-it. What does matter is how the calendar is used.

Why is the calendar so important? Because everything we do has a deadline. Veterans Day is approaching so how are the parade or dinner plans coming? How is the promotion of your post's events for the day coming along? Have you sent out a press release to notify your community?

Whether you're at the post, district or department level, you need to start with a calendar. Grab the free calendar distributed by Emblem Sales, open Microsoft Word and print a calendar template, or download one from the Internet.

Where to begin

Step one: Begin with your meetings at the post, district and department level. Find the date and write the description of the event, time and place. Second, list all known planned events, the time and place that are scheduled. Third, list the important holidays your post, district and department recognize for the year.

Step two: Take each event written on the calendar and count backward and mark 14 days, 30 days, 45 days, 60 days and 90 days out. A suggestion is that you use a different color pen to indicate that an event is coming up. Why so many reminders? It depends on what must happen for the event. If you need to invite the mayor to your

Veterans Day dinner then you may want to consider sending the invite 90 days before. It will also depend on what your media strategy for each event calls for that you should have written out when planning.

Because you are thinking about these events further out with your calendar, it creates a successful promotion.

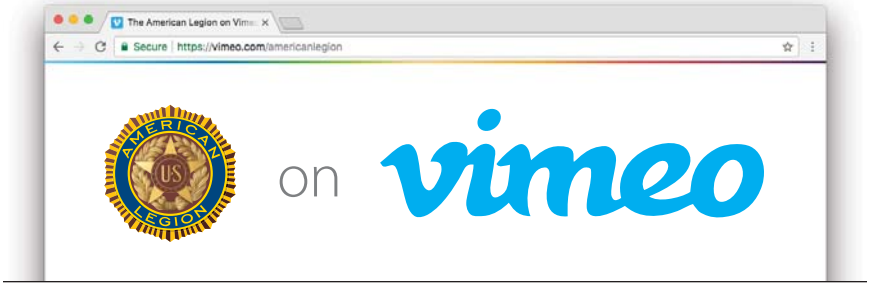
Step three: Using a different color from the other events, write down the dates when your post newsletter article is due, the deadline for submitting stories to your local paper, and the deadlines for everyone you must send a press release to.

While these dates are not connected to your events, as you use different colors on your calendar you will see that based on deadlines of newspapers and such, 14 days may have to be moved to 20 days, depending on where dates fall.

Hang the calendar on the wall and have three months visible so it can serve as a reminder.

Make friends with the calendar

Don't fear the deadlines, embrace them and never miss another one again. Stay on top of your calendar and you will stay on top of your communications strategy.



Legion Vimeo channel houses promotional videos, PSAs

The American Legion has an abundance of promotional videos and public service announcements (PSAs) that help tell the Legion's story, as well as aid in membership recruiting, fundraising efforts, support for programs and events, and more. And it's all easily accessible on The American Legion's Vimeo channel at **vimeo.com/americanlegion**.

The PSAs and videos housed on the Legion's Vimeo channel can be shared via mobile devices or downloaded onto a computer hard drive and shared without the need for Internet connection. They too can be shared with media outlets and movie cinemas to promote what the Legion does locally and nationally.

Example of videos on the Vimeo channel include:

- Membership Moment series on how to welcome and engage new members, recruit members and re-engage expired members.
- "This is The American Legion" video that gives a general overview of the Legion and its service to veterans, their families and communities.
- A video overview of the four pillars.

These videos can be played during meetings at the post or events to recruit new members.

Several of the PSAs feature National Commander Denise H. Rohan. Those PSAs focus on membership recruitment, preparing for the Legion's centennial, hosting job fairs, and Legion programs such as the National Emergency Fund and Temporary Financial Assistance.

"To enhance our communication awareness and tell the great story of The American Legion family, we offer these promotional tools," Rohan said. "It is essential that we remind veterans and their families about the programs and resources available to them through the nation's largest veterans organization."

Promote your post by localizing national press releases

National Headquarters sends out press releases throughout the year. These releases often quote the national commander about a topic of high importance to the Legion and the veterans community in general.

Public relations and communications leaders at the post and district levels often send these out to their local media, or post on their websites or Facebook pages.

