

E-Professionalism: Do's and Don'ts

E-Professionalism, what is it you ask? It is the natural progression of professionalism to all things E-electronic, including the internet, cell phones, Blackberry[®], MP3 players, and any other electronic device/gadget. So, what is professionalism? According to Webster's Dictionary, professionalism is "the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark the profession or a professional person." With advancements in technology, internet use, cell phone capabilities, and social networking sites such as MySpace[®], Facebook[®], Twitter[®], and others, E-professionalism has become a hot topic in many professions, including that of pharmacy. E-professionalism is important for a variety of reasons. What you say, do, and/or post electronically can affect your "professionalism" in many ways.

Although computers, cell phones and other electronics open up a variety of new and improved opportunities in many areas of life, they are not without consequences. These consequences may be personal, professional, or potentially even legal, depending on the information and situation at hand. Often, the lines between personal and professional information shared electronically can become blurry. Employees often post personal information online that they otherwise would not share with colleagues or patients in any other setting.

Picture this, a resident walks into a patient's room, greets the patient, asking how his evening was. The patient responds that they were pain-free and actually able to sleep well for the first time in days. The patient then asks the resident how his/her evening was. The resident responds with "It was crazy, I went out on the town with a bunch of friends, drank an insane amount, and got only a few hours of sleep. Needless to say, I'm exhausted and can barely concentrate today" I could really use a RedBull[®] IV right now!" This doesn't sound much like a typical conversation a resident would have with a patient, but that may be exactly what their latest online posts/pictures may say about them. Does this scenario portray the qualities of a professional? Absolutely not! Therefore, it is of utmost importance that you portray yourself as a professional, both in person and in electronic communication.

So, what can you do to ensure you are being E-professional?

Do:

- A regular online search of your name
- Keep online profiles/websites/blogs "private" and monitor your friends profiles to a know what is being said/posted about you
- Record professional voicemail messages at home and work
- Set professional sounding ring-tones on your phone/pager
- Treat emails as professional correspondence, using proper grammar and terminology; avoid slang and abbreviations
- Use professional online networks to market yourself professionally (i.e. LinkedIn[®])

- Check emails and voicemails on a regular basis
- Use work computers and phones for work purposes only

Don't

- Risk putting inappropriate content on the internet, including social networking sites, blogs, message boards, mass emails, or video link sites
- Assume that because you do not put inappropriate content online that others cannot or will not do so. Other people's content may include your name, pictures, etc.
- Assume even though your profile(s) are "private" that others may not see them, including your current or prospective employer(s)
- Post inappropriate or negative/derogatory comments about your employer, co-workers, administrators, interns, residents, and/or students
- Have inappropriate email addresses, blog titles, or website addresses
- Send an email until you have proof-read it and assured you are sending it to the correct recipient(s)
- Use all capital letters in emails
- Include "quotes" at the end of your emails, not everyone shares your beliefs
- Use cell phones, MP3 players, or other electronic gadgets in the business setting, including Bluetooth[®] accessories and headphones.
- Assure alerts on pagers/cell phones are silenced at appropriate times
- Send or receive calls/text messages during meetings or other inappropriate times

Needless to say, most patients or coworkers would not follow you out after work to the local pub or coffee shop to see if you are sounding off about work, but online posts are not "pub conversations," they are more like megaphones to the world. Therefore it is of utmost importance to remain professional, not only in the workplace, but in all areas of your life.

The innate nature of the internet and other forms of electronic communication such as email and text messaging makes it feel as though these exchanges are semi-anonymous. Prior to posting photos or messages, or sending emails/text messages, you should consider asking yourself if you would say the same thing(s) or show the same image(s) if you were face to face with those who may see/read the information. And, although these interactions are often thought of as "social" it is important to remember that some of these electronic communications may be world-wide and publically accessible, regardless of privacy settings.

One thing is certain regarding the internet and other electronic forms of communication; they necessary and important, and will likely only increase with time. It is just important that you be aware and vigilant of how they may impact you, not only in your personal life, but as a professional life as well.