At the meeting of the International Academy of Nurse Editors (INANE) in Australia in 2010, many of the editors attending were not at all familiar with social media – few used Facebook, most had not heard of Twitter, and many of their journals had only recently launched online websites; a few were yet to go online. Social media was a vague concept for most and those of us who were dabbling with this new medium were finding our way largely by trial and
error. While the marketing industry had clearly embraced social media as a promotional tool, its uses and strategies were not a good fit for scholarly journals targeted to health professionals.

Now, six years later, there are few journals now that don’t use social media in some form through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and to a lesser degree, Pinterest. Editors often grapple with deciding on what, when and how often to post and where. The American Journal of Nursing (AJN) has been using social media since 2009. Over the years, we have developed a strategy that has enabled us to increase our following on social media and increase awareness and dissemination of our content to non-subscribers. We now have over 212,000 Facebook followers and almost 42,000 on Twitter; our blog averages 25,000 views a month. Here’s how we think about and use social media.

DEFINE THE OBJECTIVE

There’s no doubt about it – social media is a great promotional tool and can be effective in highlighting content in each issue. But using social media solely for marketing purposes misses the point. Social media is about joining in the conversation. For journal editors, it can be a means of learning what the community is talking about, what the “hot topics” are. It can also be about creating conversation – raising an issue or asking a question, interacting with readers and potential readers, creating a recognizable and trusted voice in the community, and linking out to other sites that offer worthwhile information. Twitter is ideal for monitoring current topics and issues of concern to the community and sharing content, whether yours or others; Facebook is perfect for seeking comments and for calling attention to content, again, whether
yours or others.

Social media is also another way to deliver original content that’s timely, accurate and pertinent to current topics and events. It takes time to produce a print issue but a blog post can be immediate. For example, during the initial reports of the Ebola epidemic in August 2014, when there was much conflicting information about what precautions were necessary, we used the AJN blog, *Off the Charts*, to present evidence-based information about transmission and linked to the CDC. The blog post also linked to an article we had published in 2002 that was still relevant and accurate (Easter, 2002). We tweeted the blog post (it was retweeted 94 times) and posted the link on Facebook (14,000 clicked on the link, 8,000 shared it and “reach” was 251,000 with 700 comments) and LinkedIn (24 shares). The blog post had 32,000 views and 296 people used the hyperlink to read the journal article. The blog post was also quoted in *U.S. News & World Reports* (Esposito, 2014). This furthered AJN’s reputation as a source of trustworthy information to a wide audience. And in subsequent updates, we linked back to the original blog post.

**MAKING SOCIAL MEDIA WORK FOR YOU**

There are some simple steps that can editors can take that don’t consume an inordinate amount of time. When a new issue is published, tweet that the new issue is now available and include the link to the website. Also post the link on Facebook and LinkedIn. Invite authors to write blog posts about their articles or at the very least, to retweet the links on their personal accounts. And one needn’t write an original blog post—an interesting introductory sentence followed by the abstract with the link to the article will work, as will
an excerpt. It helps to make the article freely accessible, at least for a short while, to get readers to the site. Restricted sites can be frustrating and may keep readers from returning.

**Frequency and Timing**

There is no hard and fast rule on when and how often to post. On Twitter, it's customary to see some tweeters post several tweets—a half dozen, sometimes—one right after the other (the machine-gun approach), especially if tweeting from a live meeting. Many regular tweeters or Facebook users post in intervals that can be several minutes or a few hours apart, depending on the fluidity of a story. The idea is to post enough to be seen as a good source of information but not enough to inundate and annoy your followers (think of making repeated phone calls to the same person). If followers begin to un-follow you, that's one sign that you might be overdoing it or posting information that's not interesting or useful.

On Facebook, each time a new item is posted, older items move down on the page. Frequent postings may decrease the visibility of older, important items so timing needs to be managed a bit more carefully than on Twitter. It is possible to “pin” items so they always appear on top.

For a blog, frequency and dependability is key to building readership. We find that readership depends on having timely information—readers won't return if a blog is not updated on a regular basis with interesting content. We aim for two to three times weekly. The blog can be a vehicle for articles that might not fit a journal's format, it can be used as a “teaser” to promote journal content, or it can provide supplemental content to an article in the issue.
Building a Strategy

Here is a summary of our overall social media strategy, though no doubt it will change as our understanding of social media evolves and as new sites arise and older ones fall out of favor:

- We post links to each new issue on Twitter and Facebook and write a blog post with bullet points highlighting key articles in the new issue;
- We write individual blog posts (or post their abstracts) on key feature articles and promote the post on Twitter and Facebook;
- We tweet a few times each day, posting links to information on other vetted sites pertinent to current news and health stories. (We don’t retweet unless we check the content at the link given.) We also will tweet links to our own content on the Web site or the blog;
- We write (or ask authors, editorial board members and others to write) original blog posts relevant to current news or on topics of interest to nurses, such as conference reports, personal stories about nursing experiences and health care written by nurses, patients and other colleagues.

We also monitor comments on the sites, especially on Facebook. We remove those that are blatant promotions or that use inappropriate language or mount personal attacks on other commenters.

CONCLUSION

For years, nursing journals showed up as print publications in nurses’ mailboxes at the end of a driveway or in the lobby of their apartment building. That still happens but mailboxes are also now online and on mobile
Dissemination is no longer about print circulation or pass along copies; it’s about reaching readers through a variety of channels and providing them with accurate content anywhere they may be looking for it.

REFERENCES


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