

## Using Social Media in Exercises

The use of social media tools is an essential element of a comprehensive emergency public information (EPI) program. It is equally important that social media plans and procedures be regularly tested in a robust and realistic exercise environment, with the goal of identifying what works well and what improvements may be necessary.

There are essentially two ways to exercise social media: One way is to use proprietary software tools that *simulate* existing social media sites, and the other way is to use *real* social media sites in a closed and protected environment. While both methods have value and come with different strengths and weaknesses, the second approach is the focus of this guidance document.

The benefits of this approach include unparalleled realism, universal accessibility, no cost, and valuable experience with real-world social media tools. It does, however, require strong commitment and coordination during the planning phase and a close working relationship between the exercise management team and EPI partners onsite and offsite.

### Social Media Play

As with all elements of an exercise, the use of social media must occur in a safe, controlled environment. In conducting any kind of exercise, reasonable precautions should always be taken to ensure exercise play is not mistaken for a real-world situation—for example, by saying “exercise message” before and after phone calls, marking “EXERCISE” on written products such as news releases, and using different siren sounds to indicate an exercise or drill.

Similarly, the social media accounts used as part of exercise play should be set up in such a way that all information stays in the exercise realm and is only visible to approved participants. Once these accounts are established, they can serve as stand-ins for the social media sites that agencies operate in the real world, and players can use them in the same way they would in an actual event—to share information, gather intelligence, engage with the public, etc.

This approach has been tested and executed several times in a range of exercise environments, from small stand-alone drills that focus only on emergency public information to large full-scale exercises with multiple players participating from across agencies and jurisdictions. Within DOE, the Nevada National Security Site and the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant have both successfully used this approach in major multi-jurisdictional exercises as part of their overall EPI training process.

## Setting Up Social Media Exercise Accounts

The world of social media can change dramatically in relatively short periods of time. The most popular sites today may be replaced by new and different sites tomorrow. This guidance focuses on the two social media sites that currently are the most frequently used as part of an EPI program—Twitter and Facebook. As other sites gain relevance within emergency management, they too can be exercised following this same process. Users can also practice with these sites along with other applicable third-party tools such as Hootsuite, for example.

In following these instructions, it is important to note each agency should set up its own individual exercise accounts that can then be linked with other participating exercise accounts to form a “closed loop” network. In addition to participating agencies, exercise play may be expanded and made more robust by creating social media sites that serve as stand-ins for the public and the news media or by working with a Simulation Cell (Simcell) that provides these inputs. Special “observer” accounts may also be created to provide access for controllers and evaluators.

This process only needs to be performed once, and then the exercise accounts will remain active and available for any future exercise play.

Two additional control measures are strongly recommended:

1. Do not link exercise accounts with personal accounts; this is the best way to ensure exercise play stays, as intended, within the exercise realm.
2. Designate a single team member to create and manage the accounts; this person will be responsible for authorizing use of the accounts for training and exercises and for providing overall oversight.

## Creating an Exercise Twitter Account

Creating an exercise-specific account on Twitter is similar to creating one for personal use, though there are a few things you will want to take special note of in establishing the account.

1. Create a username that identifies your agency and differentiates it from any existing public account by including the word “exercise” (or some variation), such as “NNSAPA Exercise,” for example. If your email address is already associated with a Twitter account, you will need to create a new email address and associate it with the exercise Twitter account. It is suggested you use Gmail to create an exercise-specific email address, e.g., “[nnsapaexercise@gmail.com](mailto:nnsapaexercise@gmail.com).”

