



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

## A practical guide to Social Media

For Icon accounts and Icon representatives maintaining a social network, blog or site

### How and why we use social media

Social media is defined as any online or digital interactive communication tool or channel which encourages participation and exchange, the digital landscape is changing rapidly and information is becoming increasingly more public, permanent and open to comment.

Icon uses social media to engage with current and prospective communities with varied interests related to the conservation profession. The use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn is key to our core principles - Advocacy, Engagement and Excellence - as well as our marketing and outreach activities.

Through Social Media, we're keen to share and encourage online collaboration, research and news, as well as to collect feedback and gauge experiences from conservators and interested parties to live up to our strategy and values:

#### Advocacy

- Through social media, we can expose our members and their work to a much larger audience
- It also allows us to increase the public's awareness and understanding of the work that goes into conservation
- It extends Icon's ability to influence stakeholders by building an authoritative online presence
- It is an effective way of disseminating Icon's key advocacy messages to stakeholders

#### Engagement

- Social media is a two-way street where we can talk to and receive input from our audience and adapt the message almost in real time
- We can also expand that audience by tailoring the message to different demographics we might want to engage with
- And reach new audiences by removing barriers to participation? I.e. being able to participate in a Twitter conference as opposed to having to physically be there.

#### Excellence

- We can curate what we want the world to see, give exposure to good practices or call out bad ones.

While we are open to giving Icon's groups and networks the ability to open and run their own social media accounts, our approach is to offer our support and representation via our official accounts first and foremost. As Icon's digital presence grows year on year, we are in an optimal position to ensure all member communications reach a wide and varied audience, with the clout afforded through years of building on our brand.

That said, we aim to be open-minded and fair to all groups and so, should there be real need to create new secondary social media accounts to support their particular goals, we would encourage them to consider the following guidance:

**General guidance:**

**Social media 101**

**Why do you need Social Media?**

Do you have a clear mission and purpose or do you feel you should just open an account because everybody else has? Planning ahead and being clear about your objectives from the start is critical to the success of a channel.

**Who will you be talking to?**

Define your audience and your goals. This should be the baseline for every decision taken going forward. Furthermore, set your expectations but be realistic about the outcome: growing an audience takes a long time and a lot of effort.

**Who will be managing your channel?**

Be clear and realistic about the responsibility involved in maintaining one or several social media channels and your capacity to do so consistently. Social media can be an incredibly time consuming chore.

**What content will you be posting?**

What is relevant to the audience and goals you've set out to achieve? Having clear objectives will help you be consistent with the type of content you're posting and developing your image with; ultimately, every message should have a purpose. More importantly: make sure you have a bank of content to pull from or that you have ways of producing content regularly.

**How often should you be posting?**

Post frequency is relative, but typically it should be at least a few times per week - between 2-4 times, best on different days (though Tuesday-Thursday ranks best), and around the same hours (12-2pm is prime time).

If you're not sure about the answer to a few or all of these questions, consider whether now is the right time to open a social media channel or whether it's worth investing some time into doing research or considering alternatives- such as using the main Icon accounts.

## **Further consideration: Best practice on social media**

### **Identifying the right platform for you**

There are many social media platforms, though the most popular ones for business are still Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The most important thing to acknowledge is that you don't have to be on all of them. Following that, it's also necessary to understand how each platform works, what its user demographic is and what are the likely outcomes that you'll get from posting on each of them.

**Facebook:** although Facebook's influence has been dwindling for a while, it's still very popular among a more seasoned audience- equally balanced between male and female users in the 35+ age range. Facebook relies on private profiles containing a lot of personal information, so people tend to be more reserved about joining groups or actively engaging with content. That said, we also find that established Icon members and experienced conservators tend to engage more on Facebook than anywhere else- though we often find that it's usually the same names popping up in conversations.

**Twitter:** this platform exists in the realm of the "microblogging" sphere and it's continuously evolving. You can currently write messages with up to 280 characters, which excludes images and certain parts of a URL. Most recently, they've also enabled features to create "threads"- a collective of tweets that cascade from each other, allowing the user to add more information to the original tweet. Content on Twitter is more easily shared, but also more quickly consumed, so output has to be a lot more consistent to gain traction. The audience on Twitter is very varied- though at Icon we find that we lean into a non-specialist or non-member audience that is predominantly female and between the ages of 20 and 40.

