

Putting Your Best Voice Forward: Considering Voice and Style in Your Social Media Posts

Jennifer Regala

Social media is a powerful tool. No matter how many followers one has or how many likes any given post receives, every message has an audience. And a post never goes away. Even a deleted post can be captured for posterity via screenshot. Why are the power and longevity of social media so important to consider? It is imperative for each one of us to think about how we want to appear to our social media followers. At work, we are careful to portray ourselves politely and professionally in meetings and emails. During a job interview, we don our best business garb, sit up straight, and talk clearly. *Social media should not be any different.* As easy as it is to sit behind a keyboard or phone screen and impulsively type a hot take to share with the world, I implore you to consider your voice, tone, and style just like you would if you were sitting in your organization's conference room to give an important presentation. We all have watched public figures fall quickly from favor after a tasteless post or photo. It only takes one misstep to lose years of hard-earned respect. This article is not intended to discourage you from using social media. By all means, use it, but use it well. Understand that you are not just sharing a private conversation with your best friend. You are sharing your thoughts with a much larger audience. It's up to you how you use that power, whether you have 10 followers or 10,000.

As more and more of us become involved in our organizations' social media, there is another layer to consider past our own individual presence on the Internet. The way an organization chooses to portray itself is most likely quite different from how its employees use their own social media. We will also discuss how to develop voice and style that are appropriate for your organization and mesh well with its missions and values.

And above all, I haven't forgotten that we are all editors. We all have strong feelings around apostrophes, "data is"



vs. "data are," and the Oxford comma. Our social media accounts deserve this same level of passion, too.

Personal but Professional

If you are using social media to communicate in your professional life, you want to consider how you are presenting yourself. For example, my personal Instagram is set to "private" and quite decidedly not professional. Before you think that my Instagram is a crazy and wild spot, it's not. Plus, I do allow former and current colleagues to follow me if I know them well. I just don't necessarily want the whole world to see me at the beach with my family, out to dinner with friends (in better times, of course), excessive pictures of my dog (who also has his own Instagram handle with his own distinct voice and style), and other little snippets of fun and chaos I share on that channel.

Because my professional social media presence belongs to me, I allow glimpses into my personality. On my professional Twitter handle, I state in my profile that I am "fluent in emoji." Only very rarely do I miss a chance to include at least one emoji in a tweet. In real life, I try my best to be kind, friendly, and personable, and I hope I do a good job of translating those efforts in my tweets. You'll also catch me posting pics of my dog, my kids every now and again, and my thoughts on topics such as virtual schooling, podcasts, and grammar annoyances. However, this professional account is not the place for me to just talk

JENNIFER REGALA is the Director of Publications/Executive Editor at the American Urological Association.

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about me. That never has been, nor will be, my intent. I think very carefully about what I put on that account. Am I assisting in promoting authors and scientists I believe in? Am I assisting in promoting authors and scientists I believe in? Am I sharing content about scholarly publishing that might help my colleagues? Am I lifting up and encouraging people and messages that really mean something? Am I amplifying the messages of my employer, the American Urological Association, and the important work we are doing in the urology community? These are the questions I ask myself before I hit SEND on that tweet. I also made a rule early on when I set up this professional Twitter that I would never delete a tweet of my own, which makes me put thought into the consequences of what I am about to say. I think of it as if I'm sitting in my office lunch room or mingling in the hallway at an industry conference. I'm happy to share a general outline of my life, husband, and kids, but I don't share too much. How would I feel if my boss or one of my editors or authors read my post? If that tummy test checks out okay, I proceed. Exception: I can't stop talking or posting when it comes to my dog Scotty. He's the most perfect dog in the world. Okay, back on track!

As for style, I have an internal style guide in my head. Oxford commas are always used. One emoji at the very least is necessary if the message is not too serious. Spell out numerals of nine or fewer. Don't abbreviate anything I don't believe my audience will know unless it's spelled out. And this last point may or may not be considered style, but I always remember my personal motto, "It's free to be nice and to comb your hair."

Your Organization Wants Your Input on Social Media. What Now?

More and more, social media is becoming an imperative part of the organizations we all represent. Scholarly publishing societies, associations, and vendors utilize a wide range of social media platforms to convey their messages. Many employ Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and more. Organizations might choose just to communicate from the overall organizational level or to have multiple organizational handles across departments and journals. Social media is a quick way to convey important messages cheaply and effectively. Chances are that if you aren't involved already, you might be asked for your input or continued involvement in your organization's social media strategy. The first and most important items to address are voice and style.

Let's pretend that you are the managing editor of *The Journal of Awesomeness*. Until now, this journal never had a social media presence, but now your editorial board is clamoring for Facebook and Twitter accounts to promote the journal's authors, reviewers, and articles. After setting

them up, it's time to develop voice and style for these new accounts. You wouldn't publish *The Journal of Awesomeness* without an air-tight style guide for its content. The same should be true for the journal's social media.

- Check in first with your organization to receive guidance on their expectations for these new accounts. Meet with anyone in your organization also handling social media responsibilities and ensure that your ideas for voice and style work with theirs.
- Meet with your editorial board, particularly your editor-in-chief, so you understand the direction the accounts should take.
- Reach out to well-known authors who have published multiple times in your journal. What do they want to see covered in posts?
- To start, come up with some easy-to-follow rules for posting. Will you post about every article the journal publishes? Will you ask authors for their input on posts? Will you include authors' handles in your posts?
- Perhaps you will come up with templates for posts at first. "These authors studied..." Or "The results of this study show..." are ideas for such templates.
- Then, once voice and style are established, just remember that these accounts will evolve and change. You'll figure out what resonates with your followers, and you will want to understand which posts receive the most likes and interactions.

Wait. I Still Don't Get It!

A lot goes into a social media presence, and you've got to start with the basics, which are voice and style. Building on that will take effort. Not one of us, even the "social media experts," really and truly get it. It's hard to predict what makes a viral post or which tweet will have the most interaction. Honestly, there is just way too much to understand. Pay attention and reach out to your colleagues and additional resources. CSE and other professional organizations offer webinars and related learning opportunities in this area. Start your own professional social media presence and follow scholarly journals and organizations similar to yours to watch not only how they handle their accounts now but how they change over time. Find people on your social media feeds that you'd like to learn more from and email them or reach out to talk more over virtual coffee. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time with questions, to discuss ideas, or to suggest topics for future columns. And don't be daunted by social media. Be excited about the many opportunities and advantages presented by social media!