Social Media Guidelines
& Best Practices

Revised February 2024

Stanford University guidelines for an individual employee's personal use of social media

- The guidelines for personal use of social media are not intended to and do not limit your right to engage in protected concerted activities related to terms and conditions of employment.
- Even when you are personally engaging on social media, a Stanford affiliation on your profile has the ability to affect the university as a whole. If you identify your affiliation with Stanford in your profile or comments, other users will naturally associate you with the university. You should always think before you post, be civil to others and their opinions and not post personal information about others unless you have their permission. Your behavior should be consistent with the Information Security, Intellectual Property, and Privacy policies of the university. In addition, you should include, where possible, a statement on your profile that indicates your views do not constitute official statements on behalf of Stanford. Finally, except as permitted by law, no employee is permitted to use Stanford's marks or emblem without the prior approval of the Assistant Vice President for Business Development, trademarks@stanford.edu.[1]

Guidelines from the American College of Surgeons:
Statement on Guidelines for the Ethical Use of Social Media by Surgeons

Creating an Official Stanford Account

If you are interested in creating an account for a Stanford Surgery division, center, or lab, please contact Rachel Baker (rebaker@stanford.edu, 650-723-2301) for additional guidelines.

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[1] https://ucomm.stanford.edu/policies/social-media.html

Building Your Brand Through Social Media

4 Reasons to use social media professionally:

- *Learn:* gather information that's specific to your areas of interest and follow journals/ peers you respect.
- *Teach*: be a source of timely, credible information for the education of other physicians and the public.
- *Engage* with trainees and peers. Mentorship is no longer bound by location. Gain national or international notability for professional organization membership.
- *Protect* and control your online reputation.

Social media should be resource – not a time suck. Social media should be an opportunity for you to keep up with the latest news in your field, meet like-minded individuals, and join the national conversation. Societies and positions will often require an applicant has a "national or international reputation." What easier way to prove that than through all of your connections on social? You'll also find that a majority of society presidents have an active account.

Choosing a Platform(s)

X (formerly known as Twitter)

Since 2022 when Elon Musk purchased Twitter, the platform has experienced a series of challenges and changes. Although it still has more than 500M active monthly users, as of 2024 it is no longer in the top 10 most popular social media platforms.

Who to follow:

- journals, people in your department, and colleagues in your specialty at other institutions.

What to post:

- Great content ….be it original or curated (e.g. journal articles, news articles, and startling statistics). You only have **280 characters**; make them count.
- Event info (e.g. pics of keynote speakers with great quotes, guest speakers at grand rounds, you with your colleagues at conferences) Use the specific event hashtag (see below)!
- Career milestones (e.g. welcome a new colleague, congratulate a friend on joining a professional society, thank the people who helped you earn an award, etc.)
- Photos! Posts with images are more likely to garner engagement (e.g. likes, replies, and RTs).
- Hashtags "flag" your post for people interested in the topic you're writing about. Try not to use more than three hashtags per post. Conferences and other events will often have a hashtag so you can follow (and join in!) the conversation.
- Including other people or groups' handles will alert them to your post and improve engagement (i.e. liking and commenting on others' posts). This practice is commonly referred to as "tagging." Try tagging your fellow authors and/or the journal it was published in when you tweet a new publication. Tag everyone who is shown in a group shot you post as well as your common denominator (are you all at the same medical center, do you have the same alma mater, etc.)

- 30/30/30: 30% of content should be original resources, 30% should be retweeted, 30% should be shameless self-promotion. (The last 10% are for engaging with others!)

Frequency: try to post at least once a day but no more than 10x a day (unless you're at a conference!).

Lists: By creating a "must read" list, you can eliminate noise and streamline the amount of time you spend maintaining your account. [Learn more.](#)

Facebook

Facebook is still the most popular social media platform in the world.

Facebook's algorithm currently gives precedence to personal profiles and groups over business pages, so business pages don't have the same organic reach as they once did.

While professional pages are public, groups and personal profiles can be kept more private. Check your security settings to ensure no one can see posts you don't want them to. *Remember: Just because your account is private doesn't mean someone can't screenshot a post and make it public.*

Doximity — aka LinkedIn for Medical Professionals ONLY

Reputation Management: If you went to a medical school in the United States you already have a Doximity account; you just need to claim it. By claiming your account, you can then control what is posted and maintain accuracy of the information listed this is also known as "online reputation management."

