

The Story of the JU Fanny Pack

Jennifer Regala

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, a magical fanny pack captured the fancy of all the urologists at the most epic medical conference of all time... Join me as I recount how we at the AUA created a strategic marketing plan and leveraged our social media platforms to make our publications shine at our first in-person annual meeting since 2019.

Since the very first day I started my dream role as the Director of Publications/Executive Editor at the American Urological Association (AUA), I have been looking forward to the day when we could showcase our scholarly publications at the AUA's annual meeting for the entire urological community to see. And how would we get this job done? A combination of a carefully coordinated marketing plan and the tremendous reach of our well-established social media presence.

Because I started in June 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown, I had the time to get our plan "right and tight," in the famous and beloved words of my boss, Patricia Banks. Our meeting was entirely virtual in 2020 and again in 2021, but in May 2022, I found myself on a Southwest flight to New Orleans to represent *The Journal of Urology*®, *Urology Practice*®, *JU Open Plus*, and *AUANews* at AUA2022. And phew! The wait was absolutely worth it.

Before my tenure at the AUA, our publications did not have a dedicated space at our annual meeting. I set out to change that knowing that our community needed to experience our published research and the individuals behind those articles up close and in person. My first task was to come up with a thoughtful proposal for what a Publications Booth (intentional capitalization) would actually look like and the purpose that it would serve. Based on past experience, I knew I could make our publications shine at the biggest urology meeting of the year. During my tenure at the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB), it was clear that publications should have dedicated booth space on the meeting floor. A fond memory from my time with ASPB is dressing like a plant and running around the Welcome Reception posing for Twitter photos. This goofy

behavior, coupled with serious presentation of our content, was instrumental in relationship building with all of our major constituencies. In my opinion, the purpose of a publications presence at any organization's annual meeting is to provide a "warm human touch" to the peer review and production processes. It's important for our communities to understand the humans who make the publications magic happen!

At the AUA, I am fortunate to have a strong executive team and an extremely supportive and trusting boss. They all understand the value of our publications and their integral importance to the AUA and the urological community. To obtain approval for my proposal, though, I needed to explain the "why" of what I wanted to accomplish. The goals were very clear in my mind:

1. To educate meeting attendees about our publications
2. To build on our marketing efforts that our publications are "The Voice of Urology"
3. To make a big splash about our new Gold Open Access journal, *JU Open Plus*
4. To strengthen long-lasting relationships with our community, especially our editors, reviewers, authors, and readers

After coming up with this vision of a Publications Booth that would position our publications as "The Voice of Urology" and getting a green light from leadership, I had access to premiere resources to make planning become reality. It was time to work on the "how"!

The first step was to sit down with our Marketing team to lay out what a Publications Booth would look like physically. I am tragic when it comes to graphics and conceptualization of spaces, so I am fortunate that my work spouse and marketing colleague, Heather Corkin, worked with our designer, Jennifer Kennedy, to create an aesthetically beautiful and engaging space for us in what we call the AUA "Square." Every meeting attendee walks through this space frequently, and we had a prominent location. Heather and Jenn made a beautiful wall highlighting "The Voice of Urology" with a round table for swag and stools placed in front of it. Another wall of our display honored our top peer reviewers. And of course my favorite wall was the selfie station, where life-sized journal covers allowed meeting attendees to capture snapshots of themselves and live tweet/Instagram/TikTok during the meeting using our meeting hashtag #AUA22. Our meetings team worked closely with us on placement and details of what we needed to execute this look.

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

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Here's where we get to the good part of the story. THE FANNY PACK. What's a good Publications Booth without some legit swag? I wanted all of our publications to be represented, so I budgeted for cool *Urology Practice*® magnets, *AUANews* laptop stickers, and *JU Open Plus* string backpacks. We had posters of journal covers to give away and free journals and newsletters. The pièce de résistance, though, was for our flagship journal, *The Journal of Urology*®: THE JU FANNY PACK. Even though I'm old, I like to think I still live on the fringe of relevance, and I know fanny packs, once in style, spent some time as the epitome of nerdiness. However, fanny packs have been enjoying a comeback, and I suspected they'd be a hit at the meeting. I started putting out feelers on the fanny pack idea with a poll on my personal Twitter page asking my followers whether we should offer them as a giveaway. This poll was unexpectedly polarizing, with a 50/50 response rate in favor of vs. against the fanny pack. People had FEELINGS—very strong ones—about whether to give fanny packs away or not. Some condemned fanny packs as embarrassing and outdated. Others were excited to get one, with one of our members even saying he'd love one for rounds to use for storage of supplies and snacks. The big response told me I was onto something, so I hit "buy" on a bulk order of fanny packs with JU branding and crossed my fingers.

