

S2E4 transcript: 5 tips to get started sharing science on Instagram

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Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for joining me. This is the scicomm toolkit podcast this is the show for scientists, research, science communicators, you name it. People who want to gain all the skills, learn about all the tools that they need to improve their scicomm confidence. Today I want to talk about a topic I get asked so many questions about and as you can see the title of this episode is Instagram. I love Instagram. I have loved it ever since that first day where I set up a profile years and years and years ago now. But I set up my own profile on there because I've always loved photography. I've always fancied myself as a keen photographer trying to get those cool shots wherever I go on holiday. Whether my photography is actually any good is another question that we won't go into now. But I love the fact that Instagram was a photo sharing might not be the case anymore, but I still love it. I have become part of the most incredible community on the app. Such amazing friends with so many people that I was never even met before. It's been incredible. There are a lot of downsides about social media, Instagram, which I know is also part of my job but it's really a key part of how I started my communication journey to keep a side hustle, my ambitions and things I love to do. You get the picture. I love it. So because of that there is really so much that I can tell you just about doing science communication through Instagram.

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I think I could make

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series after series after series just about this platform. I want the scicomm toolkit to be about all kinds of communications cover all the areas possible. And Instagram is just one of those and this is the first time it's cropped up today. The best thing to do would just be to start at the beginning and ask the question. How do you even get started sharing science on Instagram? I genuinely genuinely think I get at least one DM every day from someone asking me for advice about starting an Instagram account. The questions like how do I get started? What is your advice? What should I do to just do it? Now the simple answer is to just do it and try it out. But I thought I would package up some of my advice on just taking that first step neatly packaged up into this episode for you. Now, as I said there is so much I could delve into when it comes to Instagram. So in future episodes, we'll look at how to use each of the features how to grow an audience, and so on and so on. That right now, I just want us to strip everything back, go back to basics, and think about how to get started and where to start what's the best option. In this episode, I have five tips. To share with you. I will stop rambling on and we will get to it

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now one of the very first things you will probably do when you are setting up an Instagram account for yourself or for your science communication is you will need to set up and you need a handle. Now I also have all of those DMS that I mentioned that I get from people about starting an Instagram account. I would say that half of the people who are worried about taking that first step. They don't want to get started yet because they haven't got the right name or they're worried about getting their name wrong and they'll be stuck with it forever.

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Now I'm here to tell you today that the name doesn't really matter. Especially when you're just starting out. Don't get me wrong when I first started my Instagram profile communication back 2017 I think it was I was fretting about my name too. So I knew that. So science all started with s they were alliterative look at alliteration me. So I was always trying to find that word in the middle that also started with an S. I tried. So speaks that didn't make sense. So shared science. That also didn't work. It wasn't quite as catchy as I hoped it would be. In the end, I opted to talk science. It did end up being quite a good name. It's served me well. Especially now that I've watched the podcast and I am actually talking about science related things. I think when you are wanting to start your own science communication account, of course you want to try and get it right the first time you want it to be as perfect as possible. But I'm here to tell you today that your name or your handle or your Instagram account can change. It's not set in stone. Obviously try and find one that you'd like one that matches what you're trying to share on the platform right from day one if you can, but in a few years time if you don't like it, if you've fallen out of love with it. Something's better come along or if you've changed directions, you can update it to something else. That is completely fine. So please don't let just choosing a name or handle stop you from starting. So some things that work well in a name and obviously your own name if you want to share that use words that link to the type of science that you're going to be sharing or whatever it is you're going to be doing. Make it as clear and obvious from the offset what someone who will follow you will be getting from your account. And I know there might seem obvious but you will be surprised at the number of accounts who have quite confusing or not clear and obvious handles obviously you can expand further on what you'll be sharing in your bio, but we're going to leave that for another time. Another tip I would share about naming your account is consider if you're going to be using multiple social media platforms. I am across different social media platforms now and my initial handle is soph.talks.science. That's what I am on Instagram. But I don't have that many characters available on Twitter. So on Twitter, I'm at safe talk site. Now well this isn't much of a problem if you end up going to events or speaking at conferences or you are a guest on a podcast and people are asking where they can follow you. It is much easier to say yeah, I'm at safe talk site across all platforms rather than saying I'm such a such a one platform and such and such when another platform blah blah, blah. That's not always possible. Absolutely fine too. But just something to think about when you're starting off. But my first tip for starting doing science communication Instagram, is to come up with a name but don't spend forever on it. Don't overthink it, because you can change your handle if you want to link it to what you're actually going to be talking about why you can and try to make it handle that you can use across all platforms if you're going to be using multiple.

