

NIEHS marks social media milestone

By Eddy Ball

During the final week of March, NIEHS marked a social media milestone, as the number of its Facebook likes exceeded 1,000 for the first time.

“Liking a Facebook page signifies a much greater level of approval and trust in content reliability than merely visiting a page,” said Joseph Poccia, who joined the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison (OCPL) in 2012 as a Web information development specialist.

According to OCPL Director Christine Flowers, for many people, especially those in the 18-34 age range, often the first things they check for news in the morning are Facebook and Twitter posts, which can appeal to people with special interests, such as environmental health.

“People are increasingly getting their news and information from the Internet on their computers, tablets, and cell phones,” Flowers said. “Social media gives us a great way to communicate health and science information quickly and accurately. We’re excited about reaching young people and sparking their interest in research and science careers.”

Another upside to social media is the ability of its content to go viral through posting and reposting by direct and secondary followers.

OCPL launched its [Twitter page](https://twitter.com/niehs) (<https://twitter.com/niehs>) in December 2010 and has accumulated more than 3,100 followers. The Institute’s [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/NIH.NIEHS), (<https://www.facebook.com/NIH.NIEHS>) launched in December 2011, currently draws more than 4,000 visits per week.

According to Poccia, as of April 2, NIEHS Facebook had a total of 1,028 likes. “After the U.S. with 553, we have the most likes in Europe with 55, Central and South America with 35, India with 31, Pakistan with 28, and Egypt with 23,” Poccia said. “In terms of demographics, 38.7 percent of our audience on Facebook is between the ages of 18-34, and 57.1 percent is female. Our Twitter feed has more than 5,800 followers.”

One of the things that makes social media so appealing is its abbreviated format. In the case of Twitter, user posts, referred to as tweets, may not exceed 140 characters. That puts pressure on communicators to write content that is both enticing to the reader and concise. The tweet convention has even influenced the way OCPL puts together the landing page of its monthly newsletter, with story leads generally falling within the 140-character range.



Among his Web development and graphic arts duties, Poccia manages social media communication for OCPL. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Since her arrival to NIEHS in 2004, Flowers has expanded OCPL’s informational suite to include new media, such as social media and [YouTube](http://www.youtube.com/user/TheNIEHS?ob=o&feature=result_s_main), (http://www.youtube.com/user/TheNIEHS?ob=o&feature=result_s_main) in addition to conventional news services such as [press releases](#), [fact sheets](#), and a monthly newsletter. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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