It was time for more internal AUA collaboration. Cara Freibaum, our legendary AUA Social Media Coordinator and a founding member of the Say Yes to the JU Fanny Pack Club, worked with me leading up to the meeting to come up with a plan to capture all the publications events at AUA2022. The fanny pack was an integral part of that planning. When we arrived at the meeting, though, all expectations were exceeded. The fanny packs were a massive hit. We stored them under the counter and relied on social media to spread the word. They became an #IYKYK (if you know you know) phenomenon. Photos on social media carried the message that the fanny packs were out there, and we had countless visitors to our booth asking for one. *And that's where the cost of the fanny packs paid off.* Every visitor stopping by the booth for a fanny pack got to know us and learn more about our publications before we'd hand one over, and we made so many connections. We learned that some of our fanny pack wearers could sport them on the diagonal, whereas others (like me) had to stick with the traditional waist look. And the fanny packs worked with AUA blues, business wear, and dressed-up gala outfits. We also enlisted our Online Content Editors and other Editorial Board members to amplify the excitement on Twitter. And you know I couldn't resist that fun, tweeting and retweeting throughout each day of the meeting (Figures 1–3).

I know the fanny pack sounds silly, and I promise you we had a lot of serious business to attend to at the meeting,



Figure 1. (left to right) Dr Christina Ching, Editorial Board member, *The Journal of Urology*®; Betty VanDaniker, Publications Administrative Manager, American Urological Association; Dr Stacy Tanaka, Editorial Board member, *The Journal of Urology*®; and Jennifer Regala.

too (think two Editorial Board meetings, one Publications Committee meeting, a reception honoring our top reviewers, and more). But that fanny pack unified our target audience and were invaluable conversation starters.



Figure 2. The first ever American Urological Association (AUA) Publications Booth took on a life of its own! Editorial Board members, authors, and reviewers brought *The Voice of Urology* campaign alive with their enthusiasm for the world-class research published by the AUA.

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Figure 3. Dr Rena Malik, Editorial Board member of *Urology Practice*® and Online Content Editor for the American Urological Association's scholarly publications, shows off her diagonal wearing of the legendary JU fanny pack.

What made this AUA2022 publications presence work was a mixture of careful preparation and an organic, fluid vibe that built a buzz around our journals and connected back to the larger meeting. I even put together a goodbye TikTok that played on the AUA main Twitter because it was so hard to leave the meeting and the wonderful connections we made within the community. (Note to self: write my next column, "I Made a Scholarly Publishing TikTok So You Didn't Have To" and send it to Jonathan Schultz on time so he doesn't fire me...)

The fun will not stop with AUA2022, though. We are already back at AUA HQ in Linthicum, MD, collaborating on next steps and how to capture and even accelerate the energy and excitement we built around the publications at the meeting. We have so much passion and momentum internally and externally, and we are already planning for next year.

How Can You Make Your Journals Stand Out at Your Organization's Annual Meeting?

1. Have a plan! Whether your publications have a presence at your meeting already, or you're looking to make your

case, don't show up if you haven't planned your goals and what your presence will be well in advance. Ideally, you need to begin planning at least 6 months before show time.

2. Earn the buy-in of your peers. It's not good enough to say, "Our publications need to be at this meeting." Build your case. Think about what you're trying to accomplish and why the presence of your publications will be additive to meeting attendees and to the overall mission of your portfolio.
3. Be ready to work hard. Should you have fun doing it? Yes. Should you be passionate about it? Yes. Will it be easy? No. You have to be ready to dazzle-dazzle to make your publications sparkle like the stars they are.
4. Go with the flow. Administrative details need to be well-considered, but you won't know what the meeting and the crowd will be like until you get there. Be ready to change plans and add/subtract from your programming as necessary.

How Will I Improve How Our Publications Show up for AUA2023 in Chicago?

1. Involve our editors. Our Editorial Board members want to be a bigger part of our presence, and I plan to take them up on it. We will have "Office Hours" where Editorial Board members will sign up to work the booth with me and get to know folks stopping by plus reunite with those we already know well.
2. Don't overcommit. A big mistake I made this year was trying to do too much for the staff we had available to help us in New Orleans. I plan to be much more realistic about this aspect next year.
3. Do a better job of cross-promoting other AUA programming with the publications. I plan to begin collaborating on this improvement with my colleagues ASAP.
4. Find the next fanny pack. I am already on the hunt for the perfect buzzworthy swag and am looking to bring different fanny packs next year in addition to some new, fun finds.

If you have success stories from your own experiences at meetings, especially if you have great ideas for swag we can use next year, reach out to me! You can reach me on Twitter, @JenniferAREgala, and by email, JRegala@AUANet.org. Let's crowdsource solutions as much as we are able!