



# **Social Media Staff Use Guidelines**

October 2023

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## Purpose

**The purpose of this document is to inform HSE staff of best practice when posting on social media and digital channels whether in a professional or personal capacity.**

The Digital Age provides us all with an opportunity to communicate widely in real-time and across multiple digital channels and devices. We can share content, opinions and third-party information. But with this opportunity comes a responsibility to respect others, share fact only and remain courteous at all times.

Social media provides the HSE with an opportunity to communicate with members of the public. Our customer service team, *HSELive* and social media team, manage all public-facing queries via the existing channels of phone, email, social media and Live Chat.

This document does not serve to replace the role of the *HSELive* team, but to advise individual staff members on how social media can be used to support or enhance their work.

## Applicable

**These guideline are applicable to all of the HSE's 108,000 staff. All staff will be sent these guidelines on sign-off by the Head of Digital and it will also be published on the [website](#).**

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with other related HSE policies, namely:

- Data Protection Policy [here](#)
- HSE Grievance and Disciplinary guidelines available [here](#)

## Social Media Personal Use

Everyone has personal preferences about social media. Some people choose to use it frequently; others choose to have accounts for private messaging only.

Personal profiles are in fact, personal, however the following best practice guidelines should be adhered to, in order to protect your own personal reputation and that of your employer.

**Social media is a fundamental way in which we communicate**

- Social media is about connecting, conversing, helping others and sharing.
- Social media is a valuable resource to learn, be entertained, conduct research, promote news and events and also to contribute to topical conversations.

- Social media is more than just Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube and LinkedIn. It includes blogs, online forums and any other Internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information such as blogs and messaging apps WhatsApp and Facebook messenger.
- Social media content is indexed in search engines, which means that the content you post on public networks is traceable on Google for example.
- Social media is a resource for news, but you should fact-check any news or information that you are sharing. Fake news is a growing trend on social media.

**REMEMBER:** *Data protection laws protect an employer where the employees' use of social networking sites causes damage to that organisation's reputation, or leads to the release of confidential information.*

## **Social media etiquette**

- Respect others' views and opinions. It is understandable that you may not always agree with opinions online, however, do not engage in a public disagreement.
- Try to add value to what others are doing and saying with your knowledge and insights. Remember you are not the customer-facing voice of the HSE, the HSELive team fulfil this role, however feel free to sign-post to them.
- Act professionally at all times.
- Be quick to correct your own mistakes and admit when you are wrong.
- Do not use ethnic or religious slurs, insults or obscenities.
- Do not engage in conduct that would be viewed as unacceptable offline.
- Be considerate of others' privacy and topics that could be considered personal, such as religion or politics.
- Do not engage with trolls whose aim is to engage you in negative conversation.
- Share information that you know to be true, be careful of fake news and sharing mis-information.
- Do not share information about friends or colleagues without their prior consent.
- Do not record or take photos of staff or service users without their consent.
- Remarks made in the name of the HSE about individuals, organisations or groups which are of an offensive, derogatory or threatening nature on social media may result in disciplinary, legal or criminal action being taken.
- Speak in the first person, remembering that you are publishing content in your own name and not that of your employer i.e. *I* not *we*
- **Confidentiality** – as per the terms and conditions of your employment you shall not discuss or disclose any information of a confidential nature except in the proper course of your employment.

**REMEMBER:** *You are legally liable for anything you publish on your own social networks.*

## Linking the HSE to your personal social networks

- If you refer to the HSE as your employer in your social media biography, you should be mindful that you are publicly connecting yourself to your place of work.
- Confidential and proprietary information relating to your work should not be published online, either on public or in private messaging apps.
- Having an opinion on topics in the public domain relating to the HSE is acceptable, but be mindful that any opinions or comments should be based on fact.
- Be mindful that your opinions will be monitored by the media who use social media as a research tool. If you are not an official spokesperson for the HSE then you should refrain from expressing professional views in the public domain.
- Public queries relating to HSE services are dealt with by the *HSELive* team who are highly trained and skilled in dealing with the broad range of questions received on a daily basis.
- If members of the public contact you for an answer to a HSE-related query, you should direct them to the *HSELive* team, the customer service arm of the organisation.
- **Confidentiality** – as per the terms and conditions of your employment you shall not discuss or disclose any information of a confidential nature except in the proper course of your employment. Do not record or photograph staff or service users without their consent.

## Sign-posting to *HSELive*

If you are asked a specific HSE-related question please sign-post the user to the following communications channels.

- **Live Chat** Talk to a member of the team live on the HSE website  
<http://www.hse.ie/eng/HSELive>

The *HSELive* team answer questions from members of the public from 8am - 8pm Monday to Friday and from 10am - 5pm on Saturdays.

- **HSE X (Twitter), Facebook and Instagram**

You can send the social media team via a direct message on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram with an average of a 2-hour response time during hours of 7am-10pm Monday to Sunday.

- **Phone** Freephone 1800 700 700

You can call the *HSELive* team from 8am - 8pm Monday to Friday and from 10am - 5pm on Saturday.

- **Email** [hselive@hse.ie](mailto:hselive@hse.ie)

Send us an email and your query will be dealt with by the appropriate person/department.

## Social Media Professional Use

Social media channels can be set up by individual HSE departments. You can contact the Social Media Team for further guidance and advice on this. [digital@hse.ie](mailto:digital@hse.ie)

If you are using social media in a professional capacity, please adhere to the following best practice guidelines.

## Public Engagement

Social media is about having two-way conversations, so engaging with others online is a natural practice.

When engaging with members of the public on social media whether in a personal or a professional capacity, please adhere to the following best practice.

- Ensure the person you are engaging with is a real person and not a bot. A bot is an automated account, usually on Twitter, which pushes out hundreds of Tweets without any personal information being shared.
- Always read the biography or 'about' section of a person you are engaging with on social media.
- Review their last 5-10 status updates or Tweets to get a sense of their opinions and views to see if you have shared interests.
- If you are experiencing trolling or offensive, aggressive or threatening behavior, simply screenshot the posts as evidence, block the person/s on the social network and report them to the social network.
- If a colleague is subjecting you to cyber bullying, follow the steps in the 'HSE Escalation and Takedown guidelines [here](#) and report the matter to HR along with screenshots of the offensive posts/comments.

### REMEMBER: How to spot a bot

- **Activity:** Does the account tweet or post hundreds of times per day or per week?
- **Anonymity:** Does the account lack personal information or any identifying information?
- **Amplification:** Does the account mainly re-share content from other accounts and not original content?

## Review of guidelines

These guidelines will be reviewed by the Head of Digital in 12 months.

Queries relating to the guidelines should be sent to [digital@hse.ie](mailto:digital@hse.ie).

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HSE Communications

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HSE Communications

October 2023