



SAICA SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES



This Guideline covers the use of social media by all SAICA members, in both a personal and professional capacity.

The SAICA Constitution states in section 5.5 that SAICA is to insist upon a high standard of professional behaviour on the part of members, associates, and students at the Institute and to preserve and maintain the integrity and status of the profession, to take any steps which may be thought necessary to stop or prevent dishonourable conduct and practices by members, associates, and trainee accountants, and for this purpose, to hold enquiries into The conduct of members, associates, and trainee accountants, and to take disciplinary action against members, associates, and trainee accountants, including the termination of their membership, associateship, or registration, and their expulsion from the Institute.

SAICA is, therefore, providing members, associates, and trainee accountants with guidelines to consider when using social media.

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

For purposes of this Guideline, social media means any facility for online publication and commentary, including, without limitation, blogs, wikis and platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, all other forms of communication that may now and in the future be classified or generally regarded as social media.



Social media has become an important and powerful tool that, if used correctly, provides an opportunity for unprecedented levels of engagement with clients, customers, colleagues, fellow members, and the public. However, the use of social media, in both a personal and professional capacity, has risks attached to it. Social media presents significant risks to the privacy and reputation of SAICA and the chartered accountancy profession.

SAICA is under an obligation to limit and, wherever possible, avoid those risks.

This Guideline guides your participation on social media by providing guidelines as to what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable use of these platforms. The purpose of this Guideline is to ensure that your use of social media does not compromise the reputation of SAICA, any of its members, or the profession.

This Guideline supersedes any previous Guideline.

IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES



EVERYTHING YOU SAY AND DO ONLINE REFLECTS ON SAICA.

When engaging on social media, be mindful that you are a SAICA ambassador. In the age of the Internet, your content is easily associated with SAICA. This association is even more likely where you affiliate yourself with SAICA on your social media profiles – whether by listing that you are a member, associating with other members, or making the affiliation apparent from the content you post. Therefore, before posting anything on social media, ask yourself whether your content is something that could reflect negatively on SAICA. If there is a chance that it will, do not post it. For example, any form of discrimination or distasteful jokes about rape, AIDS, hate speech, bomb threats or the like are not acceptable.

NOTHING ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA CHANGES YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AND OBLIGATIONS TO SAICA.

It does not matter if you are using a private account or using social media outside of work hours: your obligations in terms of your membership, associateship, or training contract, as well as other relevant policies, apply to your conduct on social media.

YOU HAVE A DUTY TO ACT IN GOOD FAITH TOWARDS SAICA.

You may therefore not do anything that brings SAICA or its members into disrepute (i.e., damages SAICA's reputation) and must always act in the best interests of SAICA and the chartered accountancy profession. This duty extends to your use of social media. The SAICA Constitution insists on a high standard of professional behavior from members, associates, and trainee accountants. Where valid complaints or issues exist, it is recommended that these be handled professionally and raised internally directly with Complaints may be sent to the following email address discipline@saica.co.za. The duty of due care and professional behavior are fundamental principles of our Code of Professional Conduct and should always be exercised.

IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES



REMEMBER THAT IT'S "PUBLISHED". Under South African Law, once another person has seen your content on social media, it is considered "published content" and can therefore carry the same legal consequences as content that is published in a newspaper or other publication.

ONCE IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S OUT THERE FOR GOOD. Remember that the Internet never forgets - what you publish will be around for a long time, so reflect on and edit your content carefully.

SOCIAL MEDIA LACKS CONTEXT AND TONE - Humour, irony, and sarcasm are often hard to understand without your facial expressions and gestures, even with emoticons, and can create misunderstandings. Consider what you say carefully and think about how it might be interpreted.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, BUT THAT RIGHT MAY NOT UNJUSTIFIABLY INFRINGE ON THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS – for example, someone else's right to a good reputation, dignity, or privacy. Before you post something on social media, think about the impact that it could have on your colleagues, your clients, fellow members, SAICA itself, and the public. If in doubt, either give it some time and reconsider it at a later stage or simply don't post it.

WHILE THIS IS A GUIDELINE, if SAICA receives a complaint or becomes aware of alleged improper conduct of a member, associate/trainee accountants with regards to the use of social media, the disciplinary committees considering the matter will consider the social media guidelines when determining what the required standard of conduct should have been and apply the necessary sanction.

KEY GUIDELINE PRINCIPLES



SAICA fosters an open and expressive environment and does not object to or discourage the use of social media in a personal capacity. However, in using social media, always remember that your relationship with SAICA is based on trust and confidence. You must act in good faith towards SAICA – this duty extends to not doing anything on social media that may bring the name of SAICA into disrepute.

