



# GO FUNGAL!

HOW TO SPREAD YOUR MESSAGE AND MAKE  
NEW CONNECTIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

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A guide to taking your research to blogs, Twitter,  
Facebook and beyond.

[www.botany.one](http://www.botany.one)

# SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOU



Would you like your work to get more recognition? People won't read research that they don't know about. But you don't have to rely on the press to get the word out. With a little effort, you can connect to people without relying on the media. And sharing your work this way could benefit your research in the future.

Companies such as Altmetric, Impact Story and Plum Analytics measure social impact through a number of ways. This can include noting stories about an article in the mainstream media or blogs or in comments on social media.

Using altmetric data for your papers can help you find who is talking about your work and what they're saying. They can also collate data on how the public are interacting with your work - useful if you're applying for grants with a public outreach or social impact component.

## *If you're not talking about your research, who is?*

Here are some ways you can improve your social media presence, Some of these work better when you plan in advance, but there are always ways to improve the visibility of your research.

1. Capture images and video showing how you work. Where possible show people doing something instead of static equipment. This way you can show how you found something, as well as what you found.
2. Write a press release for your work. Even if your university press office or journal don't publish the release, you have accessible material for the public you can put out yourself as a blog post.
3. Tell people about your research on social media. If the journal has a Twitter account or Facebook page, talk to them. If you have attractive images, you can offer these to help spread the word about your research.

A screenshot of a Twitter feed. At the top, there are tabs for 'SUMMARY', 'Blogs', 'Twitter', 'Facebook', and 'More...'. Below the tabs, a summary box states: 'So far, Altmetric has seen 16 tweets from 13 users, with an upper bound of 18,565 followers.' The feed shows three tweets. The first is from Ryan Folk (@ry\_folk) on 14 Sep 2017, retweeting @botanyone about a genomic study on acacias. The second is from Hannah McPherson (@hannahmcp3) on 13 Sep 2017, retweeting @MRossettoEvoEco about a genomic study on Acacias. The third is from Maurizio Rossetto (@MRossettoEvoEco) on 13 Sep 2017, posting the same genomic study information. The fourth is from J.D. Uzabakirho (@jduzabakirho) on 13 Sep 2017, retweeting @botanyone about the same study.

# OPEN DOORS WITH IMAGES



*“A picture is worth a thousand words”*

That's a lot of extra information when news story can be under 280 words ...or a tweet under 280 characters.

An image isn't enough to win everyone over, but it's an opportunity to catch their eye.

For news, having an image draws the reader's eye and gives you a bigger footprint in the newspaper or on a website.

When it comes to sharing the story on social media, images tend to be bundled along with the description. Research shows that links with images get many more clicks than plain text links.

Another thing you could try is getting video footage of you working. A video of action under a microscope can be sought after by broadcast television, so try to capture it in as high a resolution as possible.

## Image Ideas

Not every bit of research lends itself to exciting photos. What can you do when the best image you have is a complicated graph?

Get **photos of people working on the project** - even if it's just someone cleaning lab equipment. It might be mundane to you, but the location is exotic to the reader.

You might be used to **SEM images**, but the public are not. You can offer a peek into hidden detail that the reader cannot see elsewhere.

An unusual perspective on a subject, like a photo from above can make an image stand out.



Imagine how good an image of **real scientists** at work would be here.



# HOW TO WRITE ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH

It has been said that if the year's scientific output filled a swimming pool, then the portion that would be mentioned by the press would be about a litre, with the non-medical science being about a tablespoon. That's why when we get a story into the New York Times or BBC, we celebrate.

But only a small fraction will have more than a passing interest in the story, so even while the readership of New Scientist is smaller, a story there is also a big success because the audience is more likely to have an interest.

Likewise, getting a mention in a blog can be worthwhile, because though the audience is much smaller, it's also much more engaged with the topic.

So while we suggest starting by writing a press release for your research, if it doesn't get used then you can still repurpose it as a blog post for your own lab's website or as a guest post on another site.