However, these rarely get used by media in their communities. Newspaper editors and TV news directors want stories to have a local angle. To satisfy this requirement, posts and districts are encouraged to localize national releases.

In the example below, the press release on the left is one from national. On the right, the yellow screens indicate the changes that were made to update it and make it relevant for the local audience.

Original National Press Release

Legion chief says budget shortfall can't stand in the way of veteran care.

American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan expressed frustration over testimony Thursday on Capitol Hill that the Veterans Health Administration is facing a $2.5 billion budget shortfall this fiscal year. At the same time, Rohan reiterated the position of the nation's largest veterans service organization, that outsourcing is not a long-term solution.

"Veterans need the Department of Veterans Affairs, and The American Legion expects VA to provide quality health care in a timely manner to those who served our nation in uniform and earned that benefit," Rohan said. "This budget shortfall, which can be attributed to higher-than-expected patient demand and increased resources to attempt to meet it, cannot prevent veterans from getting the care they need when they need it, regardless where we are in the budget cycle. VA is going through its biggest adjustment since the troops came home from World War II. As VA, the administration and The American Legion did then, we must all work together to find long-term solutions."

For more information, please visit www.legion.org.

- 30 -

Contact:

- John Raughter, 317-630-1350, jraughter@legion.org

Localized Press Release
(changes highlighted yellow)

Local American Legion post provides assistance to veterans amid VA issues

American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan expressed frustration over testimony Thursday on Capitol Hill that the Veterans Health Administration is facing a $2.5 billion budget shortfall this fiscal year. At the same time, Rohan reiterated the position of the nation's largest veterans service organization, that outsourcing is not a long-term solution.

"Veterans need the Department of Veterans Affairs, and The American Legion expects VA to provide quality health care in a timely manner to those who served our nation in uniform and earned that benefit," Rohan said. "This budget shortfall, which can be attributed to higher-than-expected patient demand and increased resources to attempt to meet it, cannot prevent veterans from getting the care they need when they need it, regardless where we are in the budget cycle. VA is going through its biggest adjustment since the troops came home from World War II. As VA, the administration and The American Legion did then, we must all work together to find long-term solutions."

In Yourcity, American Legion Post 123 Commander John Smith said a post service officer is available to assist local veterans who are struggling to get their benefits from VA.

"We provide free consultations and resources for any veterans - not just American Legion members - so that they can receive the benefits they have earned through service for their nation," Smith said. Interested veterans may call the post at 123-456-7890 or stop by 123 Main St. to learn more.

For more information, please visit www.legion.org and www.yourpostwebsite.org

- 30 -

Contact:

- John Smith, 123-456-7890, commander@legionpost.org

Facebook: Know your audience

The first step in effectively managing your Facebook account is understanding how it works. Facebook basics, knowing who you want to reach, and knowing what to say, are three keys to an effective social media campaign.

Facebook terminology: Get familiar with it

Facebook users should know the difference between a Facebook profile, a page and a group. They each serve different functions.

A Facebook profile is a personal account where you share your information and connect with family and friends.

A Facebook page is a public profile created for businesses, brands, celebrities, causes and other organizations.

A Facebook group is the place for small group communication where people can share a common interest, information and experience, and express their opinions.

You need a Facebook profile in order to create a page or group. Profiles should not be used to represent an American Legion post, district or department.

You should create a Facebook page for your post. A very easy way to learn how to manage a page is to search within Facebook Help Center or **www.facebook.com/business**. This is a good place for the novice to learn the basics. And it serves the experienced page manager as they expand their knowledge and when Facebook changes things up.

Those already familiar with how Facebook works will benefit from liking some of Facebook's pages. Facebook tips, Facebook business, nonprofits on Facebook, and Facebook media are all designed to educate and assist the user. For an even more in-depth look check out Facebook for developers and Facebook engineering.

Understand your audience

People will follow content on pages that they feel is consistent with their own goals and objectives. Facebook pages are an opportunity to attract like-minded veterans to a Legion post. The question becomes, "What is your mission?" For a post it may be to promote the four pillars of The

American Legion and events and accomplishments that serve veterans, their families and the community.

Facebook posts should reach out to all members of your audience and engage them.

Content

You need to feature useful and compelling material that will drive interaction on your Facebook page. Interaction is key to attracting page followers and American Legion members.