KEY GUIDELINE PRINCIPLES



The SAICA By-laws states that it is an offence for a SAICA member/associate to conduct himself or herself in a manner which, in the opinion of the Professional Conduct Committee or the Disciplinary Committee, is discreditable, dishonorable, dishonest, irregular or unworthy, or which is derogatory to the Institute, or tends to bring the profession of accountancy into disrepute; (Refer to SAICA by-laws para 34.12; 41.10 and 47.10)

The by-laws include the following: Improper conduct on the part of a trainee accountant shall include any conduct which would be improper had it been perpetrated by a member or associate. The principles should, therefore, be read in line with the By-laws and what is expected from members/ associates. References to members will include associates and trainee accountants.

The following principles and guidelines outline the conduct that is to be followed when engaging in online communication:

COMMUNICATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM OFFLINE COMMUNICATIONS.

Nothing about social media changes your responsibilities and obligations to SAICA and your fellow members. Your obligations in terms of your membership contract and other applicable policies apply to your conduct on social media. The SAICA Code of Professional Conduct must be respected and considered when using social media.

DO NOT AIR YOUR GRIEVANCES ONLINE – You may not use your personal social media platforms to air personal grievances regarding SAICA, its products, policies, procedures, staff, members, or otherwise. SAICA has well-established internal grievance policies and whistle-blowing mechanisms, which can be followed if you have a grievance against the organisation. This is advisable and preferable, as often members have not understood or established all the facts of the matter. The internal governance and complaint processes should always be allowed to run their course. The duty of exercising due care is a fundamental principle of the Code of Conduct and should be applied to the process of lodging complaints and grievances.

KEY GUIDELINE PRINCIPLES



DO NOT SHARE PRIVATE INFORMATION OR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY – Remember that the confidentiality obligations outlined in your membership contract and other applicable policies apply to social media too. Nobody is allowed to disclose information that is financial, operational, or legal in nature, or any information about any clients or cases, or members (even if referred to indirectly and even if the content is positive).

USE PRIVACY SETTINGS – This limits the extent to which your activities are visible and accessible to the public, your clients, your colleagues, fellow SAICA members, and SAICA itself. However, never forget that under South African law, once one other person has seen your content, it is considered as “published” content, so you can have no genuine expectation of privacy with any content that is on social media and can still be held liable for the content.

DO NOT VIOLATE THE PRIVACY OF SAICA, OTHER SAICA MEMBERS, EMPLOYING ORGANISATIONS, OR YOUR CLIENTS OR COLLEAGUES – We take the privacy of SAICA, our members, and SAICA members’ clients and colleagues seriously, and you have an obligation not to violate that privacy. Before you post anything on social media, think about whether the content is yours to share. Be particularly mindful of posting pictures of people without the express permission of those being photographed. Avoid naming other members or individuals in a way that could cause them harm or ruin their reputations. Language and tone should remain professional, practical, and unemotional per the Code of Professional Conduct issued by SAICA.

KEY GUIDELINE PRINCIPLES



RESPECT THE LAW AND THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS – The public, your clients, your colleagues, and SAICA members all reflect a diverse set of cultures, values, and points of view. Do not be afraid to be yourself on social media, but do so courteously and respectfully, and be thoughtful about how others may be affected. Do not post or link to any content that:

- is defamatory, discriminatory, racist, sexist, or insulting
- amounts to hate speech – hate speech is harmful or hateful content that discriminates based on prohibited grounds such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion;
- is fraudulent or untrue;
- is harassing or threatening;
- is obscene, pornographic, indecent, lewd, suggestive, or otherwise objectionable; or
- infringes on intellectual property rights – for example, using written content, logos, or pictures without permission.

RETWEETING, SHARING, OR LIKING CONTENT - Even if you did not originate the content, you would be held responsible for material that you retweet, share, or like on social media as if you had published the content yourself.

DO NOT SPEAK ON OUR BEHALF – There is a difference between speaking on behalf of SAICA and speaking about SAICA. No person other than authorised SAICA staff may use social media to interact, comment, or release statements on behalf of SAICA (whether publicly or privately).

KEY GUIDELINE PRINCIPLES



WHAT YOU SHOULD DO - Immediately upon becoming aware of a discussion thread, posting, comment, statement, or misrepresentation that needs to be brought to the attention of SAICA and has the potential to impact the reputation of a member, the SAICA Legal and Discipline Department (Discipline@saica.co.za) must be notified. This notification should, where possible, be accompanied by a screenshot of (and link to) the relevant content.

DO NOT MISUSE THE SAICA IDENTITY – Your social media identity, login identity, profile picture, “handle” or username may not use or incorporate the name or logo of SAICA or any abbreviated or shortened version of the name. You may also not use the name to endorse or promote any product, opinion, cause, or political candidate on social media, and you may not set up a social media account, blog, or webpage using the SAICA identity (any name or logo).

For example:

X @JohnSAICA

X Joe Blog’s Blog: A SAICA insider

You may, however, list your membership of SAICA on social media profiles.

DO NOT SPEAK NEGATIVELY ABOUT YOUR COMPETITORS OR ANY OTHER SAICA MEMBERS – The duty of exercising due care is a fundamental principle of the Code of Professional Conduct as well as professional behavior, which requires members and associates to be honest, truthful, and not make disparaging references to the work of others.

