
SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE

Guidance and Tactics for SimLEARN
Leadership and employees to Support
Communications Growth

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Introduction

The goal of this document is to provide Simulation Learning, Evaluation, Assessment, and Research Network (SimLEARN) leadership and employees with effective tools and trainings to successfully use social media as an ongoing communications asset to promote the work being done at SimLEARN and better engage with wider simulation and medical communities. Staff will need to take an active role in social media efforts independent of contractor-provided content to increase organic SimLEARN social presence.

A personal professional profile (PPP) is an effective mechanism through which SimLEARN can elevate its presence in social media. PPPs are professional accounts that are run by members of SimLEARN; however, they are neither personal in nature nor official Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) accounts. These accounts can quickly disseminate content pertaining to live events, engage with other people and organizations and provide personal insights into SimLEARN's work and the employees who work there.

This document outlines the basic uses of social media, how to best run a PPP and how social media functions within the VA ecosystem.

Social Media at VA

SimLEARN uses PPPs instead of an official profile because VA has stringent rules surrounding its accounts and content. While a PPP account is not bound by VA rules, it is good practice to understand VA's social media ecosystem and practices. Ensure to follow VA's accounts across administrations as they are a great way to find content to share.

VA Content Rules

There are multiple resources for social media guidance and use as a VA employee. The first is [VA Directive 6515](#), which outlines not only how VA employees should engage with the public on Twitter, but also the conduct that employees should adhere to when using social media and representing VA.

Additionally, [VA's Content Writing Guide](#) provides guidance on appropriate language use and VA's writing style. It is not necessary to directly adhere to these rules with PPPs, but it can be a reliable resource for when questions arise. [VA's Tier 1 Graphic Standards Guide](#) is helpful as well, especially with image branding. Generally, branded images will be provided or designed ahead of time.

Finally, all PPP holders should understand the Health Insurance Privacy and Portability Act and have completed VA's training for it. The privacy of our Veterans is paramount, so always ensure that posted content is free of any possible Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) violations.

VA Channels

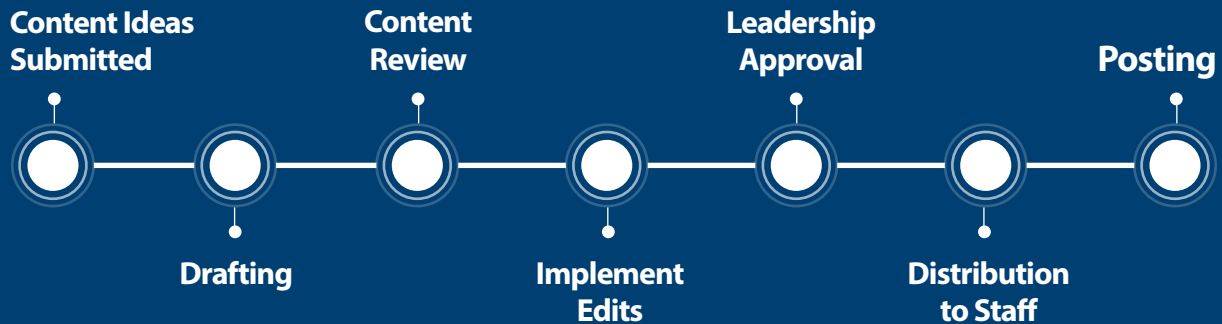
OPIA	Facebook: @VeteranAffairs Twitter: @DeptVetAffairs Instagram: @DeptVetAffairs
VHA	Facebook: @VeteransHealth Twitter: @VeteransHealth Facility Accounts
OHIL	Facebook: @VHAInnovation Twitter: @VAInnovation
Leadership	Secretary Denis McDonough: Twitter , Instagram VHA Under Secretary Dr. Shereef M. Elnahal: Twitter DEAN Dr. Carolyn Clancy: Twitter

SimLEARN Process

The creation of a strong social media presence for SimLEARN will require consistent use of social media by SimLEARN leadership and employees, supported by contracted social media experts. Content will be developed on a regular basis for SimLEARN leadership to use on their accounts in conjunction with their individual social media efforts using the skills and techniques outlined above. Leadership will receive regular content updates to use on their accounts and will supplement with their own "live" content as well.

SimLEARN employees and leadership are encouraged to share ideas for social media content for all staff to use. This content can be based on ongoing projects, new work, events at SimLEARN, interesting articles or even day-in-the-life posts. Please send content to Richard.Trotter1@va.gov.

All shared content will go through an approval process as outlined below:



With this training and process, SimLEARN can further advance its goals of becoming the leader in simulation health care for the entire country.