To start, look at your page content from a visitor's point of view. Scroll through the last several months of your page feed and determine if you conveyed the right message. Ask yourself, "Would I know if this is the place for me if I am looking to join an American Legion post?"

Make your Facebook posts relevant about engaging with the community, serving veterans and their family, and camaraderie.

Things to include in Facebook posts are Legion post meeting times and location, programs and fundraisers. Lounge events can be promoted, but make sure that is not your focus. You want to give your audience a reason to comment, like and share what you post.

In conclusion

- Use a professional, yet friendly, voice that positively represents The American Legion.
- Know your audience and understand your mission. And make sure that your mission reflects The American Legion's four pillars – Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth.
- Post relevant content that will attract a more engaged audience.
- Be strategic about your social media channels to increase Facebook followers and members within your American Legion post.

Help NALPA's Facebook page get over 1,000 likes

The NALPA Facebook page has more than 900 likes and all members of The American Legion Family are invited to follow us, as well as be a part of your respective department's press associations Facebook page.

Legion Family members are involved in public relations on a daily basis through participation in activities of our organization. We promote brand awareness when we wear Legion Family apparel, sport Legion bumper stickers, decals and license plates on our vehicles, and much more.

As a Legion Family member, you play an intricate part of promoting what we do and why we do it – for veterans, servicemembers, their families and "God and country."

Please get involved with your Legion post, Auxiliary unit or Sons of The American Legion squadron's media recourses. And if you are active on Facebook, please like the NALPA page and share your great works.

Use LinkedIn to widen circle, fill post officer positions

Some of you may wonder why there is a NALPA article about LinkedIn. Many who have heard of this online talent community think that its purpose is to help people showcase their skillsets and to help recruiters find them for a potential career opportunity. Did you know that it could also be used to help your post locate potential new members who are looking for volunteer opportunities? This article will show you how to use LinkedIn for that purpose.

There are more than 4 million professionals on LinkedIn who have one thing in common - they have expressed an interest in joining a nonprofit board or doing skills-based volunteering - or both. Think about the different leadership opportunities that your post has to offer on your Executive Committee (EXCOM). What types of skillsets would you like for those post volunteers to have to be successful in some of those positions?

Take away the knowledge side of the Legion and think outside the box. You have different military occupations that dovetail nicely with EXCOM positions. For example, your post adjutant would be a great fit for someone with a background in Human Resources and someone with a supply and logistics background could work as your post finance officer. There are public affairs officers or journalists who would make great historians.

Approximately 72 percent of younger veterans are looking for ways to give back, according to a recent article that I read. Of that percentage, veterans who are from Generation X and the mid-career veterans represent approximately 21 percent. This generation is our next generation of leaders within The American Legion. The top skills these would-be volunteers (and potential Legion Family members) have include management, customer service, leadership, project management and strategic planning.

How do you find those who are searching for volunteering opportunities?

Create a profile on LinkedIn, if you haven't done so already, and as a professional, you can signal you want to use your skills for good on your LinkedIn profile by checking the boxes for "Joining a nonprofit board" and/or "Skills-based volunteering" in the Volunteer Experience and Causes section. From there, you can search for volunteer opportunities in your area and begin identifying and connecting with veterans for opportunities at your post home.

The possibilities are endless and the potential rewards can last a lifetime!

Communication tools: LinkedIn and IFTTT

Who do you think you are? It is an important question to ponder. Are you the person in charge of your post's monthly newsletter? Or maybe you are the lucky volunteer who keeps the post's Facebook page updated.

If you are either, I would I say you are the communications director of your American Legion post; you are charged to communicate to the members and to the community what is happening in your local post. This is an important job

and who you associate with and how you communicate to others matters.

To help you, LinkedIn and IFTTT (If This Then That) are two tools to place in your "communication toolbox."

What is LinkedIn?

Think of LinkedIn (**www.linkedin.com**) as the business version of Facebook. You won't find family photos or silly quotes as you do on Facebook – the content on LinkedIn is geared toward people's professions.

How to use LinkedIn

Create an account by filling out a profile – your profile is your advertisement of why people should connect with you. With LinkedIn you make connections; you don't add friends. This social media platform allows you to connect with like-minded people, whether it's media professionals, veterans groups or people in your daily profession.