KEY GUIDELINE PRINCIPLES



BE TRANSPARENT – Avoid using social media anonymously or using a pseudonym or false screen name. If questioned, be upfront about the fact that you are a member of SAICA.

BE TRUTHFUL AND AVOID MISREPRESENTATIONS – Do not say anything dishonest, inaccurate, or misleading. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out, and if you make a mistake, be up-front about the error and correct it quickly. Be particularly mindful not to reflect an inaccurate job title on your LinkedIn or other social media profiles.

AS SOON AS YOU END YOUR ASSOCIATION WITH SAICA, YOU ARE REQUIRED TO REMOVE ALL SOCIAL MEDIA REFERENCES TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP OF SAICA. This includes updating your LinkedIn or other social media profile to show that your membership has come to an end.

DO NOT FORGET YOUR DAY JOB – Your online activities should never interfere with your job performance or commitment to clients, customers, and colleagues. You are a representative of SAICA, and your commitment to your work must reflect this.

AVOID SOCIAL MEDIA “DISCLAIMERS” – The use of disclaimers on social media does not absolve you from being held liable for misconduct in terms of these guidelines.

KEY GUIDELINE PRINCIPLES



IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET, EVEN WHAT YOU SAY AND DO OFFLINE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO NEGATIVELY IMPACT ON SAICA – We live in an age in which much of what we do is documented, photographed, and filmed. What this means is that behavior outside of work hours and off-site that is either unlawful or contradictory to SAICA's values has the potential to end up online, thereby reflecting negatively on SAICA. For example, if you make a racial slur while out drinking, someone could overhear you or take a picture/video and publish or post your utterances.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS CONTROL ACCESS TO YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS – anything posted in your name would be attributed to you.

The best advice we can give you is to have fun, but responsibly. Ultimately, approach social media in the same way as you approach the “real world.” Use sound judgment and common sense, act with professionalism and integrity, and adhere to the SAICA Code of Professional Conduct. Most importantly, always remember that you are an ambassador for SAICA and chartered accountants/associates generally– whether you are on social media or not – and that your conduct on and offline has the potential to cause serious damage not only to the reputation of SAICA, and its members but also to your reputation and career.

You are legally liable for everything you do, say, or post on social media.
Failure to adhere to these guiding principles could result in disciplinary action
up to and including termination of SAICA membership.

HELPFUL TIPS AND CONSIDERATIONS WHEN ENGAGING ON SOCIAL MEDIA



The above instructions clarify what you can and cannot say on social media in terms of your obligations to SAICA. But we also want to help you get the full benefit of social media, so we've compiled this list of guidelines to help you get the best from social media without landing yourself in trouble.

THINK BEFORE YOU POST

- The speed of being able to publish your thoughts at the click of a button is both a great feature and a great downfall of social media. But remember that the Internet never forgets - what you publish will be around for a long time, so you need to reflect on and edit your content carefully. If in doubt over a post, or if something does not feel right:
 - ~ let it sit for a while and reconsider it later;
 - ~ ask someone for advice; or
 - ~ simply don't post it!
- Take personal responsibility for your actions and words on social media.
- Remember the "billboard test": if you wouldn't publish it on a billboard next to a busy highway near your office, alongside a huge photograph of your face, your name and the name of the company you work for, don't post it online or let it exist in digital format – the legal and disciplinary consequences are just the same.

BE YOURSELF

- Be interesting and have fun but stay out of trouble.
- Write about what you know. You may find yourself embarrassed by an expert if you comment on topics that you are not properly informed about.

TAKE THE TIME TO DO THINGS PROPERLY

- Quality matters. Use spell-checker. If you're not design-oriented, ask someone independent whether your blog looks decent, and take their advice on how to improve it.

PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY

- Be mindful of posting information that you would not want the public to see. There is no such thing as "privacy" on social media.
- Be cautious about disclosing personal details about yourself online.
- Change your passwords frequently
- Never click on any links that seem untrustworthy – if a friend sends you something via private message, rather confirm with them that the link is safe.

BE UPFRONT AND HONEST

- Do not say anything dishonest, untrue, or misleading. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out.

RESPECT THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF OTHERS

- Pictures, words, videos, logos, and music are protected in terms of intellectual property law. Just because the material is freely available online, it does not mean that you may use it without permission.
- You should never quote more than short excerpts of someone else's work and always attribute such work to the original author/source.
- It is good general practice to link to others' work rather than reproduce it.

BE RESPECTFUL OF OTHERS

- If you speak about others, make sure what you say is factual and that it does not disparage that party.
- Avoid arguments. Don't try to settle scores or provoke others into inflammatory debates.

BE THE FIRST TO RESPOND TO YOUR OWN MISTAKES

- If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so.
- If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as their copyrighted material or a defamatory comment about them), delete the content immediately and apologise. Legal disputes are expensive, and it is rarely worth the fight.

THANK YOU

#DIFFERENCE #MAKERS

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