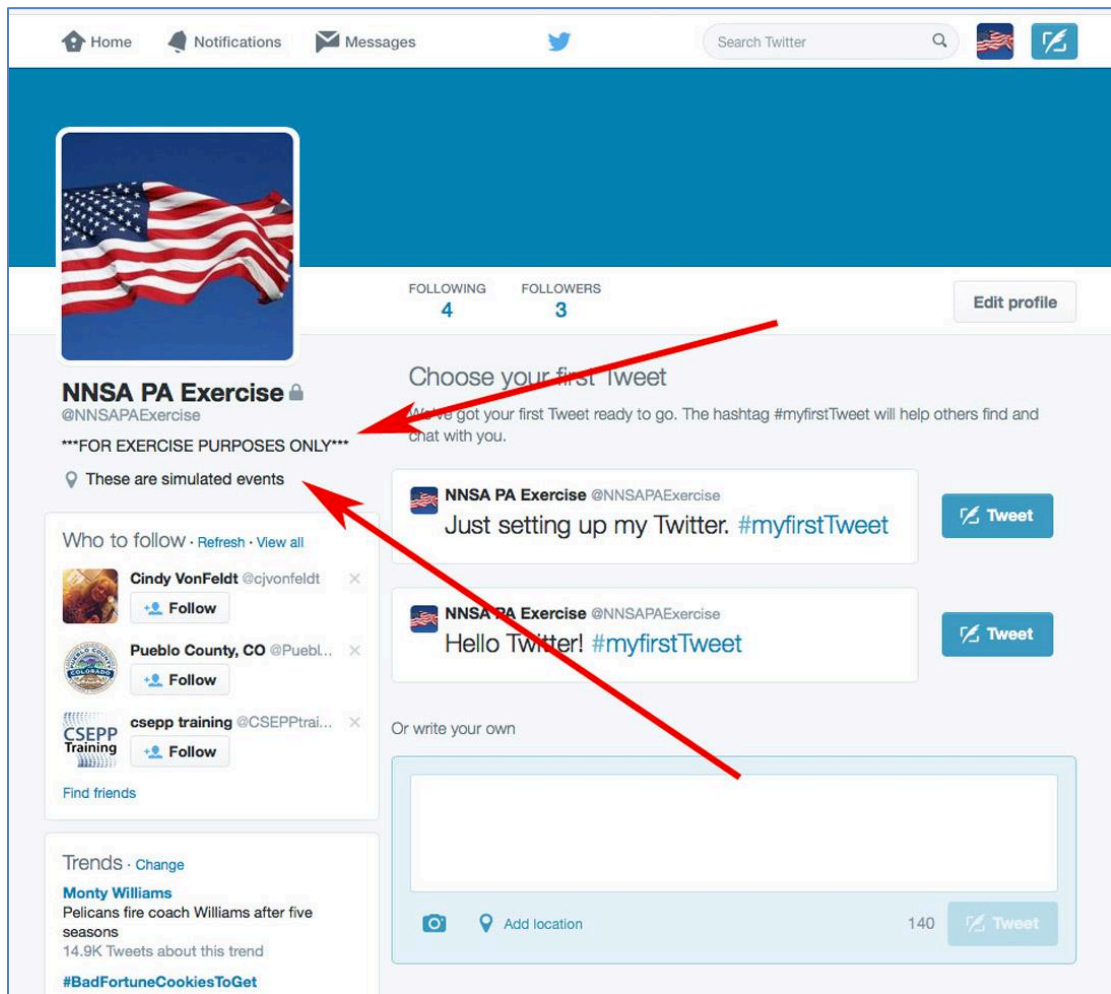
The screenshot shows the Twitter sign-up form. The fields are filled with: Full name: NNSA PA Exercise; Email address: nnsapaexercise@gmail.com; Password: 8 asterisks; Username: NNSAPAEExercise. Green checkmarks indicate the email and username are valid. Two red arrows point to the email and username fields respectively. At the bottom is a yellow 'Create my account' button.

