SOCIAL MEDIA
ADVICE NOTE

OCTOBER 2022

Who is this advice note for?

This advice note is intended for all members of CIEEM, at all membership grades. It is also of relevance at an organisational level where registered practices may have communications and / or engagement through staff who use social media platforms on behalf of the organisation. You should also be aware of and adhere to any policies and advice issued by your own organisation.

In this advice note we are talking about the use of social media platforms in a professional capacity. However, it is worth noting that even when posting in a personal capacity, this can still have potential impacts for you professionally, especially where you have crossover between your personal and professional networks.

What do we mean by social media?

Whilst the term social media is prevalent today, it may be useful to touch on what we mean by it in the context of this advice note.

Social media refers to all the publicly available digital platforms that we use for social networking, and to create and share content publicly online.

Some of the most used social media platforms that you may be familiar with are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, but there are others. Some, such as LinkedIn, are more commonly used in a professional context, whereas others, such as Facebook, are typically favoured for more personal interactions.

Why use social media as a professional?

Social media can have many benefits for our profession, you individually, your organisation and for CIEEM. Effective use of social media can enable you to:

○ Raise your personal professional profile, and / or that of your organisation and CIEEM

○ Raise the profile of our profession as a whole Build your professional networks

○ Develop and share professional skills and knowledge

○ Share, and have improved awareness of events, projects / initiatives, and job / development opportunities

○ Share ideas and get involved in conversations relevant to your profession

Because of all of this, we actively support our membership to make good use of social media. It is a valid form of communication and carries some very real benefits when used effectively.

Tips for Social Media use for CIEEM Members

Whilst there are numerous benefits to be realised from effective use of social media, there are some potential pitfalls. Here are some hints and tips on how to make your engagement with social media effective and avoid some of those pitfalls.

Why are you posting?

It is always helpful to reflect on your motivation for posting content to social media. People use social media for many different reasons, including to share knowledge; to express their opinions; to raise their professional profile; and to keep up to date with family and friends.

You should be clear in your own mind why you are posting on social media and what you want to get out of it so that there is a clarity and consistency to your posts, and any desired actions are well articulated.

Who is your audience?

As with any form of communication it is important to consider who you are communicating with. This extends not just to your intended audience, but also to those who may be unintended recipients of your posts.

Once something is in the public domain it is hard to take back and may be shared beyond your original audience. You should always think about how your post may be viewed by those unintended recipients as well, for example, how might your post read to a journalist, current or prospective employer, client, peers and people you manage/have responsibility for.

These are some points to consider in respect of your audience:

Avoid blurring lines between your personal & professional lives

No-one works all the time and members have a right to a private life. However, you need to think about whether you would be happy with colleagues, clients and other professionals, knowing what you did to let your hair down last Saturday, or personal details about your family and friends. Followers may also be confused if your posts about ecological matters are interspersed with your observations on music or a social event you attended. You are more likely to project a strong and professional image if your posts are all related (albeit loosely), to professional matters.

Consider whether you need more than one account

If you have different objectives for using social media, you may wish to consider having more than one account. Keeping your 'professional' posts separate from your personal posts also helps to retain some personal space and projects a cohesive message.

Choose the most appropriate platform

Different social media platforms tend to lend themselves to different types of messaging. For example, LinkedIn is almost exclusively a professional platform. Facebook is informal, which can be used both professionally and personally, whilst Instagram lends itself to photographs. You may find that it is better to only use one platform for certain types of posts.

Be aware of privacy & safety settings

Most platforms provide you with the ability to control who can see your posts. This means that you should be able to limit, to a degree, who can see posts. However, if you are using social media to boost your professional profile, you may wish to minimise the privacy settings. That is why it can be helpful to have separate accounts. However, *you should not rely on privacy settings.* When writing a post you should treat it as if it could be read by anyone and everyone – intended and otherwise.

What are you posting?

The content you share on social media can vary hugely, from short posts that you pen yourself, to longer articles, blogs / vlogs and sharing other people's content. It may be opinion or based in fact. You therefore need to think about the content you are sharing – both in terms of your intent, and in terms of how it might be perceived by others. Here are some things to consider:

Be discrete and don't post confidential information

No matter how carefully privacy settings are set, messages on social media are vulnerable to being spread more widely than the person posting may hope. You should always think carefully before you post any message about your work, taking account of any confidential elements of your work. Make sure the information is yours to post before posting. Do not post any information (including photographs) that would help identify a site of a protected species, or the nature of a proposed development, or the identity of an individual or professional without checking with the individuals concerned first. Consider how a client may view your post if it relates to work you are undertaking for them.

Employ courtesy and respect in posts

The informality and immediacy of social media can lead to individuals being more blunt and less polite than they would usually be in face-to-face conversations. You should always stop to think how you would feel if someone spoke to you using the language that you propose to use in a post. It is also important that you avoid making defamatory or potentially libellous comments. If an exchange starts to become 'heated' it is best to walk away for a while. Rather than send a message in haste, it may be best to pause before pressing send. Make sure that your comments could not be interpreted as harassing or bullying behaviour.

Avoid judging others

CIEEM has been notified of instances where one member has commented unfavourably on the appropriateness or detail of surveys conducted by other members of the profession. All members have a duty, under the Code of Professional Conduct, to uphold the reputation of the profession, not bring the profession into disrepute, and protect the public interest. As such, the Institute supports members in identifying instances of poor professional practice. However, the correct procedure is to raise a complaint with the Institute, rather than instigate a trial by social media. Rarely will the person commenting be in possession of the full facts and context for the survey on which they are commenting. As such, their observations may be unfair and not supported by the circumstances. It is worth noting that by acting unprofessionally in a public forum, such as social media, you may find yourself on the receiving end of a complaint.

Maintain standards of written language

The informality of social media can mean there is a temptation to take less time over spelling and grammar. If you are using social media to promote a professional image, this should be carried through into your social media posts. Poor spelling and inaccuracies will not instil confidence in your professional abilities.

Other considerations

Consider which sites to follow

It is very easy to follow other accounts on social media and there can be a temptation to follow everything. However, you should think carefully about the sites you choose to follow and what messages you may be conveying by your choice of sites. Some sites are designed to inform and provide up-to-date information about research and innovation. Other sites might be considered more 'controversial' in terms of the nature of the views expressed. Think about why you are using social media and what people might think of your choice of following particular sites.

Follow your company's social media policy

Members should remember that they are still representing their company if their place of work is stated in their profile or posts. It might be appropriate to disclaim something like "all opinions are my own". Many organisations have a social media policy, which guides employees' responsibilities in the use of social media. Members should follow such policies, where they exist.

Apply CIEEM's Code of Professional Conduct

Adherence to CIEEM's Code of Professional Conduct is a requirement for all members. The Code describes CIEEM's expectations of members' professional competence and integrity. It applies to all activities and behaviours of a member as a professional ecologist or environmental manager (whether for money, pursuit of profit, reputation gain, political or social motives or otherwise) including those conducted in the public domain and interactions with other professionals. Members can remind themselves of the content of the Code here: CIEEM's Code of Professional Conduct | CIEEM

And finally, remember it is OK to switch off! Social media can be a useful and powerful tool, but it also has the capacity to absorb large quantities of time. Don't be afraid to switch off and walk away. It will still be there when you come back to it.

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