

# Social Media in the Professional Workplace: Yea or Nay?

**Jennifer Regala**

*Social media has become an integral part of our day-to-day lives. From the early days of chat rooms, MySpace, Friendster, and AOL Instant Messenger, to the countless modern apps such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram available today, social media has evolved from a basic way to chat with others of similar interests into a viable and effective tool to enhance communication at a professional level. This column will address social media and its use in scholarly publishing, starting with this first column, which will examine whether you and/or your organization want to amplify your group's messages with one or more of today's sophisticated social media tools.*

The first thing you should know about me is that I love my job. As the Managing Editor of *The Plant Cell* and *Plant Physiology* at the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB), I love every single thing about my role: overseeing production and peer review, working closely with our extremely capable vendors, figuring out tricky style questions, facilitating the day-to-day operations of our editorial boards, and so much more. However, there has been an unexpectedly delightful and rewarding aspect of my job that has become a passion of mine: social media and using it to promote our authors, our editors, our society, and the plant biology community. Also, social media has played a crucial role in building relationships with my scholarly publishing peers. The ways I use social media professionally continue to evolve and expand in ways I could never have envisioned when I first started here at ASPB. I could go on and on about how vital social media can be to an organization if it is used well. That's how I found myself raising my hand high in the air when Editor-in-Chief Jonathan Schultz asked for volunteers to write a column for *Science Editor*. I hope to use this space to start a discussion with all of you about how to use social media effectively to educate, include, connect, promote, and so much more.

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JENNIFER REGALA is Managing Editor at the American Society of Plant Biologists.



At this point in time, I imagine that most of you have at least dabbled in social media. In my case, I got hooked on Twitter when my youngest son was born. He had some health issues his first year of life (he's now 10 years old and doing well, thankfully), and because I couldn't get out of the house much, I turned to an online community of parents for support. Although I never met any of these individuals, they were friends who could share advice and more, and they lived very conveniently inside of my phone. Now, I love Snapchat and Instagram to connect with my kids, my family, and to follow special interests of my own.

I refer to these personal experiences to bring us back to the topic of how to use social media professionally. Which tools do you feel most comfortable with? If you're not using social media professionally, the first thought you need to have is: "Should I be using it for work?" Maybe your organization does not support its use for work purposes. I know that in the past, I have worked for organizations that did not allow the sharing of any information via social media channels. Or perhaps social media use is allowed, but your messages are limited in certain ways. It is critical that you work with your leadership and your team to understand what is appropriate to share on social media. Those considerations aren't your only ones. What should you write in your social media profiles? What about your social media handles? Does someone in your organization need to review those items?

Also, you need to think about whether you want to have personal yet professional social media handles. Maybe you want to encourage your organization to start professional

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handles to represent your organization. I will use my work situation as an example. I tweet from my own personal, yet professional, Twitter handle, @JRegala\_ASPB, but I also work on ASPB's internal social media team to amplify our journals' messages via @PlantPhysiol, @ThePlantCell, and @PlantDirectJ; our organization's messages via @ASPB; and our digital ecosystem's messages via @Plantae\_org. I also work with that same team on ASPB's Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Instagram messaging strategies. Your organization might have social media guidelines, and you will want to follow those carefully. Another roadblock for you might be that your organization does not permit the use of the organization's name in your user handle. Make sure you are extremely familiar with all social media policies before you get started.

If your organization is supportive of social media use, your next question should be: "What are my messages?" Who, exactly, will you be trying to reach? In my case, I use my professional social media presence to connect with two important constituencies: the plant biology community (with a particular emphasis on editors and authors, because they are my customers and those I most want to hear from) and my scholarly publishing network (to connect with others with similar career questions and needs, to promote various volunteer engagements I participate in, and to get ideas from others about how to best serve the first community I mentioned).

Over the next several issues, it is my goal to continue the discussion I've started in this column. I have ideas and

plans for multiple future columns. I will focus on which social media outlets are best depending on what kind of user you are. Are your communities chatting up a storm on Twitter? Are many of them on LinkedIn? Do you have lots of beautiful images begging to be shared on Instagram? And then there's Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat: The possibilities are endless, and we will talk about as many of these choices as we can. What are common mistakes made by experienced and inexperienced users alike? What are the best practical uses of social media? How can you analyze your social media use to determine whether your efforts are truly working? What does it mean to "live tweet" an event, and how can you do it well and responsibly? What types of permissions do you need to post pictures or other personal information of those you feature on your social media? What's the difference between a personal professional handle and an organizational handle? And so much more...

This column wouldn't be truly interactive, however, if I didn't offer you all the chance to dialogue in real time. I encourage you to find me on Twitter, @JRegala\_ASPB, to offer suggestions for column topics and to share your own favorite social media tips with me. If you don't have Twitter (yet!), contact me the old-fashioned way: JRegala@ASPB.org. I'm excited to engage with as many of you as possible and look forward to saying hi to you from this space for as long as you will have me.