HOW TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR LOCAL MP

Using social media to engage with your MP

In an age where some politicians ask their Twitter followers their views on policy issues and MPs’ social media posts make the news, it is clear social media plays a role, not only in our personal and professional lives, but shapes how we participate in politics and politicians engage with their constituents.

Social media is a two-way communication tool. Therefore, you have to treat it like an on-going conversation that you’re having with your MP and others.

Posting a comment to their page or feed can be a good way of starting a conversation with them, or at least showing them – and readers of their site – what people are thinking about.

There are hundreds of social media platforms however those most commonly used by MPs include:

- **Twitter** - Twitter enables you to post quick, frequent messages which may contain photos, videos, links and up to 140 characters of text.
- **Facebook** - People use Facebook to keep in touch with friends, post photos, share links and exchange other information. Facebook users can see only the profiles of confirmed friends and the people in their networks.
- **YouTube** - YouTube is a global video-sharing website.
- **LinkedIn** – LinkedIn is designed specifically for the business community. The goal of the site is to allow registered members to establish and document networks of people they know and trust professionally.

Social media allows you to connect with your MP in a short, informal way. It is quick, timely and alerts your MP to issues immediately.

However, there are some key points to remember when engaging with your local MP via social media:

- **Focus on your relationship with your MP** - Remember your social media post can make or break your relationship with your local MP and their views of the financial planning profession.

- **Confidentiality** – Social media inherently blurs the line between public and private. Remember many of the posts you make to politicians on social media can be accessed and read by anyone – family, friends, clients and colleagues included.

- **Think before you post!** - Before you post a comment, think carefully about what you say and how others may react to your post.

- **Protect your important relationships** - For the important relationships in your life such as clients, work colleagues, good friends and family, keeping contentious political discussion off line might be best.
• Is social media really ‘you’? - Decide ahead of time if social media is the right place for you to engage with your MP or to comment on politically sensitive issues.

• Select your social media platform - Carefully select which platform is best suited for how you want to talk about your issue and engage with your local MP. For some, Facebook is seen as a place to keep in touch with family and friends and therefore limit their political engagement on this social network. You may find Twitter is a better place to more freely discuss or comment on issues.

• Keep it short with a clear call to action - Remember social media is a short form of communication, so keep to your key point and call on your MP to take action on your issue.

• Stick to facts - Sharing information that is evidence-based, neutral in tone, compelling and accurate, is the best way to engage in debate on your issue via social media. The minute a social media post becomes contentious, editorialised, or based on opinion, the less credibility people will give it. Stick to facts and avoid getting emotional. Say it with strength and accuracy, clearly and well written.

• Ask questions to start conversations - Asking a good, thoughtful question on your issue is a good way of starting a social media engagement with your MP.

• Keep it personable – talk like a real person.

• Be professional – Be civil, polite and respectful. When making comments about a policy issue, always be professional; avoid personal comments; and never criticise others, especially other financial planners. Be careful what you say about others.

• Re-tweeting and ‘liking’ – Re-tweeting or ‘liking’ a comment on social media is providing an endorsement of those comments and therefore it can reflect positively or negatively on you. When engaging with your MP via social media it is important to never endorse (i.e. Re-Tweet or ‘like’) ranting, rambling, melodramatic, emotive, critical or personal messages that others may post.

• Avoid highly negative/critical comments – Avoid using overly negative comments on social media, even those comments you think might help counter opposing views on your issue. You just can never tell how others may react and a highly negative / critical post could work against you. That grey area between public and private that social media inhabits can make it difficult to navigate what’s “right” to post and what should remain offline. Remember your work colleagues and clients could take offense to negative comments, as could your MP.

• Avoid the heat of the moment – Emotional knee-jerk comments should be avoided. They can harm your relationship with your MP and others.

• Maintain your impartiality – Stick to the facts and avoid politicising your issue. Maintain political impartiality.

• Keep in contact - Invite your MP to follow FPA/you on Twitter or like your Facebook / LinkedIn page, or FPA’s Facebook / LinkedIn page.