My second tip for getting started sharing science on Instagram is to actually engage and have conversations. People ask me all the time about how they can grow their account further, but they're not actually responding to any of their followers that are asking questions. They're not commenting on their followers posts and getting to know them as people as well. Instagram is a social media platform. So you need to be social. Get to know the people who are following you. Ask them questions, find out what they are struggling with, what they want to learn about. All of that will help you to create content as well. It'll help you to build trust, you can support them as much as you want them to support you and help you grow. I keep on and on and on about how it's so important to know your audience. But you can't get to know them without talking to them. Yes, there'll be reports, data and analytics about the demographics and who is actually following you where they're from and things like that. But

it's so important to remember that your followers are actually people. They're not just a number there's someone on the other side of that screen who has clicked follow. They're the ones hitting like they're the ones taking time to send you a DM or add a comment onto your post that you know how well you're doing. What's your story? They're not just a 16 to 24 year old female in the US. They're much more than that. They're a person to get to know. As I mentioned in the intro of this episode, I am so lucky to be a part of this incredible science, science communication community on Instagram. And I am forever grateful for it. I genuinely don't think I would have finished my PhD without some of the people that I've met through that app. But that's because I asked them questions. I engage with them. We had conversations. I've met so many people that have given me different opportunities or I've collaborated with people because we started those conversations because we engaged with each other, which is actually another good point. If you're worried about getting started. Start with some collaboration or appear on some of those rotating accounts or take over a different account to give you a taste for what it could be like but that's going to come from reaching out to people you need to give before you can receive.

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The third tip I have is to set your boundaries early. I'm gonna go back to my DMs again. But I get asked by a lot of people, whether they should start up a separate account for their science communication, or use their personal one and turn that into a science account. Now I myself turned my personal account into my science communication account. I shared personal things like my wedding photographs on there, but I also share the content that I do now. I made that decision to mix everything because I wanted to show that being a scientist was not just one thing and I could be abroad and I could go on holiday and do XY that I wanted that all on one feed to get back. Now I know that not everyone wants to share their personal life with Michael Mike. Absolutely fine. So it's important that you know what you want before you start. How much of your personal life are you willing to share on your cycling account? Or do you want to have a really hard line completely separate them and set up a separate account? There's no right or wrong answer. You just have to know where your boundary is what works for you. So it's important to know where you set your boundaries when it comes to what you share about yourself personally, but it's also important to set your boundaries and realistic expectations about how often you're going to post. People say on Instagram that you need to show upon stories every day you need to post every day. You need to share multiple stories. In fact, every day they say work best. That is absolutely not the case. It's just not possible to keep up with before you start your science communication account. Work out a schedule that works for you. If that means you are posting once a week, once a month, five times a week, it does not matter. The only thing that matters is that you're consistent with that so before you started that profile before you publish your first post, think about what you want your boundaries to be. Just one final note about having separate accounts, multiple Instagram accounts does create more work. But if one is a personal thing, and one is a sitcom account, then it's probably not going to be too much extra work. But just something I want you to keep in mind if you did want to start multiple accounts. Okay, tip number four, and I'm sorry, I'm going to go back to my DM once again. Another common thing that crops up time and time and time again from people who want to start Instagram accounts is that they're worried that they're going to run out of things to talk about. Now I have a hack for you that I'm going to talk about in much more detail in future episodes. But that is having content pillars. So these are going to be the 345 different themes or things that you stand for that you talk about time and time and time again on your account. They're

going to be the things that you get known for talking about the things that your account will represent your content pillars, umbrella terms, so there's going to be so many different content ideas that come under each of these themes, but they're also going to serve as inspiration for when those ideas aren't quite coming as quickly.