Social Media Basics

Regular Social Media Use

The most successful way to use social media is to ensure regular use. Having a profile but not regularly engaging with it will simply leave it unseen. Use of social media should occur daily, especially while events are in progress and when other important items arise. A consistent posting cadence will help each platform's algorithm optimize visibility. All major social media platforms use algorithms to decide what to share and how prominently to share it.

Consistent use of social media can build a network of professionals that may include other simulationists, health care professionals, Veterans, VA leadership and government officials. Expanding SimLEARN's network on social media will lead to greater connectivity and visibility for the program and its stakeholders.

Practicing using social media will lead to greater comfort with each platform and allow users to understand how to best share and express themselves on each one.

Social Media Platforms



FACEBOOK

- Popular with Veterans
- Good for storytelling
- Effective article linking



LINKEDIN

- Built for professional/business content
- Great for sharing with specific industries/groups
- Good for networking



TWITTER

- Good for quick content
- Better at sharing live events
- Great for connecting/networking quickly with other users



INSTAGRAM

- Designed for visuals and images
- Great for storytelling through imagery
- Good for both longer and quick hit content

Key Terms

Hashtags

Hashtags are how conversations and content on social media connect. They can be used on all major social media platforms but are more prevalent on some and function differently on each. A look at the basic functionality of hashtags and how/when to use them is below:

TIP: ON INSTAGRAM AND LINKEDIN, USERS CAN FOLLOW HASHTAGS. IT IS A GREAT WAY TO KEEP UP WITH RELEVANT SUBJECTS AND DISCOVER NEW INFLUENCERS.

Basics

- All hashtags start with a “#” before them. This hash is where the name hashtag comes from. Once you type a hash it will automatically create a hashtag as you type.
- When typing a hashtag, it must be one word. A space will end the hashtag. Multi-word hashtags using camel humps appear for this reason (e.g. #VeteransHealth), where each word’s first letter is capitalized. This also makes the text easier to read and understand.
- Writing a hashtag creates a link that everyone can click on. When clicked, the link will bring users to a page displaying content surrounding that hashtag. This content is usually presented in an edited format that displays engaging and popular content using the hashtag, not necessarily the most recent.
- Before using a new hashtag, investigate what is being said on the hashtag. Do this by using the search functionality on any platform and typing the hashtag. This will show what kind of conversation is going on with the hashtag, whether it is already being used by others and if it has been co-opted into a discussion you might not want to be part of. This is especially important for choosing a hashtag for an event in order to make sure the event’s hashtag is unique and not tied to other discussions.

Uses

Hashtags can be used in many ways, but their functionality falls into two main categories: conversation grouping and branding/expression. Conversation grouping uses hashtags to connect accounts to a larger discussion, which can be about any topic such as an event or ongoing issue. Examples are event-specific hashtags or hashtags around a specific idea. Branding and expression hashtags link content to a specific idea or express certain themes/emotions. For example, #SimLEARN can be used on all conversations pertaining to SimLEARN’s work and developments. By using hashtags in both of these ways, users can understand and effectively spread messages to relevant parties. Both types of hashtags can be used within specific tweets or in a group of tweets to diversify the relatability of the message.



EXAMPLES OF HASHTAG USE ON TWITTER.

Conversation Grouping	Branding/Expression
Group together posts about the same topic, such as an event	Define what you are talking about
Collect ideas and thoughts on the same subject	Give a tone and candor to your post
Communicate and converse with others	Brand the things you say to fit into your social presence

Hashtag Use by Platform



FACEBOOK

- Not used frequently
- May reduce engagement and reach
- Mostly used to connect to larger events or discussions



TWITTER

- Frequently used
- Helps users understand and discover content
- Helps Twitter elevate content to interested users



LINKEDIN

- Regularly used
- Helps connect content to the wider industry and professionals
- Builds brand



INSTAGRAM

- Frequently used
- Often many hashtags on a single post
- Promotes content into people’s feeds who follow hashtags.

Tagging

Tagging a person on social media means directly mentioning them in content. If one thinks of hashtagging as joining a conversation in a room full of people and talking to all of them at once, then tagging is like addressing just one of them in front of everyone. Tagging allows a user to specifically target people or organizations that might be interested in a post. It is the best way to alert others of new content and start building the story of SimLEARN's collective work.

Basics

- Tagging directly loops someone into a post and highlights their account. The person or business you tag gets an alert, and their handle will become a hyperlink, allowing followers to click to their account.
- Tags always begin with "@" and once one begins typing, a drop-down menu appears. Always double-check the authenticity of an account before tagging. While some platforms have verified account markers, they cannot always be trusted, as they can sometimes be bought. Tagging the wrong account can be damaging to a particular group's goals.
- One can tag public accounts, friends, followers and businesses. Private accounts may also be tagged; however, users will not be able to see these accounts.