2. In moving through the screens to create your account, you may be required to “follow” other accounts. You will be able to “unfollow” these accounts when your set-up is finished. You may be also asked to find other people you know from your contacts. **Again, it is strongly recommended you only follow other known exercise accounts and avoid any linkage with real-world accounts.**

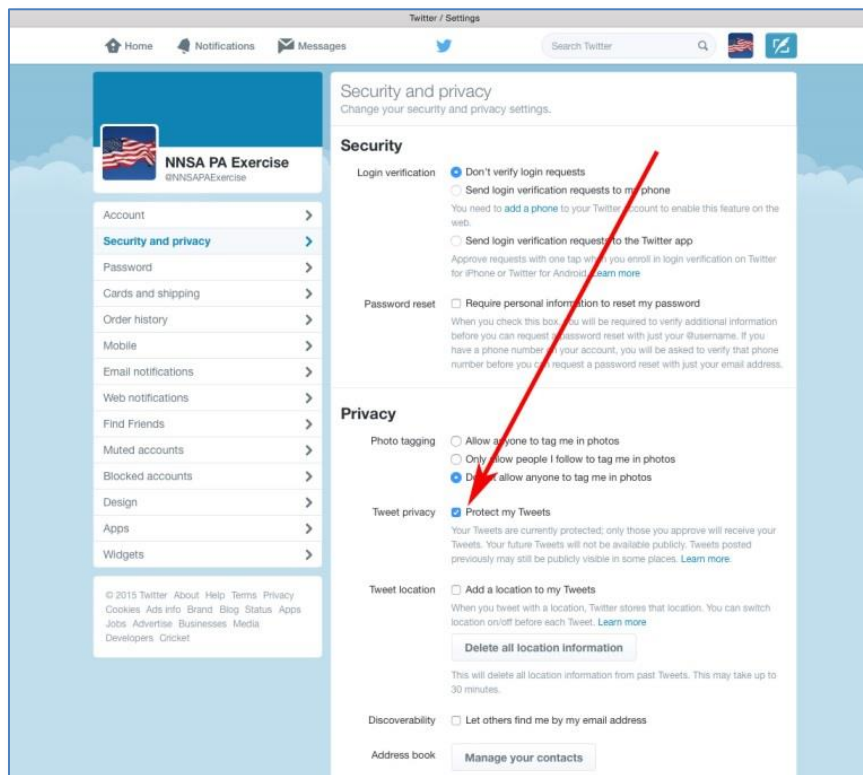
3. When the initial set-up is complete, you can customize your page. If you followed other accounts, you can unfollow them now. Include a photo for your profile and, for another level of protection, add the following disclaimer (or some variation) under “Bio”:

—EXERCISE—EXERCISE—EXERCISE—

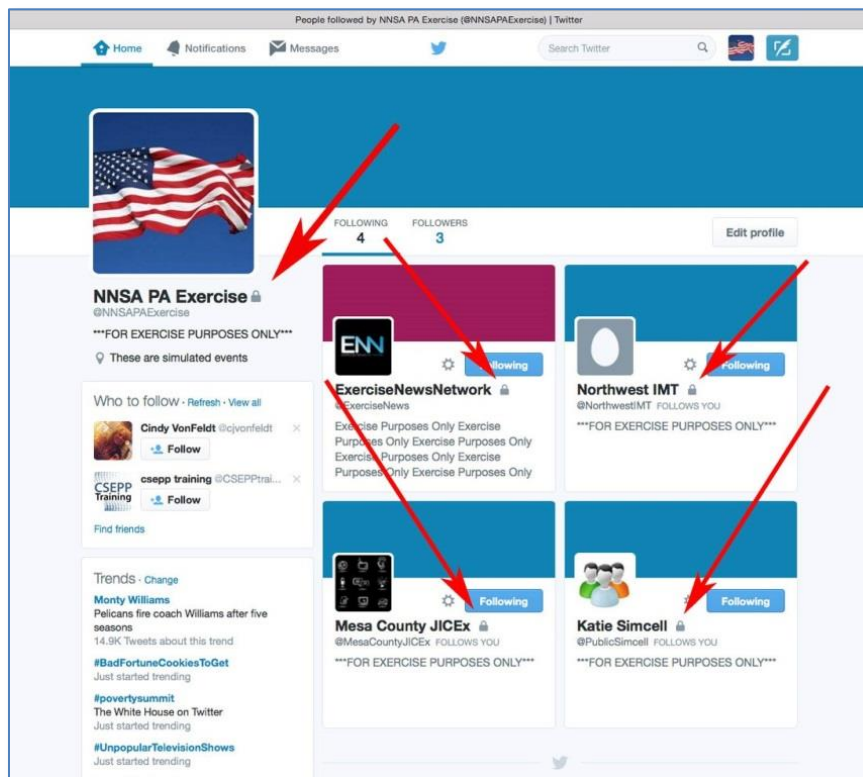
*This site is for Exercise and Training purposes only. All events are simulated.*