## Anatomy of a Press Release

Our target is an overworked journalist, so we're aiming to make things as simple and obvious as possible:

**HEADLINE:** A simple as possible, no wordplay, say what the important story is.

**PARAGRAPH 1:** **WHO** found **WHAT**. **HOW** does it work and **WHY** does it matter?

**PARAGRAPH 2:** **WHAT** is the problem you're investigating and **WHY** does the problem matter? **WHAT** stopped this problem being fixed before and what **NEW** thing did you do to change this?

**PARAGRAPH 3:** Give a quote about how you feel about the problem. Use language to appeal to the senses, the sight of something, its smell or how it feels to touch. This is insight not fact. **They can get the facts in your paper.**

**PARAGRAPH 4:** Give a quote about how you felt about the solution / results. If you're not surprised / excited / moved, this probably isn't a story.

**PARAGRAPH 5:** **HOW** will this research affect MY life? **WHY** should I care?

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***The Press Release is not the Paper. You write it to make a journalist think people would **care** about the Paper.***



# 3 × WHY does THAT matter? = Caring

It's not always obvious why someone should care about your research. A tool we use is to ask "Why does that matter?" three times to find out why research is important. So...

A pathogen uses a novel technique to interfere with a plant's siRNAs.

**Why does that matter?**

It means that the signals a plant send to fight an infection get muddled, reduce a plant's ability to fight back.

**Why does that matter?**

The plant's susceptibility to blight means that crops across sub-Saharan Africa are at risk.

**Why does that matter?**

If this blight could be eliminated Mary grow enough cassava to feed her family and have enough left over to sell to pay for school fees for her children.

## But what about the details?

If every detail of your 4000-word paper can fit into a 500-word press release, then you probably did a bad job writing the paper.

However, after spending months or years picking over every minor detail it can be painful to leave things out. So here's what you can do.



Write a blog post as well as a press release. This can help because while the press release is about your latest **paper**, your blog post can be about your **research**. You can include links to your other related papers, to add context to your research.

If you are writing something longer, use an inverse pyramid. Put the big details at the top, and the smaller stuff at the bottom. Imagine you don't know when the reader will suffer a power-cut. Write so that the last paragraph is the best one to cut, the second-last the second-best to lose, and so on.

Remember that leaving some questions unanswered gives people a reason to go to the original paper. You want people to cite your papers not your press releases.

# WHERE SHOULD YOUR WRITING GO?

When you write something to go with a research paper in a journal, your first call should be to your university press office. If they think the story is viable, they might suggest coordinating the release with the journal. Some journals are limited to a few press releases a year, so the journal might be limited in its options, but a good journal will help work with a university press office.

If the press release isn't an option, then you could post a blog post to your own lab's website. A good alternative is to see if the journal has its own blog. If they have a blog, they should also have an audience with an interest in the kind of things you're writing about.

If neither of those is an option, then you could see if you could guest post on a blog in your field. In the case of Botany One, while we post papers from Annals of Botany Company journals, we are happy to post about any good research if we can crowbar in a plant connection.

Once you have the writing out, you then need to tell people about it.

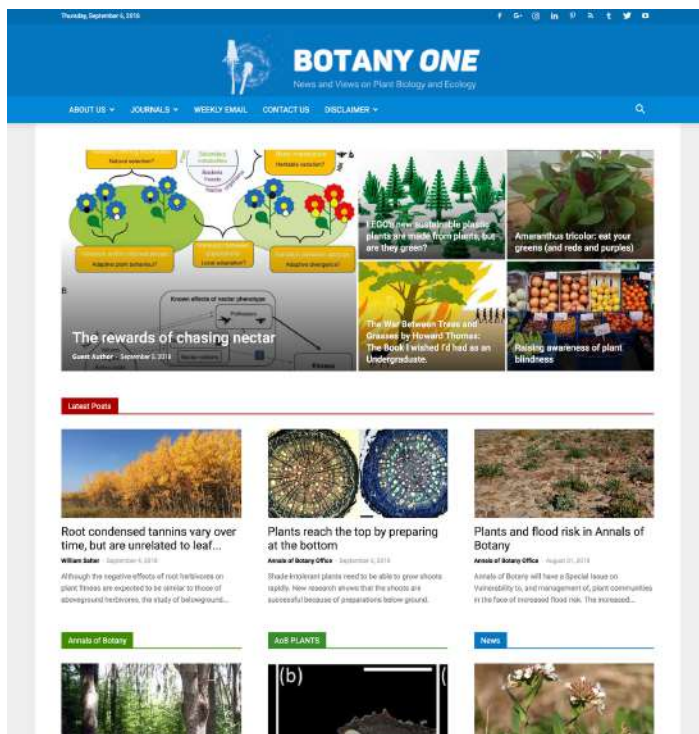


## Blogging on Botany One

There are a few advantages to blogging on a site like Botany One. The first is that we have already built up an audience, with thousands of page views each week as well as thousands of followers on Twitter and Facebook.