Start making connections by searching for people you may know or for groups that interest you, like NALPA. Then begin searching for reporters and media professionals in your area to connect with.

Lastly, like Facebook, write status updates, make comments, and provide content that is relevant to you, your profession, your Legion post or veterans. This will help educate your connections and eventually people will want to connect with you because of your knowledge.

To learn more about LinkedIn, do a Google search for "Begin to use LinkedIn" and several links will appear for further assistance.

If you start using LinkedIn, or you already have an account, connect with me at **www.linkedin.com/in/markalansutton**.

What is IFTTT?

IFTTT means if x happens then do y. If you are like me you handle several social media accounts like Facebook, Twitter, Blogger and maybe a WordPress account. Keeping all of them updated with current content can be a difficult task to manage. At **www.IFTTT.com**, you can create "applets" that automate many functions for different tasks.

For example, an applet can be created so that if you tweet a status on your Legion post's Twitter account, that tweet can then be posted to your Facebook page automatically. Or if you post a Facebook message, it can be tweeted out at the same time.

Do you have a WordPress account? If you do, then the content added to your WordPress blog can then be copied to your other social media outlets.

I have found this website to save a lot of time in keeping content updated, and it eliminates me from having to constantly copy content manually to each of my social media platforms. Check it out; once you begin using it you will find other uses for it. And did I mention it was free?

Overall, technology can make our lives better or worse depending on how we use it. Using LinkedIn and IFTTT has enhanced the work that I do for The American Legion, and I believe you will find this to be true, as well, as, as you become more efficient at using these communication tools.

Starting a department press association

By Ralph A. Schneekloth

I'm currently president of the Minnesota American Legion Press Association and department historian.

My interest in NALPA and public relations started when I became involved with both the district and department's public relations committees. I asked why the Department of Minnesota didn't have a press association and was told it was tried once but that it didn't work out. After further discussion, I was told that if I wanted to get a department press association started that I needed to do the legwork to get it going.

Initial steps were to gain support and network, and then consult with mentors. Once the foundation was established, we had a Minnesota American Legion Press Association meeting to elect officers and to adopt NALPA's Constitution and Bylaws. We are continuing to promote The American Legion Family on social media, as well as communicate information out to the districts and posts.

We are still fairly new, but as we continue to develop the association, obtain more members and gain publicity, the better I believe it will become.

I am focusing on painting the picture that The American Legion Family is a dynamic, vibrant veterans service organization that you will want to join. I'm achieving this by demonstrating actions from the historians perspective, to utilizing public relations to show the work that we do for veterans, national security, Americanism and children and youth.

How to use your NALPA press card

By Dr. John Ellis, Ed.D, California American Legion Press Association president

The California American Legion Press Association (CALPA) press card saw the light of day when it gravitated from the dark recesses of a members wallet to an all-new custom lanyard. These stylish and bright red, white and blue lanyards with a hard plastic case were designed to highlight our status as a CALPA representative whenever and wherever the occasion might arise.

The key is to wear your press card as a representative of The American Legion at organizational events, as well as at public events. It takes the place of your pocket name plate as it displays your name, organizational affiliation and home state.

For example, I had the opportunity to interview country music star Trace Adkins about his support for military personnel for a story published in The California Legionnaire. When I contacted the PR office at the venue he was to perform at and presented my request for an interview with Adkins, I had to submit an email about my request. In that email I shared about CALPA and The American Legion, among other things. And when I had the opportunity to interview Adkins, I wore my Legion cap and CALPA press card.

You have a great opportunity through your NALPA membership to represent The American Legion – not only in your local community but through your own post, district and beyond. And any time you can help the Legion obtain greater visibility, it's an opportunity to promote the organization.

American Legion style guide available for download

In all its media channels – print, Web and social media – clarity and consistency are key to successfully communicating The American Legion's message.

The American Legion Style Guide, available for download at **www.legion.org/publications**, offers valuable tips on writing copy that's clean and clear.