4. There are multiple options you can review and select under “Settings,” the most important of which is to “Protect my Tweets” so that only those you personally approve can see them. Click on “Security and privacy” and click on the box next to “Protect my Tweets.”



5. As you follow other exercise Twitter accounts (and they follow you), you should always see a “lock” icon next to the name. This indicates that the account’s tweets are protected. If you don’t see that icon, do not follow the account or approve it to follow you.



## Creating an Exercise Facebook Account

The approach for exercising Facebook is slightly different than the approach for exercising Twitter. On Twitter, the exercise account is used exactly as it would be in the real world albeit with a protected profile and close attention paid to who has access to the account. On Facebook, a personal profile is established as a stand-in for a public page. A Facebook public page is a public profile specifically created for businesses, brands, celebrities, causes, and other organizations. Unlike personal profiles, pages do not gain “friends” but “fans,” which are people who choose to “like” a page. Facebook Pages are public by default. Since public pages cannot be kept private for exercise play purposes, personal profiles, which can be made private, are used instead.

In creating your exercise account, take special note of the following:

1. Since personal profiles are designed for individuals, when you name your account be sure to make it sound like a person's name, such as "Nnsa Pa Ex," for example. If the name you choose doesn't meet Facebook's name policy, you will be asked to try again until you find one that works. The email address you use must also be original to Facebook, so it is suggested to use the same email you created for the Twitter account.

In moving through the screens to set up your account, you will be asked if you want to search for friends on Facebook, as well as to provide other personal profile information. You should skip all of these steps (using the "Skip" button). **As with Twitter, it is strongly recommended you only interact with other known exercise accounts.**

2. When the initial set-up is complete, you can customize your page. Include a photo for your profile and, for another level of protection, add the following disclaimer (or some variation) to your cover photo:

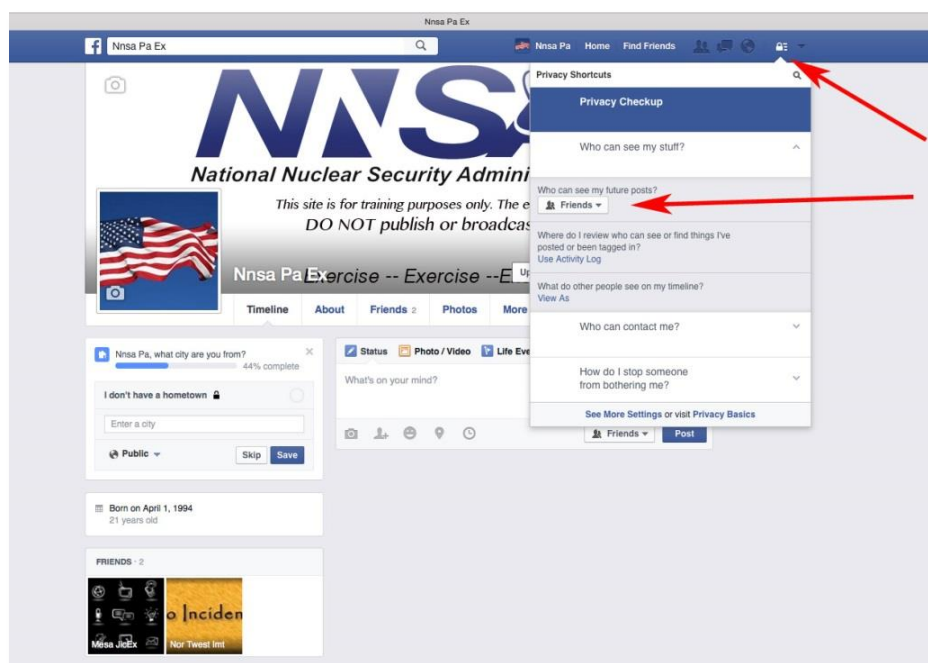
—EXERCISE—EXERCISE—EXERCISE—

*This site is for Training purposes only. All events are simulated. Do not publish or broadcast as a real event.*





