

SOME SIMPLE SUGGESTIONS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS

Twenty top tips for herbalists online

However you may view of the ethics and values of social media, they have undoubtedly become established as a preferred form of communication and interaction for many people.

As herbalists they can offer us many benefits, but can also create problems and difficulties if used carelessly or inappropriately.

Here are a few simple suggestions to help guide you safely over some of the trickier junctions on the digital highway.



GO!

FULL SPEED AHEAD



NETWORKING

Social media allows us to conveniently establish, develop, and extend wider and more diverse social and professional networks.



DISCUSSION

Through social media we can engage more effectively and pro-actively with the public and colleagues in forums and debates, both locally and globally.



INFORMATION

We can use social media to guide and facilitate public access to reliable, accurate, and balanced information about health and wellbeing.



GO!

FULL SPEED AHEAD



ADVERTISING

We can advertise and highlight our services inexpensively to potential customers, explaining what we do, how we work, and what we can offer them. Remember that as with your website and printed materials, your words and the information they convey should follow our Code of Ethics, and be in line with the guidelines set out by the Advertising Standards Authority



TRANSPARENCY

By clearly presenting ourselves, our work, and our profession on social media, we can help to ensure better transparency and accountability.



PROMOTION

We can use social media to inspire people to want to find out more about plant-based medicines, encouraging interest in learning opportunities, and helping with an understanding of what our work entails. Our potential audience may be individuals, local groups or the wider community.



ENGAGEMENT

By opening discussions with a more extensive and diverse audience on health related matters and signposting people towards the professional help that herbalists are able to offer, we can encourage wider and more effective engagement with herbal practitioners.



TRUST

We can build and develop respect for our online persona, where people feel that they know us and our work, and are connected to someone they can trust and are happy to approach for further information and guidance.



CAUTION

PROCEED WITH CARE



CONSIDERATION

We need to beware of getting involved in disputes where our views might cause offence. Although we are all entitled to have our own opinions, we do need to be cautious of being drawn into polarised or emotionally charged arguments. Good-humored banter with people we know can be productive, but in the absence of non-verbal clues others may read our comments as hostile, sarcastic, dismissive or inconsiderate. Always strive to make whatever you choose to say appear considered and **KIND**.



SELF-RESTRAINT

We should take particular care when commenting on forums and groups. Unfortunately, social media often provide ideal platforms for narcissism, entitlement and incivility – remember that when faced with a challenging comment, sometimes saying nothing can be as powerful as responding critically. If a response is essential, then a brief and polite message thanking someone for posting, before moving away from that thread may be all that is needed. Even if we have second thoughts and later edit or remove something that we posted on the spur of the moment, don't forget that there may be readers who have noted or recorded it before we changed our mind. Posts on the internet can last forever.



CONSULTATIONS

Whilst it is good to highlight the benefits of herbal medicine on social media, we should avoid conducting public consultations with individuals online. Where necessary, conversations should be moved to a private chat message thread, or better still we can politely recommend and direct people to our websites to book a consultation in the usual way.

CAUTION

PROCEED WITH CARE



IDENTITY

Most of us use our real-life name to identify ourselves and our businesses on social media, this can be useful in 'being our brand' and increasing visibility. For those of us who choose to use a pseudonym or pen name, it is important to understand that although this may sometimes offer a certain degree of anonymity, it does not absolve us from our professional, ethical or legal responsibilities when using digital media. Complete anonymity is never possible, and using a pseudonym may sometimes falsely encourage us to make disinhibited comments and risk unprofessional behaviour. Many professional bodies discourage the use of pseudonyms.



BOUNDARIES

The tendency for social media to encourage blurring of the boundaries between our professional and personal lives can be problematic. Accepting our patients as personal 'friends' could be useful, but it may be more appropriate to direct them to our business pages and accounts. As well as interacting as private individuals and herbal practitioners, we might also participate in other local or national special interest groups on social media. We need to be aware that friends and followers from a variety of backgrounds may also be able to see us and interact with us in other contexts.



COPYRIGHT

We need to be cautious about infringing copyright on written passages or images used for marketing and promotion, and to make sure that we have the owner's permission before using any public access images or literature for our own purposes.



BALANCE

We should always aim to balance and optimise our time on social media – we need to remind ourselves that it can become dangerously addictive and might reduce our productivity if not used well.

STOP!

HIT THE BRAKES



PRIVACY

We must never risk allowing social media to endanger our personal privacy. Settings should be configured appropriately – for example on Facebook we can select people we add to be 'Close Friends', 'Friends', or 'Acquaintances'. We can then decide which audience can see our future posts and also limit who can see any previous posts. Similar settings will also apply on other platforms.

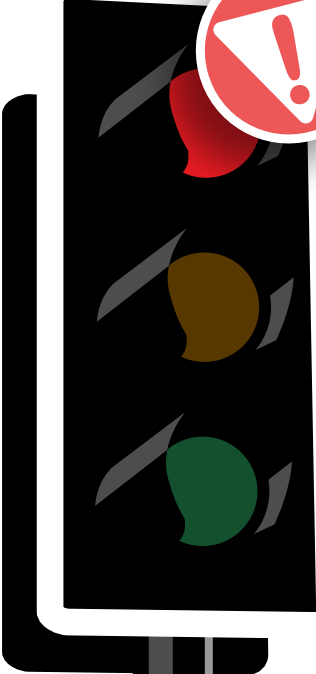


CONFIDENTIALITY

Patient confidentiality must always be fully respected and observed. We should also avoid breaching confidentiality with colleagues, friends and family members in exactly the same way. Even if individuals have properly consented to being discussed and are not identified by name, we need to be careful not to reveal any specific details which might make them recognisable to others who read our posts.



SAFEGUARDING



As with other aspects of our professional life, there may be instances on social media where our professional responsibilities might override the need for observing the privacy of others. Potential safeguarding issues, or the awareness of a criminal act could require us to take some official action. Seeking advice from a professional association or indemnity insurance provider may be helpful here.



STOP!

HIT THE BRAKES

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INAPPROPRIATENESS

As professional herbal practitioners we should never engage in unprofessional behaviour, and this also includes our activities online – for example: using discriminatory, derogatory or defamatory language, or posting unseemly pictures of ourselves inebriated, disinhibited, or behaving inappropriately or appearing to do so. We should avoid using expletives, profanities, or indecent, insulting or demeaning language when posting or responding to others online.



ADVERSE MEDIA EXPOSURE

As herbalists we should be careful not to risk posting anything online that might subsequently be adversely reported to the press or the Advertising Standards Authority, impact negatively on our business or employment, or reflect badly on either ourselves or our profession. Bear in mind that even innocent comments made in an unguarded moment during a heated discussion or when provoked, may later be taken out of context, framed in a distorted way, and presented by the media or other organisations in an adverse, hostile, or damaging manner.

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OUR CODE OF ETHICS



Our Code of Ethics and Practice is applicable in all situations, including social media. It is available on our website www.nimh.org.uk.