- It is important not to spam tags, especially when connecting with a person not associated with the content. Overusing someone's tag repeatedly in order to get them to see or engage with content may lead to blocking. Tags to unassociated accounts should be used sparingly and with thought.



TAGS CAN LOOK DIFFERENT ON DIFFERENT PLATFORMS. ON FACEBOOK, A TAG APPEARS ONLY AS A LINK, WITH NO @, AS IN THE EXAMPLE ABOVE.

Personal Professional Profiles

As discussed, the use of PPPs is a great way to share content and information about SimLEARN without the need of organizational social media accounts, which are not allowed except in rare occurrences by VA. These profiles are run by SimLEARN leadership and can share engaging information about SimLEARN, events taking place and VA's work overall. They can also be used to directly engage with other health care professionals and simulationists both within and outside of VA using the aforementioned tagging tactics. The more one uses a PPP account in an engaging manner, the greater its reach will become.

There are various ways to set up professional accounts on different platforms, so it is important to understand these differences on varying platforms. On Facebook, use [Professional Mode](#). On Twitter, use a standard account setup, and this is the same with LinkedIn. On Instagram use a [Business Account](#).

Profile Basics

There are a few key aspects to setting up, maintaining and using a PPP, but a major pathway to success is using and maintaining it on a regular basis. Setting up a strong PPP is only the first step, and one must consistently and regularly use the following tactics to gain visibility and become an influencer in the simulation space.

Utilize Available Tools

Make sure to use all available tools to their fullest extent. When setting up an account, build an engaging profile with strong images and descriptions. Connect with others by either following them or mentioning them to build presence. Finally, utilize imagery and video when possible, as these are the most engaging elements of posts.

Be Expressive

While this is a professional profile, it is also a personal one. It is OK to share humanizing opinions, ideas and fun content to others. Official accounts should be somewhat staid, but PPPs can maintain personality and character. Take a selfie, get excited about a project and show enthusiasm for SimLEARN's work.

Share Passions

Users should discuss passions and engage with others about them. This will ensure a personal touch to profiles and keep content authentic and honest. Users frequently bond over shared passions and interests, so maintaining these in a profile is a prime avenue towards connecting and networking over social media. Sharing and discussing passions helps define a PPP's personality and purpose.

Build A Brand

Define a PPP's brand by developing consistent messaging and identity. By creating a professional brand on social media, others know what they can expect from your PPP's content and that they can trust it. Use key words and phrases to define this professional branding. This work will establish connections with organizations and themes important to SimLEARN and create a PPP account that is a trusted voice in the community.

Know Why

Why is social media being used? Using social media robotically will not result in strong results. Instead, messaging and ideas will become muddled if there is no established reason for the PPP account. Think about the goals of the account and work towards them. Different goals require different approaches.

SimLEARN Brand Awareness

When posting content to a PPP, keep in mind that it represents SimLEARN. Ensure managed accounts reflect well upon your professional work and engage respectfully with other individuals and organizations.



Defining for others what SimLEARN does and who we are



Visual recognition of SimLEARN as a brand



Stronger online and social presence



Real time connections with others in the industry



Thought leadership in the simulation space

Social Media Engagement

This section describes how to engage on social media to further awareness of a PPP and connect with others. Engaging on social media does not have to be all consuming, but it should become a regular routine. Set aside time to peruse social media and check in on the people, organizations and topics that connect to your work.

Posting Content

How and what to post can be confusing, especially on an account that is for professional use and, while not officially tied to VA, represents the administration. A balance needs to be struck between speaking officially and using your own voice, especially while discussing topics and subjects that can be both complicated and personal. Additionally, HIPPA rules should always be considered, as we want to respect the privacy of our Veterans and their health care.

While the PPP account does not entirely need to be work-related, most of the content should be. Content does not always have to be centered around big, new or exciting projects; it can focus on daily items, thoughts you may have about your work or a personal experience. The key is to be consistent and produce content in a genuine manner that reflects well upon you and SimLEARN.

TIP: POSTS DO NOT HAVE TO BE LONG AND IN-DEPTH. BREVITY IS OFTEN APPRECIATED ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO SHARE EVERY DETAIL. SEE SOMETHING INTERESTING SHARE IT!

Content

Visual Content

Social media is a visual platform. Eyes are drawn to posts with images in them, whether this is a graphic, a link preview (all platforms will generate a preview of a link you put in your post, with an image included most of the time) or a photo. Always think visually when posting.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

April 2 at 10:30 AM · 🌐

This manikin is more than meets the eye. But it is another example of VA breaking boundaries to reimagine health care training and improve Veteran care.

