**Social Media – Get Connected**

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For a few days in October, #FNCE was a top trending topic on Twitter and the conversation both at the conference and online was exciting! Social media is everywhere. According to research from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 69% of adults who are online are using social media sites.(1) From Facebook to Twitter to Pinterest, new ways of connecting people across the globe are being created and implemented every day. Registered Dietitians (or future Registered Dietitians), need to be able to use this advancing technology for both professional communication and to connect with the general public.

The key to effective social media conversation lies in answering the same questions that should be asked before initiating any outreach or education effort:

1. Who is the target audience?
2. What is the objective of the outreach/education?
3. What medium(s) would be most effective (both in terms of time, cost and potential impact)
 to reach the target audience?

Organizations can benefit from integrating social media into existing communication strategies. The CDC’s Guide to Writing for Social Media (2) discusses how social media can help organizations achieve goals such as

* Disseminate health and safety information in a timelier manner.
* Increase the potential impact of important messages.
* Leverage networks of people to make information sharing easier.
* Create different messages to reach diverse audiences.
* Personalize health messages and target them to a particular audience.
* Engage with the public.
* Empower people to make safer and healthier decisions.

**Facebook and Twitter**
Keeping Facebook fans and Twitter followers engaged is critical to building a strong social media presence. Posts must be relevant, useful and interesting. Relevant content allows the reader to connect to the information and may be related to time, geography, a specific target audience, or specific interests. Providing practical tips and suggestions that are supported by credible research can make the messages you share more useful to the reader. Certainly the more creative and fun the content is, the more interesting it will be.(2) Find examples of successful RDs that are on Twitter and Facebook and see what makes their social media dialogue stand out. In October, the Huffington Post published *35 Diet And Nutrition Experts You Need To Follow On Twitter*; (3) this list would be a great place to start.

**Blogging**

Blogging is short for “web log,” which can also be understood as online journaling. This can be an extremely beneficial medium as it is a place where RDs can write about topics both personal and professional in a frequent manner. The Nutrition Blog Network contains hundreds of blog posts by RDs and can be sent right to an email account or shared via social media tools for easy access to reliable information. There are many free tools that RDs can use to set up their own blogs including WordPress, Blogger and Windows Live Writer.

**Creators vs. Curators**“Creators” are online users who post original photos and videos while “Curators” locate existing photos and videos on the Internet and share them. According to data from Pew, “56% of internet users do at least one of the creating or curating activities and 32% of internet users do both creating and curating activities.” (4) Pinterest, Instagram and Tumblr are examples of photo-sharing tools. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recently recognized the value of Pinterest to the work of RDs in the December 2012 issue of the Journal. (5) The article identifies some tips for making Pinterest sites more value-added:

* Make the Pinterest site more than just a self-promotion tool.
* Diversify content by including pins to not only articles and videos of your own work but also pins to content created by others.
* Consider adding pins to recipes, nutrition tips and cooking tutorials.
* mixing it up by including pins
* Create boards that represented your brand or niche such as on a particular topic or service.

**Ok, I joined, now what?**
Start sharing! No matter which social media tool you choose to use, you will quickly find that people are interested. You may start getting more followers or friends and often, this can open up a dialog on the subject. These conversations can help shed light on what the general public may be thinking about a particular nutrition or health topic. Many people are more comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions over the internet where can be “faceless” rather than doing it in person, providing valuable insight into how the public feels about sometimes controversial or confusing topics. The biggest thing to remember while using social media is to **have fun!** Now get on your computer or smart phone and start sharing!

References:

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