Social Media Guidance

Contacts:			
Jon Wallace	PR Executive	+44 (0)207 201 9112	Jon.Wallace@istructe.org
Tina Cardy	Director of Communications	+44 (0)207 201 9113	Tina.Cardy@istructe.org

Summary

This guidance is intended for Institution members acting as representatives of the Institution of Structural Engineers and covers:

    a. Members using a social media account connected with Institution activities.

    b. Members commenting using social media related to Institution activities.

    c. General advice to stakeholders (members, volunteers, groups, committees, panels) on social media.

Contact the Institution Communications team if in doubt on any of the advice in this paper.

Introduction

The Institution would like to encourage our members at all levels, and the wider public to engage in our online media facilities. The Institution recognises that the use of online media such as discussion forums and social networking sites can bring opportunities to engage and communicate with our audiences (including members and non-members) in new ways as well as developing professional working relationships.

It is important that we are able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly. However, it is also important to ensure that we balance this with our **duties to our stakeholders**, our **legal responsibilities** and our **reputation**.

The primary objectives of the Institution's social media engagement are:

    a) To further the charitable objectives of the Institution.

    b) To support the delivery of the Institution's key objectives.

    c) To disseminate relevant and timely information, as a key channel in the Institution's communications strategy.

    d) To drive traffic to www.istructe.org

    e) To position the Institution as a forward looking, professional institution which is the hub of sustainable structural engineering information.

Social media can help to drive awareness, engage other members and provide an additional voice for the Institution with new audiences. However, there are also risks to this engagement, if messages of dissatisfaction, misinformation or frustration proliferate without timely intervention.

There are a number of social media groups administered by HQ staff:

- [Twitter feed](#) (@IStructE)

- [Facebook Page](#)

- [YouTube Channel](#)

- LinkedIn [company page](#) and which also contains the Institution's discussion group

- Members' [forums](#)

We also have involvement in the following online media:

- [Corporate website](#)

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to:

- Ensure our online presence remains as positive as possible.

- Aid users to clearly distinguish whether information provided via social networking applications is official communication from the Institution or personal commentary.

- Manage and reduce any legal and governance risks to the Institution.

1. Statement of guidance

1.1. This guidance governs the publication of information and commentary on social media by members of The Institution of Structural Engineers

1.2. For the purposes of this guidance, social media means any facility for publishing online information and commentary, including blogs, wikis and social networking sites (including for example [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Flickr](#), [YouTube](#)).

1.3. Institution members are free to publish information or comment via social media in accordance with this guidance. Members are subject to this guidance to the extent that they identify themselves as speaking on behalf of the Institution (other than, for instance, as an incidental mention of place of employment in a personal blog on topics unrelated to structural engineering activity).

1.4. Publication of information and comment on social media carries the same obligations as any other kind of publication and should follow the ethical and legal standards which members normally follow in their work.

2. Setting up social media

2.1. Permission for new **official** social media channels should be obtained from the Director of Communications and assistance obtained from the [HQ communications team](#) in setting up social media accounts and their settings. The Institution's logo and other branding elements should not be used on social networking applications which are unrelated to or not representative of the Institution. Guidelines for members' use of the logo can be found [here](#).

3. Member online identities

3.1. You must act responsibly when posting online, particularly in activity conducted using an Institution e-mail address or which can be traced back to the Institution's domain or which uses the Institution's assets. The istructe.org address and any other Institution domain names attached to your name signal that you are acting on the Institution's behalf. When using an Institution e-mail address or Institution endorsed social media channel (for example LinkedIn

discussion groups), all actions are public. Individuals are responsible for their online activities, but note that the Institution may be seen as potentially liable.

3.2. Your rights to privacy and free speech protect online activity conducted on your personal social networks with your personal e-mail address. However, what you publish on such personal online sites must not be attributed to the Institution and must not appear to be endorsed by or originated from the Institution of Structural Engineers. If you choose to list your affiliation to the Institution on a social network, then you must regard all communication on that network as you would other professional interactions.

4. Creating content

4.1. Be mindful of the fact that any content that you publish will be in the public domain and in some cases will remain public for a long time. You are personally responsible for any content that you publish. Be aware that your content may provoke a response and be open to the opinions of others.

4.2. Provide informative content and interesting perspectives. The Institution and structural engineering industry is best represented by its people. When you decide to contribute to an online media resource you are deciding to be an ambassador for the Institution and even the wider structural engineering community. When you are producing content always consider how your information will improve knowledge, build on ideas and help to solve problems.

4.3. Be direct, informative and brief. Avoid jargon or ambiguous language. Spell and grammar check everything. Use sentence case format, not capital letters. Useful guidance on writing clearly can be found here: http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/

4.4. Always evaluate your contribution's accuracy and truthfulness. Before posting any online material, ensure as far as possible that the material is correct and appropriate. You must respect copyright, you must be certain not to post material for which you do not own the copyright, or otherwise you must have clear permission to post from the copyright owner. Remember that Institution publications are copyright material.