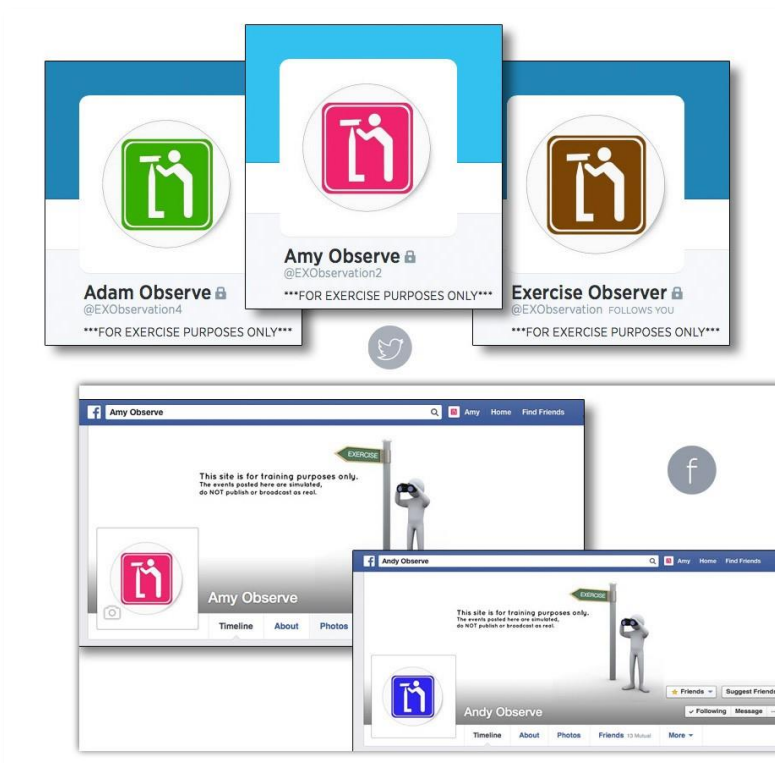
- There are multiple options you can review and select under “Settings,” the most important of which is to set your status so that only “Friends” can see your posts. Under “Privacy” look for the question, “Who can see my stuff?” and ensure the answer is “Friends.” You can now send “Friend” requests to other Facebook exercise accounts.





## Using Twitter and Facebook Exercise Accounts

To allow evaluators, controllers, and other interested non-players the ability to monitor social media play, “observer” accounts can also be created. These accounts are not designed to be used for player engagement, but rather to watch exercise play as it unfolds.



Once all the social media exercise accounts are established, they are ready for use. Ensure all identified participant and observer accounts are linked together. For Twitter, this means the exercise Twitter account and participant/observer accounts are “Following” and a “Follower.” For Facebook, this means the exercise Facebook personal page and participant/observer personal pages are “Friends.”

