

OAA Social Media Guidelines

The ubiquity and utility of social media cannot be overstated. As work increasingly shifts to the virtual domain, these platforms offer invaluable tools to network, communicate ideas and information, market services, and build a brand. Used effectively and appropriately, social media can offer tremendous benefits to the profession, both enhancing individual practices and promoting a broader appreciation of architecture among the public at large.

With that in mind, members of the OAA have an obligation under Regulation 27 of the *Architects Act* to maintain standards of professional conduct and practice. The Regulation also requires them to act in a manner that would not be considered disgraceful, dishonourable, or unprofessional when engaging in conduct relevant to the practice of architecture. Members need to be mindful any comment or posting on social media must comply with these requirements. Additionally, Intern Architects and Student Associates on the path to licensure have an ongoing responsibility to remain of good character. Rooted in these requirements is the notion that each member's conduct can serve to either enhance or undermine public trust in the architecture profession.

The OAA recognizes that the architecture profession is enhanced by thoughtful and informed critique of design, and that the public interest is served by open and respectful dialogue about the built environment, whether online or offline. The purpose of these guidelines is not to limit online communication but rather to highlight key areas where social media and professional responsibilities intersect. The goal is to provide direction on social media use that will ultimately serve to enrich the profession's reputation that engenders deeper trust from the public.

NOTE: These guidelines are not exhaustive. A legal professional should be consulted for specific advice in any particular situation.

Professional obligations

Members should familiarize themselves with their professional obligations and keep those obligations front and centre when using social media.

I. Maintain the dignity of the profession

- Communicate clearly, respectfully, and in an unbiased, neutral tone. Choose your words carefully and avoid any disparaging, antagonizing, or inflammatory language.
- Create safe, welcoming, and inclusive spaces online. Harassment, discrimination, racism, and sexism have no place in the architecture profession.
- Respect and uphold client confidentiality.
- Ensure the information posted online is accurate and avoid false, misleading, or exaggerated claims.

- Exercise caution when communicating with potential clients through any social media platforms, and refrain from providing any design advice online without an express contract

II. Abide by laws

It is important for members to gain a general understanding of the legal responsibilities when using social media. Inappropriate use could trigger other legal claims, such as a privacy or human rights complaint, criminal charges under hate speech laws, or a libel law suit. Consider the following:

- Reflect on your own social media usage and consider the purpose and intent of what you are posting. Pause and ask yourself whether your peers would think a post is clear, helpful, and professional.
- If you are an employer, create a social media policy for your office. Provide training to staff on its content and the implications for breaching it.
- If you are an employee, ensure you are familiar with any policies that apply to your social media usage.
- Take strong and swift measures to address and remove any posts or comments you receive online that are hateful, discriminatory, or abusive. Each member of the profession has an obligation to create an inclusive and respectful working environment, which extends to the online environment as well.
- Carefully consider the use of disclaimers to understand when and where they could be helpful.
- Make sure that you are giving proper credit for authorship. (See [Regulatory Notice R.5, Credit for Authorship - Misrepresentation of a Practice.](#))
- Ensure you are not infringing on any copyrights, and seek out the necessary permissions when posting articles and photos online.
- Be mindful “re-tweeting,” sharing, or forwarding messages authored by others may amount to unprofessional behavior if the content of the message violates the standards of the profession.
- Tone and context can often be misinterpreted. Building your voice or online persona will help to minimize confusion when it comes to the tone of your comments.
- Seek out legal advice when you are unsure or unclear about your obligations.

III. A note about ‘off-duty’ conduct

When it comes to social media activity, the line between the professional and personal has become more difficult to distinguish. Personal posts that are made publicly and are easily identifiable may still invite professional risk if the posts can be seen to likely diminish the trust and confidence placed by the public in the profession. Assume that all content on the internet is public and accessible to all.

An [August 2020 decision](#) of the U.K. Architects Registration Board found an architect guilty of unacceptable professional conduct resulting from anti-Semitic comments on a public Facebook profile. There is also a growing number of professional misconduct rulings in other professions throughout Canada,¹ and the [courts have upheld these](#)

¹ Grey Areas – [Trying to Make Sense of the Use of Social Media by Practitioners](#), October 2020 – No. 250)

decisions, arguing it is “entirely legitimate for a professional regulator to impose requirements relating to civility, respectful communication, confidentiality, advertising, and other matters that impact freedom of expression.”²

Unprofessional or unlawful behaviour online could be found to constitute professional misconduct, which may attract a regulatory response in the form of a complaint, investigation or, in more serious cases, prosecution through the OAA’s disciplinary process. All allegations of professional misconduct are considered in due course by the OAA, having regard to the entire context. Personal posts are not immune to regulatory scrutiny when those posts could be seen to erode public confidence in the profession.

It is also important to remember that social media platforms are constantly evolving. You should be proactive in considering how professional expectations apply in any given set of circumstances.

These guidelines were originally issued in July 2021, and were updated in April 2023.

² Strom v Saskatchewan Registered Nurses’ Association, 2020 SKCA 112 (CanLII) at para 165