



# Confidentiality in the age of social media

Our discretion has always been a cornerstone of the profession — is it more relevant than ever before?

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**A key theme at PRIMS Lyon 2020 — 24-26 January 2020 — was interpreter ethics in general, and confidentiality in particular, in the information age.**

## A brave new world

It has been a mere 14 years since Facebook first showed its fresh face in public<sup>[1]</sup> and the first twerp tweeted<sup>[2]</sup> their opinion in 140 or fewer characters.

But, less than one-and-a-half decades later, fortunes and futures are forged through Facebook (often through foul means!) and political policies and reputations are made and broken through Twitter.

How are we to interpret *that*?

## Not always unseen

Social media has created a world where the boundaries have blurred between the performers and the spectators, the public and the reporters, the commentators and the commented-on.

As professionals in an already-pressured environment, it can be unnerving to think that a slip of the tongue could turn us into a trending meme or a viral video. The animated facial expressions of the sign language interpreter or the frowns of concentration of the colleague doing consecutive, all before the watchful eyes of the audience, make us an easy target for well-timed cruel snapshots and acerbic captions.

But, as professionals, we need to keep calm and carry on. We must resist the temptation to join the fray.

## New pressures, new opportunities

Never before have individuals had such potential to reach out to a global audience to express their unique views, their personal talents, their heartfelt beliefs. With the click of a mouse or scroll of a thumb we can create communities of peers and potential clients.

For professionals – especially freelancers – this means the potential to expand our market, to build

our individual brand.

But this also creates new pressures: we need to distinguish ourselves from the crowd, show our unique selling point. And this is where it gets dangerous.

The fickle ether of social media rewards virality and response; it doesn't discern between fame and notoriety. Within minutes a witty comment, barbed observation or indignant response can spread across the globe

It is too easy to be seduced by likes, shares and retweets – and blinded by the spotlights of instant fame, and so lose sight of our professional values and reputation.

## **A badge of professional discretion**

As AIIC members we stand out from the crowd. Our clients can be confident that they are working with consummate professionals who abide by a strict code of professional ethics.

Part of this code is a shared understanding that we will not veer down the pathway of seeking sensation through indiscreet Instagram posts or provocative tweets. The flipside of this coin is that we expect to be treated with professional courtesy – both in the conference venue and across the ether. It's only fair.

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### **Notes**

[1] In 2006 Facebook opened its doors to anyone aged 13+; previously, since its launch in 2004, it had been restricted to students – first at Harvard, then other universities.

[2] 21 March 2006, to be precise, was the date of the first tweet's launch into the twittersphere. It read “just setting up my twttr”

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