

@AHPA_AU on Twitter: Reflections of an AHPA 'host' tweeter

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In this article, I share with you a short reflection on my recent experience of hosting AHPA's Twitter account. I do this to reflect on and improve my own Twitter practice, as well as to assist those of you already engaged in, or considering joining, Twitter.

Why tweet?

There is a diversity of uses available for health promotion through social media. As a professional body, AHPA has used Twitter for its conferences (e.g. Anderson et al., 2014 and @AHPA16) and maintains an active presence on Twitter at @AHPA_AU. A Twitter presence is important for AHPA to maintain a professional network, to contribute to ideas, to advocate for health promotion, to connect with its members, and to nurture its professional identity in the online world – amongst other reasons. To maintain its presence, AHPA shares the hosting of its Twitter account between its member branches, for which it asked me to host in July 2016.

What happened?

An AHPA branch representative provided me the @AHPA_AU login details. I signed in on my mobile phone using the Twitter app, to view and engage with fellow tweeters when mobile. The Twitter app allowed me to switch between my personal account and the AHPA account – meaning I had to pay attention to the account from which I was tweeting! Access on my mobile phone was important because some of the computers I work with block social media access, and because I am not always at a computer. I explored using TweetDeck to organise tweets ahead, but decided against doing this given I did not have a series of messages I wanted to tweet, nor was there an AHPA agenda for July. I focussed on amplifying the voices of others by way of retweets, sharing information that was directed to me, and sharing items of interest that would reflect the AHPA aims. I monitored particular accounts to retweet their perspectives (as an example, @WePublicHealth, @Croakeynews or @IndigenousX), including accounts with which AHPA might benefit from connecting to, or vice versa. I also sought to engage with tweeters who directly connected with @AHPA_AU, knowing the power of Twitter for dialogue and engagement.

Some reflections and challenges

Carving out regular time to host the AHPA account was a challenge for me. I suspect this was in part because I juggle various demanding part time roles, with a different office and organisation each day of the week. During the month of July I also had a case of the flu and took some leave, resulting in poor access to my phone and computer, and thus to Twitter. On reflection, my busy-ness meant I leant towards passive engagement such as retweets, rather than proactive engagement and dialogue. I was mindful that I was using Twitter on behalf of AHPA's agenda, and thus careful regarding Twitter's blending of the personal with professional. Perhaps because of these factors, I (and @AHPA_AU) did not experience the full dialogical benefits of Twitter while I hosted. My view though, is that with a planned or focused approach these constraints do not need to be a barrier to use of Twitter.

I valued the opportunity to contribute to the @AHPA_AU presence and to use that profile to promote a range of perspectives, voices and information. I finish with some suggestions regarding hosting a Twitter account, based on my experience. Please share your tips and tweak or add to this list!

- Stay focused on your reason for using Twitter.
- Identify Twitter accounts you want to observe and promote; follow those you want to appear in your feed; likewise for hashtags.
- Find ways to make Twitter accessible to you easily, such as using apps on your mobile phone, tablet, iPad and so on.
- If you know you will be absent or busy for a period of time, consider using an app in which you can schedule tweets ahead, such as TweetDeck or Buffer.
- Consider tweeting information that you come across outside of Twitter, including through your health promotion colleagues. Acknowledge the source.
- Abbreviations can help shorten your tweet length, as can shortening links, e.g. use <http://tinyurl.com/>.
- Be present and interact, regularly and moderately: retweet, comment, favourite, use pictures, embed links, and so on. Engage in professional conversations and dialogue.

Contact me on Twitter @solomon_kazza - I would love to hear about your experiences on Twitter, and what you'd like from @AHPA_AU in this space.

References

Anderson, G., Gleeson, S. Rissel, R., Wen, L.M., & Bedford, K. (2014). Twitter tweets and twaddle: twittering at AHPA's National Health Promotion Conference. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 25: 143-146.