



Using Social Media

Below is an edited excerpt from a blog post titled “[Social Media, HIV Advocacy and Your Voice](#)” by The Well Project, a nonprofit that focuses on HIV among women and girls across the gender spectrum.

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Using social media and communicating through mainstream media can be great ways to inform the public about the issues, concerns and day-to-day realities of people living with HIV. It can also be a little scary at first. By following a few simple guidelines, you can approach working with social or traditional media with a sense of confidence and control.

In the past several years, social media has become extremely important for nonprofit organizations, causes, public figures and individual advocates to get information out to large groups of people at little or no cost.

Although social media can be a wonderful tool for networking and communicating, it is important to think about how and what you share on the internet in general.

Here are a few suggestions to keep you safe and help you get your message across when using social media:

- Nervous about what to say or how to say it? Try to relax and remember that people are reading what you write. Write or type as if you were talking to a real person. Keep it simple, and, as much as possible, be positive. Some sites will block you from participating if you are too negative or critical online, if you slam or drag others or if you use vulgar language.
- On the other hand, many internet users behave poorly toward others without consequence, while some instances of language not intended to be vulgar (such as sexual health education) or hateful (such as using a term to describe one’s identity that others do not agree with) have been flagged as offensive. It may be a good idea to be aware of this occasional double standard, but try not to let it affect your well-intentioned communications.

- While some websites may be accessible only to members, it is best to assume that whatever you put on the internet can be seen by anyone. What you share online may be seen by people outside your intended audience, including family members, work colleagues and others. Although it is a good idea to keep your tone conversational (like talking to a real person), remember that you are not just talking to your best friends.
- To protect your identity and confidentiality, be careful not to share personal information, such as your home address, phone number, birth date or Social Security number. Just as with an interview, identify yourself online as you wish to be identified—use your full name only if you are comfortable doing so. You may choose to use your initials or a pseudonym (a made-up cybername, or handle) to protect your confidentiality. Also remember not to share other information that can be used to identify you (such as the name of the clinic you go to) or others without their consent.
- Adjust your privacy settings to a level of visibility that feels comfortable for you. You can decide whether you want only “Friends” to see your posts or whether you want your posts to be “Public” or some other setting. This must be done manually.
- When writing or posting information for a blog, try to keep your comments under 500 words, and tell a story about one particular topic or issue. It can be helpful to consider your audience (who is likely to read what you post) and to use a creative title to attract attention.
- Just the facts! We live in an age of “fake news” and “alternative facts,” especially when it comes to health topics like HIV. Misinformation and disinformation can be detrimental to your cause and confusing to your audience. It is fine to post based on your opinions, but when the conversation turns to facts, be sure to share accurate, evidence-based information from trusted sources so as not to contribute to these dangerous trends.