Make connections: The only people with accounts on Doximity are other MDs. HALF of America's physicians have claimed their accounts.

Vote: Did you know that *U.S. News and World Report's* list of the best hospitals in the country are partially based on data collected from Doximity surveys? Doximity is also one of the leading ways medical students learn about the residency programs they want to apply to.

LinkedIn

nonMDs: If you're not a doctor, LinkedIn is the one social media profile you should DEFINITELY have. Treat this as your online resume, and—because it's digital—you can add links to websites, PDFs, videos, and more to engage your audience and impress future employers.

LinkedIn also gives you access to free professional development and allows you to connect with other professionals in your field. Join groups and follow company pages and thoughtleaders that pertain to your scope of work (or the work you aspire to).

The timeline feature is similar to that on Facebook, but for work-related comments only. Post original content and links to content you found interesting with your comments. You should also comment on your connections posts.

Remember the time to nurture your network is BEFORE you need it.

MDs: Because Doximity already provides a social networking platform for physicians, maintaining an additional profile on LinkedIn isn't time efficient… unless you are interested in working in the private sector. Tech start-up execs and venture capitalists don't have access to Doximity, so they'll be looking on LinkedIn for information about your education and work experience. Edit your CV to highlight the skills that are applicable to the job you want.

Instagram

Instagram is an image-centric social networking platform. Because of its visual nature, this channel has become particularly popular with plastic surgeons. Your account can be public or private and you can also change the type of account you have to creator or business (which gives you access to analytics).

What to post:
- *Posts*: In addition to highly-groomed images, candid shots of you and/or your peers can help humanize your account. Before and after shots are very popular among plastic surgeons. Long captions are currently en vogue, however, only the first two lines will show as readers scroll through their feed, so make sure they grab the reader's attention!

- *Stories* will disappear after 24 hours …although, you can then add them to your profile's highlights. Each story can be 15s long and can include photos, videos, music, giphys, and interactive stickers such as questions, quizzes, and polls.
- *Reels* are up to 90s video clips.These should be more audio-focused than your stories, and you can also add captions (just like posts).
- *Hashtags* are extremely popular on Instagram. Each post and reel can have a maximum of 30 hashtags and each story can have 10.
- *Links:* Links got an update, and you can now copy and paste links from a post caption and create clickable links using stickers in stories. Link in bio is also a common way to add links to your posts.

Frequency: Major brands post an average of 1.5 times a day. Laymen are encouraged to post once a day, but the more important goal is to **post consistently**. Starting off slow and then ramping up as you get better at taking photos and posting them is better than opening with a deluge of content and then sputtering off into oblivion for a week.

TikTok
At this time, Stanford UComm does **NOT** recommend the creation of brand TikTok accounts. Do **NOT** install the TikTok app "for professional or personal use on any Stanford-sponsored or work-connected mobile device."

Yelp/Vitals/RateMD/Healthgrades & other crowd-sourced review platforms
Perform a simple Google search of your name and, if you're an MD, odds are the results will return at least one page for you on a crowd-sourced review platform. There are many approaches to maintaining one of these pages, but we suggest the following:
1) Claim your page. Once you've claimed your page you can add a link to your website, professional headshot, and include your hours and specialties.
2) Ask for positive reviews. This doesn't mean you have to put a sign on your main desk with a QR code (though some do!) Simply suggest a customer writes a review after having a particularly positive experience.
3) Do **NOT** respond to negative reviews. Even if a comment is untrue, sites will refuse to take it down unless you can provide evidence to the contrary. This information is most likely protected by HIPPA, so unless you're interested in filing a suit for libel, you're out of luck.

ResearchGate

ResearchGate is LinkedIn for scientists. After some questionable practices in the 2010s, ResearchGate reached copyright agreements with several major academic publishers. Like Doximity and Healthgrades, the odds that a profile has already been created for you is likely. Profiles are often machine-generated based on papers that have been uploaded by co-authors. Claiming your profile is important for managing your online reputation.

