

The Story of the JU Fanny Pack, Part Deux: Building Community and a Vibe, with a Bonus Pet of the Month Calendar

Jennifer Regala and D Robert Siemens

Last year, *The Story of the JU Fanny Pack*¹ was first told. It was 2022, and our first ever American Urological Association (AUA) publications booth debuted at our annual meeting, #AUA22, in New Orleans. This meeting was extra special because it was the urological community's first large gathering after the 2020 and 2021 meetings were canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our goals for our inaugural booth were centered around featuring our 3 peer-reviewed journals and our newsletter/digital ecosystem as follows:

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

Part of our vision was to share swag showcasing our journals as a fun way to connect with our community. One of those items, *The Journal of Urology*® (JU) Fanny Pack (intentional caps), exploded in a frenzy using a combination of planned and organic social media strategies. This first iteration of the meeting's most sought-after swag was black, with JU's official logo. JU, the flagship journal of the AUA, is more than 100 years old and has a long history of publishing global urological research. We believe that the JU Fanny Pack, which on the

surface is undoubtedly a silly piece of swag, built long-lasting relationships in the short span of a 4-day meeting like we had never seen before in the history of our publishing program.

I share authorship of this issue's Social Media column with D Robert Siemens, MD, FRCSC. Dr Siemens is Professor and former Chair of the Department of Urology at Queen's University and is cross-appointed to the Departments of Oncology and Biomedical and Molecular Sciences. He is a member of the Cancer Care and Epidemiology research unit and is Director of the Centre of Applied Urological Research. He served as Editor of the Canadian Urological Association Journal until 2020 and is now the Editor-in-Chief of *The Journal of Urology*. He has published more than 300 peer-reviewed articles.

We have collaborated to share the excitement and fun of the second year at our publications booth while it was still fresh from #AUA23 (held April 28–May 1, 2023 in Chicago). We love the momentum we are creating to make our journals a community. We look back at our year-over-year growth vs. last year and see how much we have grown the community and engagement around the Voice of Urology. We also recognize that we have so much further to go.

The one comment Dr Siemens had last year was: "I love this fanny pack, but why isn't it pink?" (Side note: obnoxious pink is Jennifer's signature color.) That is all Jennifer needed to hear to move forward with making the 2023 JU Fanny Pack the most perfect power color of all time.

And then Dr Siemens showed up with an idea as big as the fanny pack. We send a monthly newsletter to our JU Editorial Board, "The JU Stream," which is an engagement tool we use to connect the members of our team. We report monthly peer-review statistics, editorial report cards, Editorial Manager tips and tricks, and other newsworthy updates. Additionally, though, we focus on fun stuff: "catching" our editors doing good works, tweets of the month, and the most favorite feature of all: the JU Pet of the Month. The concept is simple: We invite our editors to share their pet photos, and we write some funny blurbs to go along with the pics. This highlight has taken off, and I spend an exceptional amount of time wrangling an inbox of pet photos. Dr Siemens took this popular concept to the next level, though, when he came up with the idea of a JU Pet of the Month calendar (Figure 1

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[online]). These calendars were received with great delight (and lots of social media hype) from meeting attendees.

Now, on to the story of the triumphant return of the JU Fanny Pack to #AUA23: new color, same goals, big vibes, lots of tweets.

Perspective from Jennifer Regala, the AUA's Director of Publications: Let's Build on Last Year's Vibe

When we headed to New Orleans in May 2022, we were clueless and had no idea what to expect. We knew we had a big job ahead of us. We had goals to meet, and we had to prove that we deserved that big beautiful booth with its premium placement in the center of meeting festivities. The fanny pack played a huge role in what turned out to be a very successful first year. A beautiful booth (designed and executed by Heather Corkin, Jennifer Kennedy, Siena Manoogian, and their teams), complete with a selfie station with life-sized journal covers, served as the backdrop for our efforts. And our editorial leadership showed up big time for this representation. Dr Siemens and his fellow Editors-in-Chief (Dr John Davis, *JU Open Plus*; Dr John Denstedt, *AUANews*; and Dr Stephen Jones, *Urology Practice®*) spent hours at the booth, along with countless other editorial board members from all publications. Attendees came in droves to learn from them and, of course, pick up the fanny pack everyone was wearing.

I spent the rest of 2022 into 2023 tantalizing our social media following with plans for Chicago swag. I ran Twitter polls asking people to vote on fanny pack color and asking for input on alternative names to "fanny pack." And our initial fanny pack recipients tweeted pics of their coveted swag all year, too. Dr Siemens even had a photo shoot of his fanny pack on a beach in Portugal (that is dedication to the cause).

Although we don't have hard data (put that on our neverending to-do list we lovingly call the "firehose list"), we have seen a marked change in our relationships with anyone and everyone who comes into contact with our editorial office. From early-career researchers to seasoned professionals, from advanced-practice providers to biostatisticians, people feel like they can approach us now. We have seen a marked rise in presubmission inquiries, for instance, because people are comfortable approaching us. Our reviewer pool is way up, which has led to an increase in editorial comments and even quality frontmatter editorials and other featured content.

Reviewing last year's articles allowed me to reflect on the published goals I stated for Chicago at that time. The first was to involve our editors in our efforts. Done. The second goal was "don't overcommit." MISERABLE FAILURE. If you know me, I always overcommit, and I remedy that by committing some more. This issue must and will be fixed for next year. The third goal was to do a better job of cross-promoting

other AUA programming with the publications. One way we did this was to coordinate swag with our colleagues. A big hit at our meeting was our public policy and advocacy booth, where they handed out the perfect pink sunglasses, and our AUA Census booth, where they handed out urology pun-themed button "flair" to personalize the fanny pack. These connections were a super fun way to get new traffic to our booths. The final goal was to find the next fanny pack, which was all Dr Siemens: the JU pet calendar.

