The *do's* and *don'ts* of social media

Reena Wadia¹

The social media revolution

We are at the beginning of a huge shift in the way dental professionals connect, learn and communicate. A shift which is clearly transforming the profession and its future. I am of course talking about the social media revolution.

Social media is defined as the 'software that enables individuals and communities to gather, communicate, share and in some cases collaborate or play'.¹ In other words, that's social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and Instagram.

The aim of this article is to share a few important do's and don'ts whilst exploring these social media platforms. This is in no way an exhaustive list but whether you're an avid user or newbie, I hope you can pick up some helpful tips.

1. DO connect with friends and colleagues

The well-known six degrees of separation theory states that everyone in the world is six steps away, by way of introduction, from any other person. However, thanks to social media, it appears the six degrees are now shrinking! As explained by Facebook on their research blog 'each person in the world (or at least among the 1.59 billion people active on Facebook) is connected to every other person by an average of three and a half other people'.² So whether it's through sending a Facebook friend request, a LinkedIn invitation or following on Google+, social media is the perfect way to connect with current and new friends from all over the world.

Here are a few tactics which may help whilst connecting:

¹ Associate dentist/clinical tutor and member of BDJ Team's reader panel

a) Follow rather than friend

Facebook lets you follow someone without friending them. When you're on the profile page of someone who has this feature turned on, you'll see a 'follow' button to click, next to the 'add as Friend' option. When you follow someone, you see their posts in your newsfeed, just as you would when you become friends with someone. The big difference between friending and following is that there need not be reciprocation from the other person. So if you want to see what *insert name of your dental role model* posts but s/he doesn't return your friend request, you can follow instead.

b) How do you say that?

You may be connected with users from all over the world who speak many different languages. If you want to teach your friends how to *actually* pronounce your name, Facebook can help you with that! To add a pronunciation guide, go to the 'about' section of your profile and click on 'details about you' then 'name pronunciation'. Here, Facebook will offer suggestions for your first and last name that you can listen to before selecting. If these aren't suitable, you can also type in your own phonetic pronouncer.

in the top menu at LinkedIn, then 'contact settings' and 'export LinkedIn connections'.

2. DO use social media to keep up-to-date with the latest in dentistry

Social media platforms allow educational content to be shared in a more accessible form and the volume of content available is remarkable. Often when I'm browsing my Facebook newsfeed, I spot something that grabs my attention but don't immediately have time to read or watch it. If you're ever in this situation, Facebook has a useful feature that allows you to save a link to come back to later. To do this, click on the 'save' option in the drop-down menu under the top right

various updates. So for example, you can retrieve the latest Twitter updates posted by a particular account via SMS by sending 'GET [username]' to the custom number.

ResearchGate is a platform that allows scientists to connect, share research papers and collaborate. Even if you're not regularly publishing articles, ResearchGate allows you to follow prominent authors in the profession, it notifies you of their latest research papers and there is also a facility to request the full article text from the author if it isn't already available on the site.

3. DO check out the latest events

Facebook events are particularly useful if you

'IF YOU WANT TO SEE WHAT *INSERT NAME OF YOUR

DENTAL ROLE MODEL* POSTS BUT

S/HE DOESN'T RETURN YOUR FRIEND

REQUEST, YOU CAN FOLLOW INSTEAD.'

c) Messaging someone you're not yet connected with

If you want to get in touch with someone on LinkedIn but you have yet to make a one-to-one connection, you can work around this by joining a common group. Group members can message each other even without a direct connection. Click on the person's name in the group, and you'll see an option to 'send message' in the drop-down under 'follow'.

d) Downloading a list of your connections

If you're using LinkedIn, you can download into a spreadsheet - via a number of different formats - a full list of your connections, including their name, current title, workplace and email address. Click on 'connections'

corner of the post you'd like to save. 'Save' also shows up on pages. To find your saved posts again you can head to <https://www.facebook.com/saved/> and on mobile tap 'more' from the navigation and then you should see an option for 'saved'. You'll be directed to a complete list of all the posts and pages you've saved, viewable as a single list or broken down by category.

Twitter is similarly a great platform if you're looking for the latest news or articles. One of my favourite Twitter feeds is by the BDJ (@The_BDJ), which provides regular links to abstracts of the latest publications. If you're a big Twitter fan, you might want to manage your account via SMS by visiting your Twitter settings. You'll receive a custom number through which you can receive

want to find out about the latest events that are taking place in the dental world. If you regularly use Google Calendar, it might be helpful to link this to your Facebook events. This is helpful to plan and organise both work and social schedules and ensures you don't miss any important occasions! To do this, head over to 'events' on Facebook, and click on one of your 'upcoming events'. Once you're on the event page, click on the 'options' button and select 'export event' from the dropdown. Copy the URL under 'subscribe to all upcoming events on your calendar'. Once you've copied the URL, open up Google Calendar and on the left-hand side you'll see an option called 'other calendars'. Click on the drop down next to 'other calendars' and choose 'add by URL'. Insert the URL you copied from Facebook and your Facebook events will now sync with Google Calendar.