**Instagram:** as a photo-centric platform, Instagram is very difficult to maintain without a constant stream of original and attention grabbing pictures. While it allows captions, Instagram's focus is much on sharing images that you can apply filters to. With a fairly varied audience in terms of age, it's still predominantly used by 16 to 35 year olds, with a noticeable lean into a female demographic. Icon doesn't currently have an Instagram account as we cannot guarantee a realistic output of images we own the rights to.

### **Understanding the differences between a business and a personal profile**

Social media feeds for organisations and businesses are different from individual user profiles - both in the technical aspects and the way they should be used.

From a technical standpoint, social media channels for business allow multiple admins to manage the same account, as well as access to analytics and the ability to promote content for money.

From a usage standpoint, a business page will always be seen for its association to the organisation and so it should speak accordingly- avoiding sensitive topics where possible or speaking in a way that is clear, correct and reflective of the organisation's values. A business

account should be treated more or less like a news outlet - conscious of its mission to inform while limiting opinions and personal judgements.

### **Purpose and call to action**

While a personal page can be used to post generic messages, opinions or shared interests with friends, a business profile should focus on ensuring that each message has a purpose or is of informative value.

Posts to showcase a new project, to announce awards, scholarships or benefits, or to call for papers or contributions to an event are good examples of messages with a purpose. These messages should always contain clear information about what is being promoted, as well as a link to a source or further information- as social media's true purpose is to give the audience just enough to want to know more, thus creating transit to additional resources.

### **Tone of voice**

The tone of voice of any social media channel associated with an organisation should reflect its values, policies and personality.

For Icon, this means that the tone must convey professionalism and respect for the conservation profession, as well as an eagerness to increase public awareness and generate engagement and participation.

Speak correctly: avoid open sentences, poor punctuation and grammar, text talking, ellipsis, or treating it's the person behind the monitor speaking to the audience. It's also important that there should always be something more to the message: an image or a link- not just text.

With that in mind, a message should not sound stiff and devoid of emotion. It's a conversation so be human! Be authentic and conversational, use real examples on every post and use images to enhance engagement. You can be fun while professional- whether you have 1 follower or 9.000.

### **Hashtags**

A very common question when getting into social media is "What hashtags should I be using?"

This largely depends on what you're trying to achieve. Hashtags have two purposes: archival and signal boosting.

Archival or Event hashtags are those that you make yourself- such as #IconACR or #IconTC, which serve the purpose of creating a timeline with every tweet that uses the tag. Typically it's only people participating in an event who would use that hashtag and so it's unlikely any external audiences would participate, thus limiting the reach of the tweets using this hashtag.

Bandwagon hashtags are those created with a theme and embraced by the global public. They tend to become "trending" tags - even in small, segmented circles - and by using them, we

make our tweets appear on a much larger, yet fast-moving timeline, with the potential to be exposed to a much larger audience. Examples of this would be #MondayMotivation, #PortfolioDay, #VisibleWomen.

### **Measuring success**

On Twitter, you can activate Analytics for any account. You can do it following [these instructions](#).

On Facebook, analytics are available by default on any business page, to anyone with an admin or mod status. You can access this by clicking on “Insights” somewhere near the top.

### Key Metrics:

- Followers: refers to the number of people who follow you on the account. Note that not all followers will see all of your posts.
- Reach/Impressions: refers to how many people have seen your post since it went live.
- Engagement: refers to the number of actions people have taken on your posts. This can be clicks, likes, shares or retweets.
- Link clicks: refers to the number of times people have clicked through a link in your post leading to another page.

With that in mind, there is also the matter of the infamous social media “algorithm”.

In a nutshell, social media algorithms are a way of sorting posts in a users’ feed based on relevancy instead of publish time. Social networks prioritize which content a user sees in their feed first by the likelihood that they’ll actually want to see it.