4.5. If you make an error, acknowledge this and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so. Always include a correction statement to prevent the audience from thinking you have attempted to 'cover up' a mistake. If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as copyrighted material or a defamatory comment), deal with it quickly – better to remove it immediately to lessen the possibility of a legal action.

4.6. Members must also remember that they are bound by the Institution's Code of Conduct and Royal Academy of Engineering Statement of Ethical Principles.

5. Confidentiality

5.1 Be mindful of posting information that you would not want the public to see. It is acceptable to talk about our work and have a dialogue with the community, but it

is not permissible to publish confidential information. This includes things such as:

a) Announcing another member's name, personal details and information.

b) Business performance – this includes: discussing future business plans, unannounced strategies and financial analysis.

c) Revealing any information which is not publicly available.

5.2.   Privacy settings on social media platforms must be set to allow anyone to see profile information similar to that on the Institution's website. Other privacy settings that might allow others to post information or see information that is personal must be set to limit access.

5.3.   Personal information is governed by the Data Protection Act. You must not cite or reference your clients, partners, suppliers or any other third party without their approval. If you have permission to discuss matters relating to a client, partner or supplier you must not reveal confidential information.

5.4.   It is acceptable to discuss general details of a project if you protect anonymity and ensure you do not violate any non-disclosure agreements. You can disguise a partner's identity for example by saying 'Partner 001'.

5.5.   If you are unsure of a particular subject you should review what you are about to publish or seek advice.

6. Be transparent

6.1.   It is important to be open and transparent in order to build up trust with your audience. When you use online media you should clearly identify yourself using your real name and, if relevant, state your association with the Institution.

6.2.   If you are producing content on behalf of the Institution you must not remain anonymous. You should always check facts before publishing content online and not mislead your audience in anyway.

6.3.   Always provide a means by which you can be contacted in a timely manner (normally email or direct telephone number).

7. Potential legal issues

7.1.   The Institution of Structural Engineers accepts no liability for legal breaches of individual users. Content published by those associated with the Institution are fully accountable for their own actions.

7.2.   It is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use/dealing of copyrighted material. Never quote more than short excerpts of someone else's work, and always attribute such work to the original author/source. It is good general practice to link to others' work rather than reproduce it.

7.3.   The Institution cannot provide legal advice in relation to using online media. However there are a number of legal areas to keep in mind when using online media on behalf of the Institution:

- consumer protection from unfair trading regulations 2008

- intellectual property

- disclosure / confidentiality

- defamation

- invasion of privacy

8. Respect your audience

8.1.   The public in general and the Institution's members reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. Do not be afraid to be yourself, but do so respectfully. This includes avoiding not only ethnic slurs, personal insults and obscenity but also being sensible and non-confrontational on topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory such as politics or religion.

8.2.   If you are posting in a personal capacity, use your best judgement and make it clear that the views and opinions expressed are yours alone and do not reflect the official views of the Institution. However, do not rely on this, as some users will perceive your comments to be official. If in doubt, do not post.

8.3.   Remember that there are consequences to what you publish. There may be times where you feel something has been misrepresented. If you need to correct the content of another user please do so with respect and keep to the facts. If you feel even remotely uncomfortable with something you are about to publish try to identify why or seek advice.

9. Controversial issues

9.1.   Seek support from the Institution's Communications Team before:

-   Responding to a negative post. If a blogger or any other online participant posts an inaccurate, accusatory or negative comment about the Institution, seek advice.

-   Responding directly to a journalist. If you are contacted directly by a journalist regarding issues of concern.

10.   The Use of Disclaimers

10.1.   Many social media users include a prominent disclaimer saying who they work for but that they are not speaking officially. Staff who use their personal social media accounts to talk about topics related to the Institution must display where appropriate a disclaimer in their profile stating that their personal opinion does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Institution of Structural Engineers. Something along the lines of: 'the postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the Institution's position'. In the event that there is insufficient space in the profile for the above disclaimer you must at least include the words "Personal Views" in your profile. Bear in mind though that even this good practice may not have that much legal effect.

10.2.   If, as a member, you wish to respond to technical discussions, then you must make it clear that the views expressed are your opinion, and not an official

Institution statement. If you consider it necessary for the Institution to express a view on a technical matter, this must only be done in consultation with the Director of Engineering and Technical, who may also further seek advice from within the Institution as appropriate.

11. Enforcement and responsibility

11.1.　This document has been produced to provide guidance to those using social media for or on behalf of the Institution. Breaches of the policy by Institution members may lead to a formal complaint under the Code of Conduct, and be referred to Professional Conduct Committee under the Disciplinary Code of Conduct.

11.2.　The Institution has a responsibility to monitor and review all content that is associated with the organisation or posted on its behalf. If the Institution identifies content which is not in line with these guidelines it has a right to either a) delete content where it has administration rights on the specific site or b) demand the removal of content. Where content is deleted a correction notice will be published.

11.3.　If you as a user identify potentially damaging content or content that is in breach of the guidelines please contact the Institution.

11.4.　The Institution's Communications team reserves the right to require the closure of any official social media applications or removal of content published by members which may adversely affect the Institution's reputation or put the Institution at risk of legal action.