4. DO join groups

I'm sure you'd agree that one of the best ways of learning is through informal discussions with our peers and colleagues. A great way to do this is through joining groups on social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Some of my favourite Facebook groups include 'For Dentists by Dentists', 'Dental Roots' and the 'Dental Hygienist & Therapy Network'. When I'm following discussions in these groups and want to go back to a post, link or comment, I find it helpful to use the search function.

If you're part of a Facebook group and interested in asking members a particular question and want them to pick from a specific set of answers, use the Poll feature. Choose the 'create poll' tab inside the status update bar. Click 'add poll options' to enter multiple-choice options. Google+ also allows you to run polls with individuals in your circles. Ask a question in your Google+ post and click on the 'poll' button.

If you're looking for someone to join your team, Facebook and LinkedIn groups also seem to be a popular place to advertise jobs. Sometimes this is far more productive than other forms of more expensive advertising. In the same way, if you're looking for a job, keep a look out for job adverts on the popular groups.

5. DON'T publish patient identifiable information

The latest guidance released by the General Dental Council (GDC),³ which was effective from 27 June 2016, states that we should 'maintain and protect patients' information by not publishing any information that could identify them on social media without their explicit consent'. This is important to bear in mind if you are posting clinical photographs of your patients or discussing patient related information.

6. DON'T post anything that could affect the public's confidence in you as a dental professional

The latest guidance on social media from the GDC emphasises the importance of not posting any information, including personal views, or photographs and videos, which could damage public confidence in you as a dental professional. Posting information under another username does not guarantee your confidentiality. Even if you do not identify yourself as a dental professional, you must still follow the standards and this guidance when using social media.

If you're a practice principal or practice manager, it might be helpful to set out a social media policy for your staff to reinforce the

above guidance. Within this, it may also be helpful to highlight the need to maintain appropriate boundaries in the relationships the dental team have with each other and their patients.

7. DON'T troll or cyber-bully

Standard 6.1.2 of the *Standards for the dental team* states: 'You must treat colleagues fairly and with respect, in all situations and all

However, it is important to remember the limitations of these tools and realise that even the strictest privacy settings do not guarantee security. Ultimately, any information that you post is instantly made public. It can be easily accessed by others and can be copied and redistributed without you knowing. So presume that what you post online will be there permanently, even if you delete it afterwards.

**'AS A DENTAL PROFESSIONAL WE HAVE
A RESPONSIBILITY TO BEHAVE
PROFESSIONALLY AND RESPONSIBLY BOTH
ONLINE AND OFFLINE. TREAT COLLEAGUES
FAIRLY AND WITH RESPECT.'**

forms of interaction and communication'. The standards expected of dental professionals do not change because they are communicating through social media rather than face to face or by other traditional media. So as a dental professional we have a responsibility to behave professionally and responsibly both online and offline. We must treat colleagues fairly and with respect in all situations. We must not instigate or take part in any form of cyber bullying, intimidation, or use offensive language online. It can be tempting to think you are sheltered behind a screen when making defamatory comments, but realise you will be stepping out of the GDC's guidance and this could lead to serious repercussions. Furthermore, if you share any such content posted by someone else, you can still be held responsible even though you did not create it.

8. DON'T forget to check your security/privacy settings

You should regularly review your privacy settings for each of your social media accounts.

A recent addition to Facebook's trove of tools is a 'security checkup' that will guide you through a checklist aimed at making your account more secure. This includes logging out of Facebook on web browsers and apps you are not using, and receiving notifications or an email when someone attempts to log in to your account from an unfamiliar device or browser.

I hope the above is useful. We'd love to hear your comments or personal favourite social media tips, so feel free to share these on the *BDJ Team* Facebook page or Twitter feed!
www.facebook.com/bdjteam
<https://twitter.com/EditorKate2>

1. Muhlen M V, Ohno-Machado L. Reviewing social media use by clinicians. *J Am Med Inform Assoc* 2012; **19**: 777-781.
2. Facebook research blog. Three and a half degrees of separation. Available at: <https://research.facebook.com/blog/three-and-a-half-degrees-of-separation/> (accessed 20 July 2016).
3. General Dental Council. Guidance on using social media. Available at: <http://www.gdc-uk.org/Newsandpublications/Pressreleases/Pages/Social-media-guidance-for-dental-professionals-updated.aspx> (accessed 20 July 2016).
4. General Dental Council. *Standards for the dental team*. Available at: <http://www.gdc-uk.org/Dentalprofessionals/Standards/Documents/Standards%20for%20the%20Dental%20Team.pdf> (accessed 20 July 2016).

bdjteam2016142