Here are a few examples from the style guide:

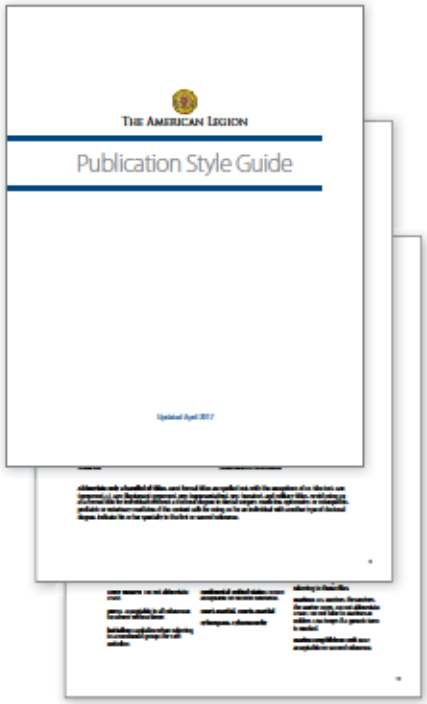
Avoid alphabet soup by using capitalization only where it's necessary and appropriate. When too many words are emphasized, none stand out. Don't write, American Legion Posts are full of Veterans who respect our Nation's Flag. Do write, American Legion posts are full of veterans who respect our nation's flag. Limit capitalization to the first word of a sentence, proper nouns (people, groups, places, etc.), and titles preceding names.

Not sure when to capitalize the "t" in The American Legion? Only when referring to the main organization or Sons of The American Legion. When the name is followed by another word or words, go with a lowercase "t": the American Legion Family, the American Legion Riders, the American Legion Baseball program.

Do not capitalize post except when referring to a specific, numbered American Legion post. For example, write the Chattanooga post, American Legion Post 95 in Chattanooga or Post 95. When referring to posts in a general sense, write American Legion posts or Legion posts.

The style guide also has a list of frequently used terms, including:

- *servicemember* (It's one word, not two.)
- *half-mast* (ships and naval stations ashore) and half-staff (elsewhere ashore)
- *Korean War.* (Do not use Korean conflict.)
- *Medal of Honor* (Do not use Congressional Medal of Honor. Use Medal of Honor recipient, not winner.)
- *taps* (Lowercase without quotation marks for the bugle call sounded at "lights out" and military funerals.)
- *U.S. flag or flag* (Do not use the Flag.)



Hashtags throughout the year

Hashtags are a way for social media users to search for a particular topic of interest. Throughout the year, the following are hashtags that will be used and/or monitored by The American Legion National Headquarters team. One hashtag that is ongoing monthly and posts are encouraged to use is #LegionFamilyDinner.

January-March

#HappyNewYear

#MLKDay

AmericanismMonth

#FourChaplainsSunday

#WashConfYEAR

#WomensHistoryMonth

#BlackHistoryMonth

#AmericanLegionBirthday

April-June

#OratoricalContestYEAR

#VEDay

#ArmedForcesDay

#MemorialDay

#PoppyDay

#FlagDay

July-September

#ShootingSports

#BoysNationYEAR

#VJDay

#ALWSYEAR

#LegacyRunYEAR

#ALConvention

#PatriotDay

#POWMIADay

#GoldStarMothersDay

October-December

#VeteransDay

#ElectionDay

#AmericanEducationWeek

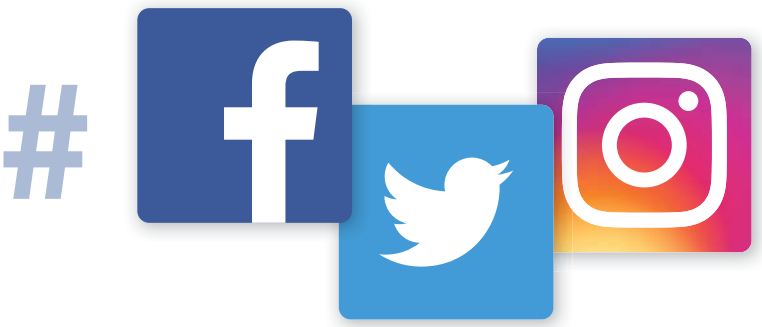
#NationalFamilyWeek

#Thanksgiving

#PearlHarborDay

#Christmas

#Hanukkah



www.legion.org/nalpa