

It's Okay to Hit That Unfollow Button!

Jennifer Regala

Scholarly publishing social media is, for the most part, just like the scholarly publishing community at large: warm, welcoming, collegial, intelligent, hilarious, and a place where like-minded professionals feel like they belong. At this point, I feel like I know who has adorable dogs and cats, what the return-to-office policies are for many of my colleagues, which organizations use which kind of peer review, individual and organizational thoughts on preprints, and so much more. I would not have had any of these insights without social media.

I have been encouraging you in my past columns to jump on the social media bandwagon. I have been so passionate in my message to you all that I have almost used shouty caps! "DO IT!" I said. "IT'S SO FUN!" I said. "IT WILL DO WONDERS FOR YOUR <insert your goal here> JOURNALS/ ORGANIZATION/YOURSELF/YOUR NETWORK!" I said. And I wholeheartedly stand behind my recommendations to put yourself out there on an individual professional level and to use social media as a key tool to promote your organization and its valuable missions.

I was having a conversation with one of my editorial board members recently, and I realized that we are moving from a world where having journal readers is what we are striving for to one in which we are looking for journal consumers. No longer is it good enough for us to hope that an individual picks up our journal and reads it cover to cover. It's more important for us to have consumers who absorb our content in a way that is meaningful to them, and I realize that my responsibility is to facilitate that process. Podcasts, article one-page summaries, visual abstracts, webinars, Meet the Editors events, and of course, social media are all ways that I can repackage and repurpose valuable journal content. The idea of journal consumption, though, makes it clear to me that the process of picking up a journal and reading it is obsolete. Our consumers are participating in the process now, and that is (mostly) a wonderful advancement of our field, in my opinion.

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

Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of their employers, the Council of Science Editors, or the Editorial Board of Science Editor.



With the more active participation in content, though, there will be perils and pitfalls. These are not significant enough to stop my mission, but I definitely keep my eyes open as we navigate the evolution of the dissemination of content for my organization. I also think about my interactions from an individual professional point of view.

You are going to be challenged. I find that when I post anything, it helps to be prepared for responses ranging from crickets to a cacophony of voices disagreeing loudly. Mostly, what you post on social media will take one of the following paths:

- Get lost in the vast sea of other posts
- Be well received by a small group of your followers, maybe even spark a small and constructive conversation on whatever you posted
- Go "viral" (going viral should never be your goal, and we will talk about why in a future column; however, it does happen rarely and often for posts that don't seem like they would go viral)
- The dreaded "roasting." There are topics that are known to trigger heated responses (health care, politics, and preprints, to name just a few). And then there are topics you have no idea will generate an outcry. For instance, you might highlight an article in one of your journals in

CONTINUED

a post without realizing the research described is highly controversial.

People are not always going to be agreeable about what you're posting. Often, their disagreements with your posts will be well-founded and easy for you to address. But sometimes, you will run into someone who is just plain mean. Be prepared with a plan of how to address these reactions.

Professional Challenges

Here's where I will get repetitive. I have stated this often in past columns. Do not represent your organization on social media in a vacuum. This effort should be very collaborative. Work with your important constituents to craft your messaging strategy, including but not limited to your organization's leadership, other departments if you have them (marketing, communications, etc.), your editorial boards, and your community at large.

Once you've established the foundation for your messaging, you'll start spreading posts far and wide. What will you do if you receive a less than favorable response to one of your posts? Time for the shouty caps: DO NOT HANDLE YOUR ORGANIZATION'S RESPONSE ON YOUR OWN. Work with your social media strategy team and your supervisor to craft an appropriate response, or maybe you will decide together that your organization will not respond at all. There is no rule stating that every @ directed at your organization requires a reply. You have a team on your side. Don't be afraid to use their expertise combined with your own.

Personal Challenges

To me, it's a little scarier when I get a less-than-positive response on my individual professional social media. The only person to consult with is me, but it's stressful because my professional reputation is on the line. That's when I reach out to trusted peers for their input and suggestions on how to handle tough situations.

The Dreaded Troll

I won't sugarcoat this one. And I hope you never have this experience. There are some people out there who hide behind their screens and harass social media accounts. These so-called trolls do not offer constructive criticism or opposition. Instead, their main objective is to belittle and debilitate individuals and organizations. Please do not engage with these individuals, and here's where we get to the title of this article. It is okay to hit that unfollow button! You can even go one step further and block accounts. Do not feed these online bullies an ounce of attention by engaging in any way.

It Takes a Village!

I make it a point to watch out for my neighbors, my colleagues, friends, and family in the real world. I do the same when it comes to social media. I reach out to contacts independently to my network to alert them to any concerns, and I am always gratified when others do the same for me.

I Give You Permission to Unfollow!

It really is okay to hit that unfollow button. You can unfollow literally or metaphorically, but my point is that you do not need to engage with anyone who is toxic, inappropriate, negative, or makes you feel uncomfortable. This concept was hard for me to understand when I was young and wanted to please everyone, well before social media was even a thing. If someone isn't nice or makes you feel some kind of negative way, you don't have to remain connected. The same goes for your organizational accounts. You are not obliged to follow anyone. Communicate often and clearly with your strategy team so you are all working together to follow accounts that are meaningful to the conversation.

Remember what I always tell you: It's free to be nice and to comb your hair. And if you're putting your own best voice or your organization's best voice out there, you will.