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
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.