<https://bit.ly/3KsmV4u>



👍 488

346 comments 33 shares

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share



PHOTOS ALWAYS ELEVATE POSTS. FOR EXAMPLE, WHILE A SIMPLE PHOTO, THE IMAGE OF THE HIGH FIDELITY MANIKIN GIVES OTHER USERS A SIMPLE MEANS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE TECHNOLOGY.

Opinions

Be careful about what you say and how you say it, but positively expressing yourself as an employee of SimLEARN is a benefit of being on social media. Your PPP should be a destination for insights into SimLEARN, and your account may provide a reliable and branded lens into what makes SimLEARN's work impactful.

Personal Content

While most content should be built around SimLEARN, part of identifying your brand and creating a profile that feels organic is posting carefully selected personal content. This can come from the aforementioned opinions on work-related content you share, but also from judiciously selected posting of non-work-related items. This content should be work-adjacent things like volunteering, a photo from a vacation or something related to a hobby. However, this type of content should be used sparingly. Do not post your entire vacation experience to your professional account; simply share one photo. Help define yourself outside of work and show that the account is more than just a reason to promote SimLEARN.

Content Types



PHOTOS

Photos from events, appropriate meetings and presentations



GRAPHICS

Graphics and images when possible, including link previews



ARTICLES

Articles, information and ideas you find on the web



SHARES

Shares of other people's or organization's content



[IN THIS POST](#) UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH DR. SHEREEF ELNAHAL COMBINES IMAGERY, OPINION AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE TO TELL A STORY.

Things to Consider

Public Forum

Social media is a public forum. Anything online can be seen by anyone and will last forever, even if you delete it. Make sure to bear this in mind whenever you post. What you post not only reflects on you, but SimLEARN, and VA, as a whole. This should not keep you from posting or cause you to be hesitant to share, but it is an important factor in considering what and when you share something.

TIP: WHEN WRITING, USE THE CABLE NEWS TEST: WOULD WHATEVER YOU POST SOUND GOOD IF READ BY A CABLE NEWS ANCHOR TO A NATIONAL AUDIENCE?

Consistency, Frequency and Quality

There is no need to spam or post constantly. In fact, spamming poor content or posting nonperforming content can lead to social media platforms' algorithms devaluing posts. While consistency is key, make sure the content is something that user want to engage with and that it is posted with a purpose. Here are a few good questions to keep in mind before posting:

- Is this something that users care about and want to engage with?
- Am I timely with this content or has it already been discussed?
- Is my post adding something new to the subject at hand?
- Is this relevant to my audience?

Other Engagements

Regular posting is the best way to spread the word and build presence on social channels, but posting is not the only way to engage. Using social media is not a one-way street, and in order to build a successful presence on platforms, engage with other users' content, even in small ways. Liking, retweeting and commenting are all "microinteractions" that can build up.

TIP : FOLLOW VA LEADERSHIP AND VA ADMINISTRATION ACCOUNTS AND ENGAGE WITH THEIR POSTS. THIS WILL GIVE BOTH PARTIES GREATER VISIBILITY AND INCREASE ALGORITHMIC BENEFITS.

The moment one interacts with something on social media, it creates a connection that can grow. Every action counts in building a presence online and, more importantly, reminds people of your work and SimLEARN. Purposeful and consistent engagement with other accounts builds visibility through each platform's algorithm, so activity always contributes to SimLEARN's visibility.

Additionally, interacting with other accounts can begin building real partnerships for VA and bring new technologies and innovations to SimLEARN.

Engaging With Veterans and the Public

While social media is an effective way to make new connections and engage with others in the health care simulation space, it is also a public forum where the world can see and engage with any published content. All social media platforms contain complaints, angry individuals and those who are looking for arguments. The best policy when encountering upset or angry individuals, especially Veterans, is to not engage. Never rely upon "winning" an online argument, so best practice is to not engage in the first place. Even if you see misinformation and want to correct it, bear in mind that your PPP can be seen as representative of VA.

When encountering Veterans with specific complains, point them towards their facility patient advocate or the appropriate office for their question.

TIP : IF YOU COME ACROSS A VETERAN THREATENING SELF HARM OR SUICIDE, YOU CAN PROVIDE THEM WITH THE VETERANS CRISIS LINE INFO: CALL 988 AND SELECT 1. YOU CAN ALSO FLAG THE CONTENT TO THE PLATFORM'S ATTENTION AS ALL PLATFORMS HAVE SUICIDE PREVENTION OFFICES. DO NOT ENGAGE BEYOND THIS. LET PROFESSIONALS HANDLE THE CRISIS AS THEY ARE TRAINED TO DO SO.