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So over the past couple of months, I have taken a step back from Instagram, a bit of an Instagram break, just so I can reset. I was getting in my head so much about what I wanted to share what's the right thing to share? What you guys as my audience wanted to hear from me, so I just needed to take a step back and think about what my content pillars were. So I'm still working on behind the scenes. As an example. Some of the content pillars I'm working towards at the moment. This is what a career as a science communicator looks like. It's really important for me to share that a career in science can be creative. It's not just about being a lab doing research. So one of my content pillars is covering that. Another pillar is that science communication is an essential skill that everyone needs. This is what you can learn with me. So it's probably quite obvious that I'm also really passionate about sharing science communication skills with others, that they can gain competence. The whole topic of this podcast, that's another theme I want to cover on my Instagram. Another one is that science is not just learning facts at school, but science surrounds us in everything that we do. That's really important to me as well. So there are three of my pillars as an example for you. But as I mentioned, we'll go into content pillars and a whole other episode because it's so important. When it comes to the number of pillars. I think you need a minimum of three, but I would not go more than six. This gives you enough variety. So you can chop and change them throughout the week with whatever your posting schedule is, but it also keeps you niche focused. So it's really useful for accounts before they start to think about what they want their content pillars to be. But just for anyone listening Who is that next flight harvester, there's also visual pillars. So this could be a carousel post. Or it could be a Instagram reel or it could be an IG TV or it could be a quote or photo of you. These are visual themes that keep cropping up on your feed. Now this is an extra layer because when you're planning out all your content, you can say Okay, today I'm going to make a post about content pillar one. And I'm going to use my visual pillar one to go with that. Then for my second post of the week, I'm going to write about content. Pillar two, I'm going to use content pillar five. So you can kind of mix and match your content pillars or your visual pillars to keep you coming up with ideas, giving a fresh face to old ideas, because you can still do that too. Just to keep those ideas coming because it makes me so sad when people really want to start this but they're worried that they're going to run out of things to talk about when they haven't even actually said anything to begin with. So have a think about what your content pillars and even your visual pillars can be before you start your account, because it's really going to help you with content creation. And it's also a great tip for anyone who is already on Instagram doing science communication, if you are looking to generate new ideas.

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Okay, so my final tip today about doing like on on Instagram, is to remember that it's supposed to be fun. Please start overthinking. It's supposed to be a creative outlet, something that you want to do when you're starting out is the perfect time to experiment with different things. Work out what works well what doesn't work well. So if you're sat there listening to this today, and you've been thinking about starting up a Instagram account to science communication for a while, I just want you to do it. That's the simplest thing I can say

when people ask me for advice you just need to put yourself out there. Don't worry about the name. Don't worry about keeping ideas coming from months and months and months in the future. If you don't put that first post out, if you don't start that account, that first handle that you ever had, you're never going to be able to learn. You won't be able to experiment. See what you enjoy most what works for your audience, that you just need to start but never, ever ever forget it. It's supposed to be fun. That's what happened to me earlier in the year. It felt like a chore I felt like it was just another bit of work that I was doing. I wanted to step back and remember why I started sharing on Instagram in the first place why I use the platform. And that's because it's a creative outlet for me and I love being creative. So please, please, please just start that account. Have some fun and see what happens. So as a very quick wrap up. The five tips that I have today for getting started showing signs on Instagram is number one. Don't overthink the name or your handle because it can be changed. Number two is to engage and have conversations with the other people on there, the people you are following, but also the people who follow you build a trust and build a relationship with them. Because if anything like in my experience, those people are going to be critical. My third tip was to set your boundaries and know from the start, what you are going to share on your account what you're willing to share about yourself and how often you're going to post. My next tip was about content pillars. Before you start, think about the handful of themes that you will cover on your account. And my final and most important tip is to experiment and have fun.

