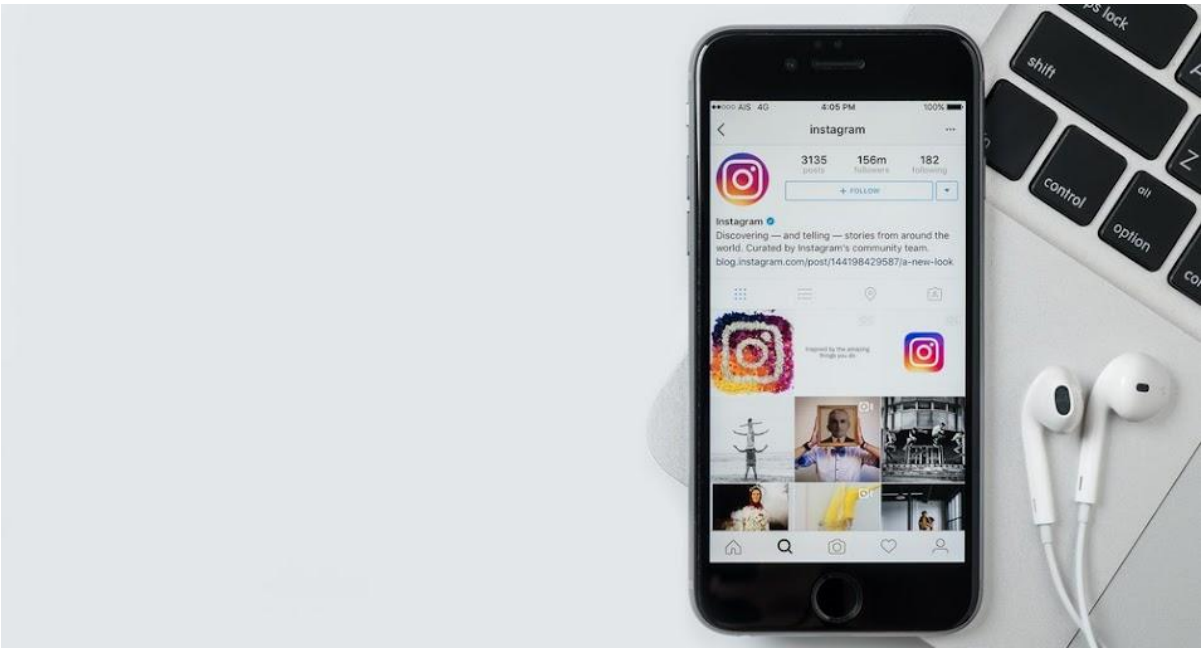
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Read This Before You Post: 6 Social Media Rules for Veterinarians



TikTok. Instagram. Twitter. Snapchat. Facebook. BeReal. Reddit. With more places to post than ever before, Americans are doing just that—and the data[1] proves it. Instagram alone boasts 2 billion users and sees over 100 million photos uploaded daily. 1.9 billion users log onto Facebook every day, and the average American spends 500 minutes per month on TikTok.

Regardless of whether you're for or against social media, the undeniable reality is that sharing our daily highs and lows, likes and dislikes, memes and criticisms, has become an intrinsic part of the American social fabric. And where exactly does all this hearting, posting, and commenting take place? According to Zippia,[2] over 77% of Americans use social media apps on the job, and the average working American spends 12% of their workday scrolling through TikTok, Instagram, and other platforms.

Because so much of Americans' daily social media use occurs during the business day, learning that school and work feature heavily in social sharing shouldn't come as much of a surprise. Snaps and stories feature the physical workplace in the background; desks, notebooks, and computer screens sneak their way into on-the-job or at-school

selfies; complaints about faculty members, bosses, clients, and school procedures get tweeted out into the universe; and in the end, our shared spaces may lose a considerable amount of privacy.