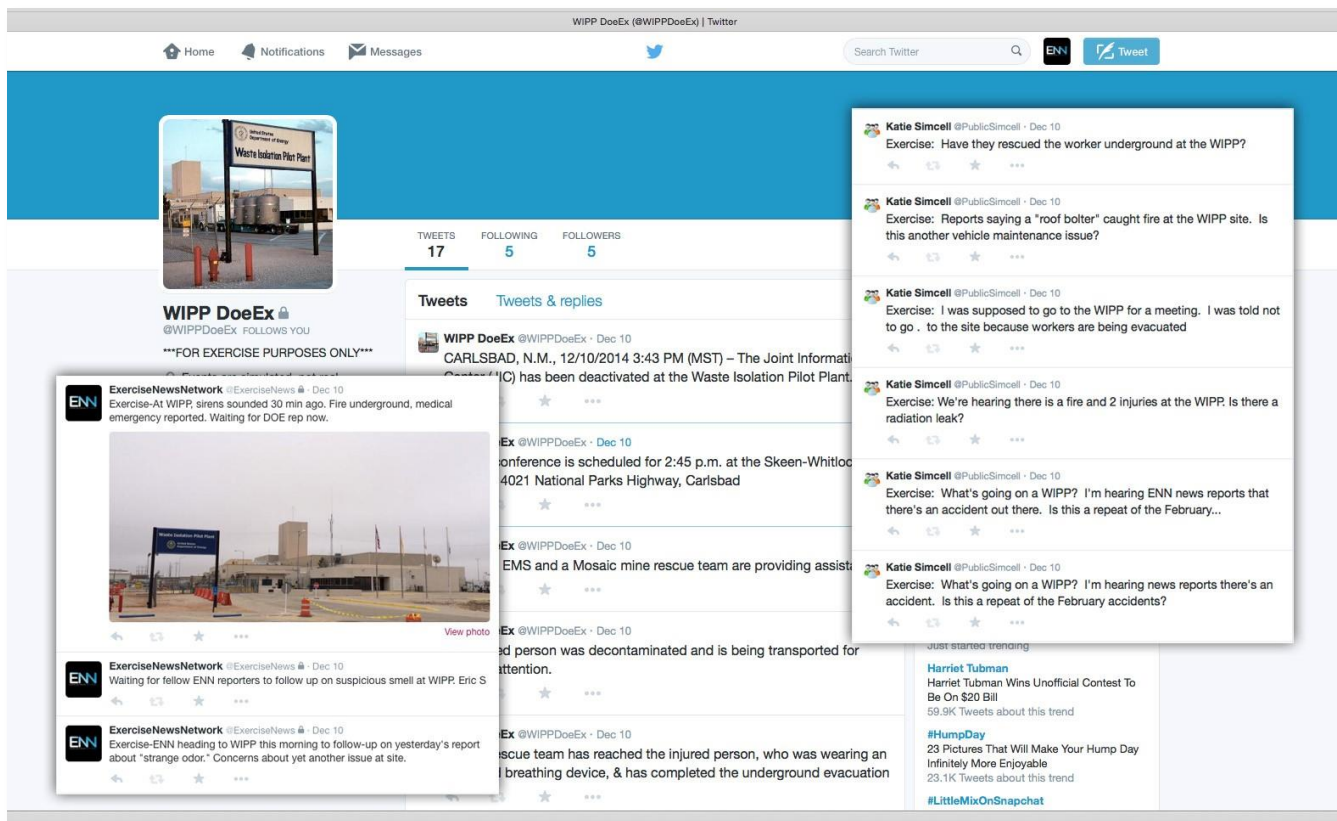
When using the accounts, consider including “This is an Exercise” at the beginning of all messages to provide even further exercise security.

It is highly recommended to schedule a dry-run in advance of any exercise play with all the participants logging into their accounts and joining on a conference line to discuss what they’re seeing on the screen. If the use of webinar is available, it is also recommended a webinar is used for the dry-run so all participants can view the accounts. This is an opportunity to make a few test Facebook posts and Twitter Tweets to determine if any final adjustments are needed.

For the exercise itself, it will be helpful to work with a Simcell that can simulate social media inputs from the public and the news media to create a more dynamic and realistic exercise environment. This can include pre-scripted injects based on the scenario, as well as real-time interactions based on player actions.

***Social media exercise play is illustrated below.***

**Twitter Example:**



## Facebook Example:



## For Additional Information

For specific questions or other technical assistance related to establishing and using real-world accounts to exercise social media, please contact EPISC Leadership.

The EPISC would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the creation of this product:

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