The trick of the fanny pack is that we do not simply leave these coveted items out on the counter for anyone to swipe. We keep them under lock and key, using word of mouth (and the power of social media) to have people seek us out to chat. And we never simply give a fanny pack away. We want to know more about each attendee. Do you publish? How do you read the journals? What do you like? What don't you like? Do you want to take a selfie? Can we follow you on Twitter? Tell us your submission pain points? And thus a friend of the publications is made, and the fanny pack exchange is finalized. Multiply that by hundreds of interactions, and we found we created a loyal following that resulted in submissions, new reviewers, new article pitches, and loyalty we couldn't have gotten in any other way.

I have to point out here that I am one lucky Director of Publications. I work with quality humans who understand how I think. At the AUA, we chase impact, not Journal Impact Factor. We want the work of all of our publications to touch as many readers as possible and to be foundational to future research. And we want all of our community to feel engaged with our content and the people behind it. A lot of editorial leaders and society leadership would not support these tactics, but the wholehearted, genuine acceptance of our swag shenanigans has been critical to our success.

Dr Siemens might have raised an eyebrow ever so slightly to the hot pink whirlwind that I am, but I know he gets it now. He is not only supportive of this mission but amplifying it. There is a *je ne sais quoi* element that makes the engagement around our swag compelling and unifying. Most importantly, he surely did wear that pink fanny pack (cross-body like the cool kids, no less) for almost the entire meeting (Figure 2). And now he's an influencing machine, too, with a hugely epic swag success in imagining the one-of-a-kind pet calendar.

Key practical items to replicate this annual meeting experience for your publications:

1. **Don't take yourself too seriously.** The swag needs to be light-hearted, easy to carry home in a suitcase, and memorable. Don't overthink it—make it FUN.
2. **Keep the swag hidden.** It makes all the difference. You won't believe the amazing conversations you'll have and the new connections you'll make. I can't tell you how many presubmission inquiries, *AUANews* authorship

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Figure 2. The JU Fanny Pack in all its perfect pink glory. From left to right, Jennifer Regala, American Urological Association (AUA) Director of Publications; D. Robert Siemens, Editor-in-Chief, *The Journal of Urology*®; Larisa Bresler, AUA Chief Diversity Officer.

commitments, and new reviewers I've received from these interactions.

3. **Start spreading the word early.** For 2023, I remembered who our most ardent fanny pack lovers were from 2022. Debra Gottsleben was one of our Patient Perspectives abstract presenters in 2022 and is also an AUA Editorial Office favorite. She helped us to spread the word organically by tweeting about scoring a fanny pack in 2023, and she continues to tweet about it even now that she's home! (Figure 3 [online]).
4. **Use your conference hashtag.** Your unique hashtag is the quickest, easiest way to get buy-in on your efforts.
5. **Get organizational and editorial leadership to partner with you on your efforts.** This item seems hard, but I promise you it's the easiest one on the list. Your team will love being a part of the fun and the hype.

Perspective from D Robert Siemens, Editor-in-Chief: Engagement and Community

So how in the world does one best engage authors, readers, and friends of a medical journal at its affiliated association's annual meeting with nearly 15,000 attendees? How does one translate and amplify the excitement felt by the editorial and

publications team in a 2.6 million-square foot convention center, filled with fairly overwhelmed and over-stretched attendees bouncing among academic sessions, novel industry offerings, and a plethora of add-on meetings?

A session in the exhibit hall, hosted by eager editors, highlighting the out-of-the box initiatives of the journal, hopefully getting ahead of the curve of the ever-increasingly complex publishing world, would attract several of the dedicated. But at any one time there are more than 2 dozen sessions in progress. A journal "named" state-of-the-art lecture during a plenary session is undoubtedly some good branding and would garner some good will, especially if the topic is innovative and aligns with the vibe that journal is trying to embody. However, that plenary is packed with ground-breaking, practice-changing talks that easily distract. Massive signage in the grand hall of the conference center? Way too much competition with the newest and brightest wares from our industry colleagues.

In comes the pink fanny pack! No advertisement needed. Three or four strategic handouts, with subsequent tweets, to friendly influencers (aka the popular kids), and the buzz is palpable. Fans of the journal (authors, readers, reviewers, editors) flock to the publication's booth. Selfies everywhere comparing the coolest way to brand the must-have accessory. It's not a joke. Everyone knows what this is about. It's low tech, fun, retro, and with just a tiny bit of anti-establishment rebellion to the theater and seriousness of the meeting itself. Add a pet of the month calendar filled with the furry (mostly) companions of the editors and you have broken the meeting! Only question is how to best keep it rolling next year? Cyan?

Join Us in San Antonio, TX, in 2024!

You know we are already planning for next year, and my colleagues in other departments have started plotting with me on some super fun surprises. Join us in this space next year for an update!

We want to hear from you! The JU Fanny Pack mystique lives on even though the meeting is over, and we are loving seeing pics of the pink magic from all over the world on Twitter. And Jennifer's email is filled with global pleas for additional pet calendars for labs, offices, and homes. What color do you think the fanny pack should be next year? What swag works best for your conferences? How do you make your publications shine at your annual meeting? Tweet us (@siemensr and @JenniferARegala) and share your wisdom and most vibe-worthy ideas.

Reference and Link

1. Regala J. The story of the JU fanny pack. *Sci Ed.* 2022;45:72-74. <https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-D-4502-72>