An introduction to social media as a tool

Managing your online presence to boost your career

Engaging with social media platforms is becoming increasingly important when managing your career and looking for your next steps. It is a great way of creating and maintaining useful links with those in your sector, leading to collaborations or even funding opportunities, and it is a quick and effective way of finding relevant information. As online information about people becomes easily accessible, it is often the first port of call for employers when seeking potential employees.

Why social media?

With the increasing engagement with social media, both by organizations and individuals, finding information about people is getting easier. Have you ever tried Googling yourself to see what you find? There is often more than you think, and not all the information out there is from yourself. So being aware of your online presence and managing this effectively puts you in control of how you are portrayed online.

Professional profile

Below are just a few examples of the numerous social media platforms that can be used for your advantage and help to raise your professional profile.

Writing a blog

Having your own blog is a good way of establishing yourself as a ‘communicator’ in your sector. It gives you the chance to demonstrate your specialist knowledge and also show your engagement with your subject outside the laboratory. You can upload pictures, have guest bloggers, and write your own topical posts. However, you must be aware of your audience, each blog post is like a mini-article so it must be engaging and well written. Used effectively, it can demonstrate your writing skills and ability to communicate with a wide audience.

Twitter

This is an exceptional tool for finding information quickly. It enables users to share information and demonstrates how useful you can be to others.

LinkedIn

This is often the preferred platform for professionals working in the science sector, and is the most widely used as a career tool. You can share your CV (résumé), professional skills, publications, and demonstrate networks and links in a very visible way. For example, if you speak to someone at a conference and obtain their business card, you can then make the link public by adding them to your professional network.

Facebook

In general, this is a platform that is best kept for personal use, and it is rarely used to help raise your professional network. It is set up to be a ‘social’ tool, and, although organizations will have groups and pages you can link to, it can be difficult to prevent the line between personal and professional becoming blurred. If you are keen to use it, an option is to set up a separate profile from the one you use to keep in contact with friends. Or, you can create a group for your whole laboratory, so others can keep up to date with your news and all updates go through the group instead of your personal account.

What should you share?

As well as sharing your professional skills and networks online, sharing your work and research to a considered extent can be very beneficial, and is important so people know what your interests are. However, this must be done with caution as not to disclose anything that could jeopardize publishing opportunities and the work of the rest of your team. You also need to bear in mind any funders you may have, as they may not want you to...
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While it is tempting to disclose anything online, it is advisable to check your institution’s policies for what you can share, and if they don’t have one, speak to your PI and funders to be sure where they stand with it.

What not to share?

As a general rule, do not put anything out there you would not want potential or current employers to see. This may seem obvious to many, but there are tricks to make sure you don’t trip up. First, look out for automatic updates. If you use numerous social media platforms and these are linked, you may upload something on Facebook that will pop up somewhere else and make an unforeseen announcement to an unintended audience. Check all your settings on a fairly regular basis, (as updates can occur), to ensure you are managing your privacy setting effectively.

Where to start?

• Reflect on your current online presence. So essentially Google yourself and see whether how you are portrayed is what you want.
• Consider what you want to gain; for example, use it for a career tool to help you find potential jobs, create links for use in your current role, publicize the work you are doing to the general public or others in your field, or to create a well-known online presence for yourself in order to engage with key groups.
• Ask yourself whether your online presence is findable and effective. So, are there lots of people with the same name as you, and, if so, how can you be distinguished from the others? Think about associating yourself with either your research, or the message you want to portray (if you want to talk about current affairs, highlight this).
• Look at your colleagues and peers online profiles to see what others are up to. Find some examples of what you like and use these to set the tone for what you do.
• If you want to be very active, consider whether you will have time to do so. Based on this, set expectations for your audience, for example “I will update this blog once a week/month”.
• Make a plan and create a calendar for your activities. There may be time when you know there will be a lot going on that you want to engage with, so make time for this in your schedule by planning in advance.
• When planning, remember it is better to do a few things well than lots of things badly.

How can you engage with us?

The Biochemical Society has a number of social media accounts:

Follow us on Twitter @biochemsoc

Find us on Facebook at Biochemical Society

Join our LinkedIn Group

Follow our blog at www.biochemicalsociety.wordpress.com