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And we are back at the self assembly arena aka the DIY section of the podcast. It is right here that I gave you an exercise and results or tool. Something that you can do right now after listening to this episode is going to help solidify skills, the tips, the tricks, the advice that we've shared in the main episode. Today it's related to those content pillars that I mentioned. I know we're going to talk about this in much more detail in the future. But I just want you to start brainstorming what those pillars could be. Think about what you want your account to stand for. What do you stand for? What matters to you? Those are the types of things that are going to form your content to help you just get your account started. It's also a great exercise to do if you're listening to this and already have an Instagram account the science communication, but you want to give it a little refresh. I love a good brain dump So grab yourself a pen and paper, use the Notes app on your phone or get a blank google doc whatever works for you. And just brainstorm anything that comes to mind about what you want to cover on your Instagram sites communication. And then just store that safely away until we delve deeper into content pillars in future.

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Now if this episode has whetted your appetite to learn even more about using Instagram for science communication, then I was invited on to the brand new site comm accelerator podcast and my episode went out just a couple of days ago where I talk even more about Instagram science communication. There are five big picture tips that we talked about but also three practical tips that you can take away right now so you can head across to science communication accelerator, in brackets (scicommX) podcast. It's available wherever you get your podcasts right now, but even more Instagram advice from yours truly. So that is that for today. I really hope now that no matter what your worries were about starting an Instagram account to do find the cue indication that you're going to go away and set it up right now. That would be the dream if you do send me a DM tagged me in whatever your bus it says so

I can follow. Follow up, follow along your journey with you because you know I want to be a scicomm cheerleader for any anyone listening to this. Thank you all for listening to me once again. I really hope it was useful. I would really appreciate if you could spend a couple of minutes leaving a little rating a review wherever you get your podcasts. It really helps me to know what you guys are interested in what you're enjoying. helps others to find the podcast so you can help them as well. As always the shownotes transcripts resources for this episode, and all of the other episodes of the toolkit podcast are available on my website. That's [soph talks science.com](https://www.soph-talks-science.com) forward slash scicomm toolkit. You can also find me on Instagram at [soph talks science](https://www.instagram.com/soph-talks-science) if you have any questions about anything you've heard today, or you have a topic suggestion for a future episode. But just before I leave today, I recently got tagged in a Instagram story from someone who listens to the podcast with feedback and it honestly just made my day receiving messages like this from you. We're gonna have to get my phone out now and read it to you quickly because it means so much to me. Okay, correction it wasn't an Instagram story about an Instagram post from Charlotte who is [@cmscience_](https://www.instagram.com/cmscience_) underscore today after listening to the scicomm toolkit I realised that I'm still experimenting with my scicomm style and that is 100% ok I think it's easy to fall into the trap of seeing someone else's scicomm platform work well and trying to mimic their methods, which is exactly what I did. And one of those examples that she said I'm camera shy so filming, taking pictures of myself was not something I was going to enjoy or push myself to do. That said it has pointed me in the direction of scicomm methods which may be more suited to me by taking the camera away and I will talk my head off. The podcasting might be the avenue for me to explore. Just because I haven't found my niche doesn't mean my scicomm career has been a disaster. I've just had a few failed experiments. When I read that the other week this was just everything to me if I can make anyone just have a realisation like that from this podcast, my my goal is done so thank you so much for sharing because that means a lot to me and I hope everyone else listening resonates with that but you're also having your own and then I'll stop rambling and leave you to get on with your little DIY exercise. But until next time, stay curious. Keep creating and I will see you again bye.