So, to put it lightly, when you post something to your timeline, it’s likely that less than 20% of your audience will get to see it. This percentage will increase the more people engage with the post, as the algorithm will then change based on the perception that your post is valuable to a wider range of people.

With that in mind, keep analysing your content and check in often with how it resonates with people. If you feel that you’re not getting seen or heard, question why and what you can do about it. Never stop self actualising: if your content isn’t getting picked up, don’t hesitate to reconsider and change things up.

### **Being mindful**

Social media can sometimes seem like a free-for-all, open space to voice our every thought to a large, unknown audience. However, due to this very nature, ill-considered comments or poor responses to particular issues can quickly spread and develop into a wildfire.

It’s important to note that things can’t always be deleted from social media - Facebook and Twitter allow accounts to delete their own messages, but only Facebook allows us to delete the messages of others. On Twitter, not only are we not able to delete other people’s comments,

but any that were in response to our original tweet will remain even if we delete the original comment that instigated that response.

That said, even when a comment is deleted, nothing ever disappears from the internet. People may have taken screenshots or used third-party applications to draw the content out of webpage backups. In a nutshell: it's impossible to take something back once the mistake has been made and trying to hide instead of rectifying it will only fan the flames harder.

So, it's incredibly important that we follow some key principles when posting on social media:

- First and foremost: Stick to your area of expertise and talk about what you know.
- Consider what you say before you say it - check if it's accurate, inoffensive and true.
- Always fact-check the statements and news you share and don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion.
- Be inclusive, respect diversity and echo our values in all your content and be principled in the types of content you post so as not to self-promote.
- Play fair; be polite, be considerate – don't pick fights or engage in them, remember what you say will be public for a long time.
- Use discretion. Take care not to publish information that shouldn't be made public - such as personal information and contact details. If you aren't 100% sure, seek advice.
- Get copyright clearance for the use of images, videos, texts or photos.
- Most importantly: when a mistake is inevitably made - own it and admit it. We all make them so when you do, be quick to admit and correct them- don't try to brush it under the rug or doubledown into it. In the same vein, don't accidentally escalate it by making the admission larger than the infraction itself.

## **Representing Icon Branding**

As Icon continues to expand digitally, consistency between what has been done before and what we're doing going forward is key to expanding our image and representation.

This is especially important in an organisation such as Icon-which supports and is supported by more than 20 groups and networks of unique origins and specialisations. The more we expand, the more important it is that we are seen as a unit.

To that end, Icon has designed custom Group and Network logos to be used on all social media profiles. You can access these [[here](#)].

Cover images can be picked by each group, but you must make sure that the photographs used meet the following requirements:

- It must be a high quality image (avoid poorly cropped or pixelated images)
- The group or network must own or have permission to use the image
- The image must be relevant to the group or network's mission

## Images

We've all heard that a picture is worth a thousand words. On Social Media, it's more than that: a post with an image is 40% more likely to be engaged with than one without.

Finding the right image can be tricky, particularly if there isn't one associated with the post we want to make. While we might initially gravitate to Google Images, this is actually an option to avoid, as many of the images we find there cannot be used freely without consent.

Thankfully, there are plenty of free stock photo websites to pick from. Here's a selection of the ones we most use at Icon:

- [pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)
- [pixabay.com](https://www.pixabay.com)
- [magdeleine.co](https://www.magdeleine.co)

As conservation can be a pretty niche field, it's important to broaden your search terms to alternative words, such as "art", "glass", "heritage", etc.

Lastly, because of their open source nature, most of the images on these websites are under a Creative Commons license- meaning you may use this image freely on your website or social media. If the image is intended for commercial purpose, however, make sure to check the source to see if this is permitted - as even Creative Common photos have usage limits.

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This guide aims to get you started with the basic principles of social media, but should you need further information or advice regarding topics not covered in this guide or our social media policy please contact the Digital Contact Officer on [web@icon.org.uk](mailto:web@icon.org.uk)

## Further Reading

- [TheMERL – @TheMerl and info about the 'absolute unit'](#)
- [Guidance on accessibility](#)
- [How to use personal social media to support Icon](#)
- [Image bank](#)