

How can I become more confident in using social media?

CHERIE SOHNEN-MOE RESPONDS

Social media has become an integral part of our cultural landscape. While Facebook is one of the most popular sites, people actively engage on Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Meetup and other social sites.

According to Pew Research Center's *Social Media Fact Sheet*, released in January 2017, 69 percent of all Americans use some form of social media. Within social media use, Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform, with 68 percent of Americans using it, followed by Instagram (28 percent), Pinterest (26 percent) LinkedIn (25 percent) and Twitter (21 percent).



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These platforms provide a major way for people to connect—and this is particularly true in the massage profession, as it's a rather solitary calling. Yes, you work with clients, but those interactions are supposed to be client-centered—which means *not about you*.

Interaction with colleagues is limited, even for those practitioners who work in a group practice or are employees in a spa or massage center. Most practitioners barely have enough time to stretch and drink water between clients let alone have in-depth conversations with co-workers.

The image of colleagues standing around the water cooler and chatting doesn't really exist in this field—but practitioners do find time to check their phones for posts to see how their friends are doing, and that helps them feel connected.

Social Strategy

Social media platforms aren't limited to fostering your personal relationships. They can also be an effective business tool to promote your practice, generate new clientele, keep in contact with your current clients, drive people to your website, and enable you to quickly research almost anything.

Unfortunately, pitfalls also exist. It's easy to wander down the social media rabbit hole and find yourself emerging hours later. Plus, there are technological restrictions and ethical considerations.

One of the first social media platforms was MySpace. That sounded like a great name, but social media has never been *your* space. You don't own the space so you have limited control of how or when your content is seen. You have to follow the platform's guidelines—and those guidelines are all different.

The solution is to use your social media sites to drive people to your website where you can control what and how content is viewed. Share links to your articles and blogs, and once people are there, offer them regular opportunities to join your email list for announcements, special offers and newsletters.

Online Privacy

Privacy is tenuous in the realm of social media. You have to be careful

people don't discover too much of your personal information and that you maintain client confidentiality.

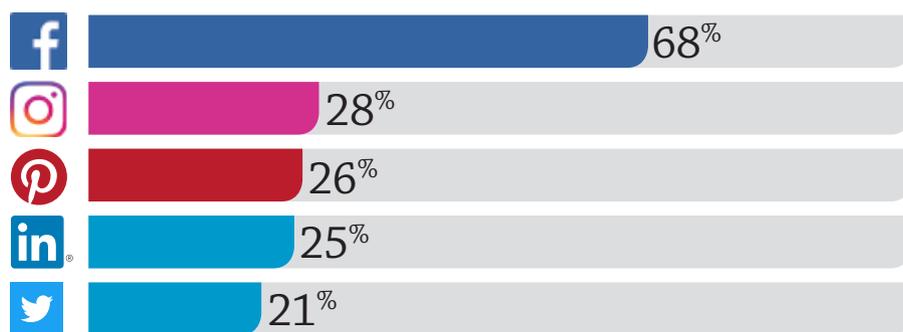
The main way to secure your online privacy is to be cautious when posting. Only post things you would be comfortable having anyone (and everyone) know about you. The next step is to manage your privacy settings.

For instance, in Facebook, you can allow only friends to see certain posts. You can also create subgroups that can only see certain posts.

Think before you write—particularly if you have an emotional response. Once something is posted, you can't take it back. Yes, you can remove it from your site, but there are other sites where it's already been shared.

Do create a dedicated Facebook business page, because it will help

Social Media Use Among Americans



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Source: Pew Research Center's *Social Media Fact Sheet*.

establish boundaries. Keep in mind that even with a business page, many people will still search for you by your personal profile.

When I first set up my Facebook account, business pages didn't exist. I set up a separate business page once that option was available and attempted to move my business friends to that page, but it wasn't as effective as I would have liked. Now I have a personal Facebook page and a business page. Sometimes there's crossover of people on the lists because the focus of what gets shared is different. And there are times where I post the same thing on each page.

Some people don't allow others to directly post on their Facebook pages. The only option is for those people to reply or comment on a post written by the page owner. While this certainly helps keep unwanted posts from your page, this isn't a very social thing to do.

Conserve Confidentiality

It's crucial to maintain client confidentiality. This is another aspect of online privacy. Many practitioners use social media as an informal peer support group. This can be perilous, particularly when discussing client issues. You must make certain that nobody could figure out who you are talking about in your posts.

The most common confidentiality violations occur in relation to photos. For instance, you hold an open house for your practice and take some great photos of the attendees. You write about the event and post the pictures.

You think you are maintaining confidentiality because you didn't identify anyone by name. Unfortunately, someone else could share your photo and tag the person(s). The best solution is to get written permission whenever you take photos of clients or people attending your events.

Photo Protocol

Use appropriate photos for your cover photos on your personal and business page. You can add other photos on your personal sites—but it's best to be conservative with the photos that you allow the public to see.

Only use photos or images that are yours or that you confirmed are royalty free. (Read the guidelines carefully, because royalty free doesn't necessarily mean that there aren't costs for using the photo or specific requirements for crediting the source.)

Get permission or give credit to the source of the original post whenever you share, re-tweet or re-pin a photo, video, post or meme.

Security Steps

Most cellphones and tablets have automatic geo-tagging (location information) loaded. While this is helpful for

people trying to find your business location, it also provides a lot of information you might not want to share. There are software applications that can read metadata to pinpoint the exact location where a picture is taken. In most instances, this isn't a problem, but there are times when you want to protect your privacy.

For instance, let's say you want to sell or even give away one of your possessions. You take a photo of that item and post it on several social sites such as Craigslist, Freecycle and Letgo. If you don't remove the geo-tagging information, you could be unwittingly providing your location to thieves.

The first step to removing this information is checking the privacy settings on your phone. I own an iPhone, and when I click on privacy and location services it gives me a list of options to activate or disable. I've set things like maps and compass to *while using* and have set everything else, such as camera and messages, to *never* status.

Another security option to consider if you don't want to alert people to the fact that you aren't home is to wait to post photos from events and meetings until you or someone else is at your house.

Be Safe

Also according to Pew, 77 percent of Facebook users visit the site daily (51 percent of Instagram users do so, as do 42 percent of Twitter followers). With so many Americans online and looking for information, education and connection, no massage therapist can afford to ignore social media as a valuable venue for capturing clients.

Just be sure to implement social media safeguards, to protect your clients, your privacy—and your practice. **M**

Cherie Sohnen-Moe is an author, business coach, international workshop leader and successful business owner since 1978. She has served as a faculty member at a massage school, acupuncture college, and holistic health college. She is the author of *Business Mastery* and *Present Yourself Powerfully*, and co-author of *The Ethics of Touch*. She is a founding member of and is the current president of the Alliance for Massage Therapy Education. Visit massagemag.com/targetmarket to read Sohnen-Moe's "Create a Target Market Profile."



In "Social Media: Your Incubator for Professional Development," educator Jason Erickson, B.C.T.M.B., C.P.T., describes the ways social media can contribute to a massage therapist's education and career. Read this article at massagemag.com/socialincubator.