

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE



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Strategies for success!



- Register on Thieme Connect to get alerts of new issues or eFirst articles and use as triggers for your posts.
- Use new features on social media platform (sign up to get notified): Experiment with new features especially while they are new and exciting to your audience.
- Think of a pool of the different types of posts you can use to diversify your feed such as: new articles, FAQs, tips & tricks, popular procedures, industry news, new techniques or developments, call for papers or reviewers, etc.
- Segmentation: If you are using multiple channels, try to tailor your posts according to channel. Analyze which platform is suitable for your goals, which platform works best for the content you share, and which platform is most used by your audience.
- Distribution: Add links to your social media pages as frequently as possible in your email signature, profile(s), institution website, etc.
- Connect to or follow influential people in the field, engage in discussions professionally, or join groups.
- Your aim should be to establish a reliable, trustworthy, and relevant social media platform.



- Humor: If you like, be funny but always remain respectful, professional, and courteous. Remember, what is funny to one person may not be to someone else. If you would not be comfortable repeating what you post in an open public space, it is likely not suitable for social media.
- Monitor what others in your field are doing on social media and review how they have been successful
- Advertising: Talk to your institution to see if funding for social media advertisements is available.
- Consider the use of lay language where appropriate as your audience may include people who are not experts in the field but who could be beneficial to your account such as media or press contacts.





What to Post

- Engaging with the community: Encourage followers to actively engage via asking questions, setting surveys etc.
- Frequency: Post on a regular basis to keep account current.
- Use visuals: Post images or links to images or videos if possible.
- Share, retweet, re-post, like relevant content from other sources that might benefit the community.
- You can search online for tools to shorten URLs if needed.



How to Use Hashtags

- Use relevant hashtags or specific phrases to get better results.
- It's ok to hashtag existing words within your posts as opposed to adding hashtags at the beginning or end of your post to save space.
- Review how popular hashtags are, to help you decide what hashtags to use. On Instagram you will be able to see how many times a hashtag has been used as you type it.
- Search for “online hashtag tools” that can help you identify popular hashtags.



Listen to Your Audience

- Be sure to respond to comments in a timely manner.
- Monitor responses, shares, likes etc and adjust your strategy accordingly.



Use Handles

- Mention fellow authors via their @handles of their social media accounts.

Excerpt from How Can Social Media Get Us in Trouble? by Sean J. Langenfeld, Rishi Batra, published in Clinics in Colon and Rectal Surgery 2017;30(4):264-269

Understand Social Media

Not all physicians are going to be enthusiastic about social media, and involvement in these platforms is certainly optional. However, the public will continue to gather information about doctors and diseases from online sources, and other medical professionals will also continue to use the Internet to communicate with colleagues and patients; thus, an understanding of these resources is mandatory for the modern physician.

You must review the privacy settings of different social media platforms, with the single most important teaching point being that none of these platforms allow reliable, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)-compliant sharing of patient information. You should also study your institution's policies on social media use to avoid an unintentional rule violation. If tutorials or webcasts are available, you should review them to better understand social media. Additionally, you should not hesitate to employ the help of a friend or mentor with more online experience.

Know Your Audience

As mentioned above, you must consider the target audience for content shared online, and cater your profile to match the intended recipients. You should not use one account for both personal and professional goals, as this will almost certainly result in an overlap between your personal and professional lives. Social media authors Mostaghimi and Crotty have previously recommended a “dual-citizenship” approach to online social media that helps maintain professionalism by separating professional and private accounts on social media. [2]

Among the currently popular platforms, Facebook is more appropriate for personal use, as it allows for more privacy (i.e., “Friends only”). We recommend against accepting friend invitations from patients. There are private Facebook groups which can be used for case-sharing and e-mentorship, but you should remember that all this information is discoverable, and privacy cannot be guaranteed. There do exist HIPAA-compliant forums (such as the American College of Surgeons Communities), where these patient details can be discussed without fear of discovery, and this is a preferred way of discussing such information.

Twitter is designed to share all content with the public; thus, personal use is less appropriate. However, careful professional use can be beneficial, with the thought that if you are not comfortable with your patients seeing a comment, then it is not appropriate for Twitter.

Police Your Profile

You must take time to manage your online persona. This includes using search engines such as Google to see what comes up when your name is searched. It should be noted that neglected social media profiles are



dangerous, as a physician can be unknowingly tagged in pictures or the status updates of other users, and thus unintentionally pulled into unprofessional situations. Similarly, old forgotten posts may still be viewable, highlighting the danger of past indiscretions.

In the process of policing your profile, you will likely encounter content on social media or doctor-rating Web sites that is negative or inflammatory. It is important not to react strongly to these situations, as engaging with “trolls” helps validate their opinion, and it gives them the desired negative reaction, which can “fuel the fire.” You should remember that the attention span of “trolls” is relatively short, and if they are ignored, they will become bored and move on the next victim, particularly if there is no active engagement to stir the pot and keep the attention going.



Measure Twice, Post Once

As previously mentioned, digital footprints are difficult to erase. Therefore, you must be cautious about what you decide to share on social media, especially when discussing topics that are emotionally charged. Essentially, there are no “mulligans” in social media; so, you must treat each post as permanent. Additionally, you should never assume that a post is truly private, as pseudonyms and enhanced privacy settings are unreliable. Rather than trying to hide posts that can be perceived as unprofessional, it is better to simply not demonstrate unprofessional behavior within social media.

Never Stop Learning

As highlighted in Section “The Dangers of Social Media,” [1] social media evolves quickly, and it is quite possible that the advice and statistics shared in this article will be obsolete in a couple years. Because social media is known to be a powerful instrument with palpable consequences to the practicing physician, it is important to be a lifelong student. Even if you are not a social media enthusiast, you must understand it to effectively communicate with the next generation of physicians and patients.



Conclusion



Unprofessional online behavior is common among physicians, especially within social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. This behavior is often due to a lack of understanding of these new platforms and their ability to provide the public with enhanced access to the surgeon's personal life. Misadventures with comments intended for a small, private audience can be discovered and have adverse consequences, which can be severe. You must work hard to understand the downfalls of inappropriate social media use to prevent such negative effects. When used safely and responsibly, social media harbors great opportunities for the new physician, including networking and enhanced professional growth.

1 Langenfeld, S. J.; Batra, R. How Can Social Media Get Us in Trouble? *Clinics in Colon and Rectal Surgery* 2017;30(4): 264-269
2 Mostaghimi A, Crotty BH. Professionalism in the digital age. *Ann Intern Med* 2011;154(8): 560-562