Social Media & Medical Professions

It's easy to dismiss social media as thoughtless, harmless fun, but when apps overlap with school and the workplace, students and employees—particularly those in medical professions—can get themselves into hot water. Consider these two social-media-in-the-workplace stories that made headlines in 2022:

- The nurse who filmed herself doing a TikTok dance in the hallway of her hospital moments after her patient died
- The group of obstetrics nurses who listed their "icks" about patients in a video that was filmed at their hospital

Though these incidents occurred in the human medical industry instead of at a veterinary practice, veterinarians can still learn a lot from these cautionary tales. Two videos that didn't feel noteworthy at the moment of posting quickly spiraled into national-scale embarrassments for the medical professionals featured in the videos, their employers, and any patients who might have crossed their paths.

The takeaway? **Think before you post.** This golden rule of social media should guide you regardless of whether your posts are focused on your personal or professional life and abiding by this rule is the key to avoiding the social media danger zone. Read on for a list of social media tips that all veterinarians should follow.

Social Media Guidelines for Veterinarians

1. **Think before you post.** Before you hit send on a post or story that takes place at school or in the practice where you work or mentions work in any capacity, ask yourself: Is this a post that you would be comfortable with your classmates, professors or other colleagues seeing? Would you show it to the patient's owner? If the answer is no, refrain from sharing.

2. **Familiarize yourself with your university's social media policy**.* While your social media accounts are irrefutably your own, posting content related to your school or practice based experiences (or even content that isn't related to school or work but occurs in the clinic) may allow others to have a say in what you share. Many universities and practice owners create social media policies that employees must sign, and violations of these policies can lead to censure or even firing. Carefully reading through policies in place at school and any practices where you are working or completing

clinical experiences is a must; if a policy is not in place, consider asking the practice or school for their recommendations.

3. **Secure owner permission before sharing information about patients, including photos**. Photos of clients in the clinic setting, diagnoses, and visit information all constitute PII (personally identifiable information). Sharing PII without express owner consent is a breach of privacy laws and posting on social media is no exception. Even if the post or tweet gets deleted, sharing this data is still considered a violation. The same holds true for 24-hour Instagram or Snapchat stories. Posting without owner consent is a lapse in judgment that can result in scathing reviews, legal trouble, and other ramifications that have the potential to harm your clinic.

4. **Be aware of your audience and privacy setting**. A private Instagram with 100 friend and family followers is significantly different from a TikTok with hundreds of thousands of unknown followers. If a veterinarian posts a video of themselves in clinic-branded scrubs saying that they're frustrated with the clinic's practice manager for XYZ reasons, the potential for negative fallout is drastically increased on the public TikTok versus the private Instagram. Consider your followers and privacy settings before posting anything work-related.

5. **Engage with respectful content.** Many social media apps (mainly Facebook and Twitter) actively show your friends and mutual followers the content that you interact with. If you keep your posts and stories clean and professional but like, retweet, or comment on inappropriate content, there's a good chance your followers will see it. If your account is public, remember that you are a reflection of your university or practice. If clients (or even fellow colleagues) catch you interacting with harmful or disparaging content and are made to feel uncomfortable, they have every right to bring this to the attention of faculty or other supervisors.

6. **Consider the legal ramifications of sharing information about malpractice incidents.** In the event you find yourself embroiled in a malpractice allegation, *do not under any circumstances share details of the claim proceedings*. Professional liability claims and license defense complaints can be frustrating and upsetting, and the need to vent is only human. However, if your malpractice claim escalates into a trial, any social media posts you've made about the claim can be used in court. To ensure the best possible outcome for yourself and your practice, keep the details of malpractice incidents private and off the internet.

Just like Instagram Explore, this list of social media guidelines could easily go on forever. However, the six tips outlined above are the most important to keep in mind

while practicing veterinary medicine. By adhering to these rules and using a bit of common sense, you can keep your clinic content, your clients happy, and your social media stress-free.

Sources:

1. https://www.socialpilot.co/blog/social-media-statistics#tk-usage-stats
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