YouTube

YouTube is the second most popular social media platform worldwide with the total number of YouTube users forecast to hit 933M in 2024.

Posting quality content is resource intensive and time consuming but can be worth it. If you are interested in creating video content but don't want the hassle of creating and maintaining your own channel, offer the video to the Department channel. This is a win-win: we get content, you get an audience.

Note: The Department of Surgery has a video interest group!

Social Media Best Practices

Always
- Acknowledge sources by using their handles (i.e., "@name")
- Use relevant hashtags judiciously. Hashtags should *add* to your post (don't just repeat words with a pound sign).
- Be yourself.
- Listen.
- Secure your account with a legitimate password and two-factor authorization.

Never
- Post content that contains protected health information (PHI).
- Expose the privacy of others.
- Respond to a patient.
- Post unless you have something to say. Quality over quantity!
- Post when angry.
- Engage with trolls; ignore or block them.

Images
Adding a high-quality image to your post can take more time, but it's worth it. Images can [increase traffic](#) to a post and help viewers remember the post. Use the [optimal image ratio](#) for your channel; no one wants awkward crops. Note that channels update their optimal image sizes often, so be sure to check their online guides for current information. Hootsuite now offers a built-in image editing tool that will crop to the desired dimensions.

Only use images/illustrations you have the rights to or that are freely available under a [creative commons license.](#) When in doubt, contact the original photographer, illustrator, or creator to get permission before posting. You can find Stanford images at [SALLIE (Stanford ALL-Image Exchange).](#) Smartphone cameras have more than enough resolution for posting to the internet. You can also try screenshotting a webpage, etc. for a quick image.

When to post:
- [Myriads of studies](#) have been done to discover when the best times to post are; they all contradict one another. Post at different times of day until you

discover the habits of your unique audience. You can also use free analytics tools to see when your audience is active online.

- Don't post all of your content at once. Use a free scheduling tool like [Hootsuite](#) or [Later](#) to publish your content throughout the day/week, which will increase the number of people who see your posts.
- Be consistent!
- Don't post during a crisis/major events.

Analytics

Most platforms offer limited analytics for free. Use the data collected each month to figure out what types of content you should post more of and what types garner less engagement. Remember: correlation is not causation. Business accounts may offer greater insight, but this comes at a cost, as those pages don't receive as much organic engagement algorithmically.

Cross-posting

Some applications will allow you to simultaneously post to multiple channels at once. While sharing the same content across several different channels is encouraged, simul-posting is NOT recommended. (e.g. If you simulpost from Instagram to X, the photo won't display properly and handles are ofttimes slightly different.) Different platforms have different audiences and goals. Post to each channel individually, making small changes in your tone of voice, timing, and hashtags to earn the most return on each piece of content.

Notifications

Change your profile settings on each platform to send you emails, text messages, or push notifications when someone mentions you, leaves a comment, etc. Because of the nature of social platforms, quick responses are expected and encouraged. Choose the notification settings that work for you and update as necessary.

Resources

Who to follow on X:

The Department of Surgery's X account uses lists to organize who we follow into groups. Exploring these lists can help you find colleagues, mentees, and others who already have accounts. NOTE: These lists may not be complete as new accounts are constantly being created!

https://twitter.com/StanfordSurgery/lists

HubSpot

Inbound marketing and sales software purveyor, HubSpot creates free educational content on social media and personal branding on a regular basis. Their blog is a great place to get new ideas and stay up-to-date on a field that is constantly evolving.

https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing

Social Media Examiner

As its title implies, this blog examines the latest and greatest in social media. Take a look at the daily content for information on everything from what size photo to post on Facebook to how to use paid LinkedIn ads.

https://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/

Hootsuite

In addition to helping you schedule posts across multiple platforms, Hootsuite offers free (and paid) resources to help posters learn the science of social media. Hootsuite also offers additional analytics.

https://blog.hootsuite.com/

Stanford Surgery #socialMedia Slack channel

Have you joined the Stanford Surgery Slack workplace? If so, please join the #socialMedia channel. This channel is regularly updated with information about social media best practices and platform updates. You can also ask questions of your fellow posters. There is also a social media community of practice sponsored by the university.