

Provincial Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons East Lancashire



Some tips and simple guidance for using social media

The several types of platforms which we know collectively as 'Social Media' have transformed the way in which many maintain contacts, make friends, express opinions, and share their lives with a wide range of people around the world. As a communication tool, it allows many people to stay connected with a broad range of acquaintances with whom they might otherwise struggle to do so.

Within Freemasonry, social media has allowed individuals, Lodges, Provinces and even Constitutions to extend their range of fraternal friendship. During the pandemic, it was a lifeline to their Masonic friends and memberships. And when our members cannot attend, it is a vital means of maintaining contact.

It is common for many Masons to combine their Masonic, private, professional, and personal lives within one account, sharing views, opinions, photos ... and humour!

For others, various aspects of their lives are limited in what is shared with either their friends, colleagues, or the public. It's all about choice and what you feel comfortable – and safe – doing.

Lodge social media accounts are becoming popular and an increasing number of individual Masons (particularly those who use the platform 'X' formally known as Twitter) have dedicated accounts in which they maintain an exclusively Masonic profile.

No matter how we choose to engage with social media, we still need to be mindful – particularly when it comes to our memberships within Freemasonry – how we represent ourselves as individual Freemasons and Freemasonry in general.

There is an expectation that, as Freemasons, we will maintain the highest standards of personal conduct in all our public, professional and private interactions. That is not diminished when we express our views in the virtual world on social media. For many of our members, their use of social media is a positive one as they present positive role models of the value of membership, our place in society and our charitable works.

If such accounts include details of our membership, events we are attending (including photographs) and illustrate – and even promote, our Orders and membership of them, we need to be sensitive in what we say. An unguarded, inappropriate (and sadly sometimes) offensive remark, or image not only reflects on the individual but also on their connections – particularly if they are alongside posts about Freemasonry.

If you take nothing else away from any of this, remember, **think before you click.**

Think before you Click – Safety

First, make sure you are using social media safely. Think before you post personal or private information. Even when an account may be 'private' details can still be copied or shared from it.

Before you accept a friend request, are you certain the person is whom they claim to be? Are you already their friend on that platform? This might be an indication that this new profile is a bogus one.

Think before you post personal information publicly. One personal fact about you may seem innocuous on its own. But we can scroll through a profile and several posts and quickly gather enough pieces of information to identify a lot more. That one innocent disclosure can soon become a roadmap to you, where you live, your life and your loved ones. If you wouldn't stand in a public place and shout out a comment, would you then want to tell the online world?

Have you received a personal message via a platform which is unexpected, strangely worded, or does not 'sound' like the person you know? Is it asking for personal information or financial assistance? If you are in doubt, then follow your intuition. Would such a 'friend' contact you using that platform, or in that manner? Contact them an alternative way and check it out.

Think before you Click - Security

Check your settings. Regularly. Do not just expect the platform's default security and privacy settings are right for you. If the only people you want to see what you post are your confirmed 'friends', check that is the case. And remember, 'public' MEANS public.

Regularly change passwords and follow the guidance all the platforms provide about this.

If you receive a message via a platform from an individual or a company, don't just click on any links it contains, particularly if that then causes you to leave that closed environment. If in doubt, check it out.

Remember, when you post something on social media, it is like letting a genie out of a bottle. The bottle might be one you have only shared with friends, but you have no control over what they may in turn innocently or inadvertently do with it. You may be very savvy with your personal information. Unfortunately, some are not – and they may not be with yours.

Think before you Click.

And what about Freemasonry?

We like to think this is all obvious stuff, but it is the obvious stuff we tend to forget:

- Does your social media account include information about your Freemasonry? If so, are the other things you post about at odds with it, or might it make others think they are the views held or promoted by all of us?
- Think before you share a link to anything. Again, is it at odds with being a Freemason? Worse, does it contain anything illegal, defamatory, or likely to offend others? So many are caught

out by sharing things without properly looking at what they really are. Do not get caught out by assuming.

- We talk about 'piques and quarrels' not having a place in our meetings. Think of social media in the same way. If you are at odds or have an issue with a member or a membership, deal with it sensitively, appropriately, and privately. Social media is not the place for it – private accounts or otherwise.
- Do not share ritual or any aspect of it. As simple as that.
- For lots of good reasons, many members prefer to keep their membership private. We must not be identifying members as being such without their consent. Sharing photographs of meetings or our members must not happen without first considering others. Let others know you are planning on taking a picture, what you are going to do with it and where it will be posted. If in doubt' always ask. Respect other people's privacy.
- Unless in a role where you are communicating on behalf of an Order or a Province AND have been expressly authorised to speak on its behalf, please don't.
- Posting copies of summonses and correspondence attached to posts. They will undoubtedly contain personal and private information about members, events, meetings, contact information etc. Unless you have been asked to, do not share them publicly. And even when you have been asked to, if you are not sure, check with the originator. Being a gatekeeper for others is a good skill to develop. Remember that genie in that bottle!
- And lastly, do not use Freemasonry or your membership of it as a vehicle for personal gain or promotion – especially professionally. It is not why we are Freemasons.

Finally

If you do not know them, do not follow them.

If in doubt, unfollow.

If concerned, block.

If unsure, do not post.

And if you make a genuine error or mistake, you can fix all the above.

Be sensible. Be accountable. Use social media to the full and enjoy it. Better still and only if you feel comfortable with doing so, share your positive experiences of Freemasonry. Ultimately, you are our ambassador and the best advert we have for membership.

T – is it Truthful

H – does it Help?

I – does it Inspire?

N – is it Nice or Necessary?

K – is it Kind?

And REMEMBER ...

Think before you Click

Martin P Roche

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