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Privacy and account options: Using Facebook in your journalism

Wherever people are gathered, there's an opportunity for journalists to be listening and learning. That's true online in different — but no less important — ways than it is in person.

For most kinds of journalism, the largest digital gathering of community members and potential audience is on Facebook. If there are thousands of people talking to each other in your coverage area about things you cover, shouldn't you be a part of that conversation? Or at least eavesdropping on it?

Some newsrooms require their staff members to use Facebook in their professional lives. Many, many more, though, highly encourage it and say they would no longer hire a journalist who isn't active on social media. And if you help manage your brand's Facebook page, you have to have a personal profile to log in with.

On Facebook, some people talk to your brand on your brand's page. But they MOSTLY talk to each other on their own pages, on their organizations' pages and in groups. Groups are the real gold mines for focused, niche audiences.

Here are the options for journalists to consider as they decide how to blend their personal Facebook use with their work life. Regardless what you choose, act professionally as an individual and personably as a professional.

OPTION ONE: USE YOUR PERSONAL PROFILE IN YOUR WORK

This is by far the best option and the one most recommended by social media managers within journalism. It's also the most common one, especially in local and regional work. It keeps things seamless for you, with one login. It reinforces the idea that you're a regular person. It allows you to participate on pages and in groups as yourself. It connects your real-life identity with your professional life, which understandably feels more comfortable for some people than others.

IF YOU CHOOSE THIS:

- Be sure your profile identifies your connection with a news organization, so people clicking through can see that you're legit.
- Because you'll appear as a person, be sure to be transparent about that connection in your posts and comments. "As the reporter on this story …"
- Double check your privacy settings. Click in the top right of your Facebook home page and look for Privacy Checkup. You can control whether people who are not your friend on Facebook can see your photos, your profile information and your posts. If you don't want sources to see your vacation pictures, you can control that. (Do realize that potential sources and even audience members are likely already looking you up on social platforms, so you should keep these settings

up to date in general.) It's up to you how much of your background, interests, family, etc., you want to share with people who are not your friends.
- Get in the habit of varying the audience for each post. You can default to showing your status updates and other posts only to your friends, but change posts to be public when they would also be appropriate for a wider audience. You can also view your profile as a friend or as the public, to make sure you're comfortable with what's accessible.
- Consider categorizing your friends with Facebook lists. You could have a list of people you accept friend requests from in a professional capacity but don't share family pictures with. Then share most of your posts to friends EXCEPT that list. That list would see only what you choose to share with them.
- Lastly, consider allowing people who aren't your friends to follow you on Facebook. They would see only your public posts. And when people send you friend requests and you don't accept them, they would automatically follow you.

OPTION TWO: CREATE A SEPARATE PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

You can create a separate "person" on Facebook by setting up a new profile. This might be a good option if you use a different name for work or if you prefer to keep your personal profile totally locked down and unfindable.

IF YOU CHOOSE THIS:

- A big downside is that you have to log in and log back out — Facebook doesn't support management of two user profiles.
- Another big downside is that this is a separate place to publish to. Keeping it up to date becomes an item on your to do list. And letting it become stagnant is worse than not having it at all.
- Remember that people are expected to have personality. Setting up a user page and only sharing links to your stories will not be interesting or engaging.

OPTION THREE: CREATE A JOURNALIST FAN PAGE

It's common in TV journalism and in some other newsrooms for journalists to create fan pages. These are not individual profiles but are public pages for people who work in the public eye.

IF YOU CHOOSE THIS:

- You can manage this page from within your personal account, without having to log in separately.
- You get the added bonus of Page features like Insights, promoted posts, targeted posts and adding multiple admins to help you manage it.
- You can participate as this page by leaving comments on other pages. See the little box to the right of a comment box that says "liking and commenting as" and choose from your personal profile and the pages you manage.
- You cannot, however, join groups as a page. Given how many conversations happen in groups, this is a big potential downside.
- As with a professional profile, this page is a separate place to publish to. Keeping it up to date becomes an item on your to do list. And letting it become stagnant is worse than not having it at all.

More on these options from the Facebook staff is here.