We also regularly work with first-time bloggers who do not have a site of their own. We take text from Word files and make suggestions on how to edit for style when writing for a blog. Once your text is out we then start promoting it over social media and our weekly newsletter.

Further, if you're writing in Annals of Botany, we'll talk to OUP about getting your paper free to access for a limited period to coincide with the blog post. If you're publishing in another journal, we're still happy to publish your text. Some other publishers are also willing to cooperate and make a paper free to access too. If you're publishing in AoB PLANTS or in silico Plants, then this isn't an issue - they're already Open Access journals.





# SOCIAL MEDIA WITHOUT SHOUTING

The different social networks have different cultures and behaviours associated with them. For people starting out with a social media presence, Twitter is the easiest place to get early traction and see results. Viewers on Twitter are more likely to click on links than from the other social networks.

However, if your interest extends beyond paper views then you might find other networks to be valuable.

## Twitter

Twitter is a great way to get your message out to a lot of people, particularly if you use the right hashtags in your tweets.

If you want to use your account to keep up to date with your field, trim noise from signal by following only those accounts that tweet relevant information. Just because I follow you, you're under no obligation to follow me back.

Following a tightly focused group of accounts, like labs and journals on Twitter means that when people agree a paper is notably good (or sometimes bad) you will see it shared when you log in.

Likewise sharing material with a tight focus will gain you followers. There's nothing wrong with tweeting about science AND kittens, but if you do you might lose some dog people.

Sadly some people are very angry about life. If someone harasses you, block and move on. Don't waste energy engaging with them.



## Hashtags

Hashtags are a way of searching for comments on a similar topic, that first appeared on Twitter but are used on other networks now. The original idea was that using #word made it easy to search for tweets that had that string in it - while avoiding tweets that were just mentions of word.

An example is the State of the World's Fungi symposium. Anyone who adds #SOTWF to the end of their tweet will appear in a search for #SOTWF, so you can quickly see what other people at the meeting are saying even if you don't know their name.

The danger is that when a hashtag becomes popular robots start using it to sell things, because they know there'll be an audience for searches on the hashtag.

## Facebook

Facebook is geared to keeping people on Facebook as much as possible, so while you can share links on Facebook, the design is geared to keeping commentary on-site where Facebook can sell adverts. If your goal is engagement more than paper views or blog views, then posting the full text of your release would be the best way to go.



## Instagram

Instagram gets much less attention for scientific social media. One reason is that it's difficult to link to something from Instagram, so you can be stuck with an image and a caption.

However stringing images together in a gallery can make a compelling story, and the captions can be very long.

You can share video over Instagram too. If you have a short animation. If you value engagement, then Instagram is well worth looking at.

WHY GO VIRAL WHEN YOU CAN...

# GO FUNGAL!

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'Social media' might sound like something you do for public outreach. Sometimes it is, but sometimes a member of the public can be a scientist too.

This leaflet from Botany One is a guide to the basics of using press releases, social media and blogs to spread the message about your research.

Get outreach right and the public will go out and start telling other scientists about your work for you - giving you more impact in the lab.

FIND THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO TO MAKE YOUR WORK MORE SHAREABLE.

HOW DO YOU TAKE RESEARCH THAT TOOK YEARS AND THOUSANDS OF WORDS AND CONDENSE IT TO A FEW HUNDRED FOR A PRESS RELEASE?

TWITTER: HOW YOU CAN USE THE SITE - WITHOUT ALL THE SHOUTY PEOPLE.

WHERE CAN YOU BLOG WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE TIME TO BLOG?

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