

Social media safety for activists

As the world continues to feel on fire (both literally and figuratively), we need people engaging in community organizing initiatives now more than ever.

For many, digital and social media organizing feels like the most accessible entry point, and we know it can have a tangible impact beyond our computer screens.

Some of the most notable social movements of our time (*including the Arab Spring, Idle No More, Black Lives Matter, and MeToo*) have used social media as a critical tool in their organizing efforts, alongside offline tactics.

Here are just 3 tips to remember when engaging in online activism:

1. Encryption

These days, most people are aware that when we accept those pesky terms and conditions (*which often appear in point two font and require a couple of law degrees to read*), we permit companies to track, collect, and sell our data to others. We don't need to give *everything* to these would-be data miners, however.

When discussing sensitive materials, consider using platforms and services that offer *End-to-end encryption*—a security method that helps keep your communications secure. With it, no one other than those you send a message to can read what you send.

Signal stands out as the most reliable app in this regard, but there are also others, such as Session, which aren't owned by mega corporations like Meta. Android users may be interested in trying other applications, such as Briar.

2. The Rise of AI

A newer concern in digital organizing is the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The general advice here is to avoid using AI when organizing online.

When it comes to creating content, there have been numerous discussions about how the information AI generates is not always reliable and raises several ethical concerns associated with its use.

Moreover, AI relies on storing user inputs to expand its knowledge base and refine its outputs. While we might already expect a level of user surveillance when organizing online, there is no need to hand it over directly to companies like ChatGPT or Google for permanent storage and potentially nefarious use. Companies like OpenAI, Anthropic, and others have already committed to working with state surveillance and military departments, for example.

3. Digital Hygiene

According to the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA), “Digital hygiene is the catch-all term for the practices and behaviours related to cleaning up and maintaining your digital world”.

CIRA stresses that digital hygiene is vital for many reasons, not least of which is that “everything you own online can become a source of entry or a piece of information used by a bad actor to launch a scam or cyberattack against you”.

There is a long list of things we can do to improve our digital hygiene, including:

- Reviewing all of our privacy and account settings to ensure we aren’t willingly giving away information we don’t have to.
- Deleting old accounts (particularly from when our brains weren’t fully formed—looking at you, NeoPets, Club Penguin, and the ancestry DNA kit your mom made you do)
- Practicing password-protecting—not just your devices and accounts—but also your files and stored information.

4. Ethical Engagement

We should always be aiming to make our digital outputs as accessible and ethically sound as possible. Consider:

- Can you include image descriptions or attach transcripts/closed captions to your work so that people with visual and auditory disabilities can access the information you are sharing?
- Can you create a plan for disengaging or reducing engagement on platforms that are owned or operated by bad actors? We saw good examples of this when we observed people transitioning from platforms like Twitter, once it became X, to those like Bluesky or Discord. And movements from WhatsApp, owned by Meta, to Signal or other messaging platforms.

5. Burnout

Lastly, just because digital organizing might not require you to put your body in the way of immediate physical violence, it doesn’t mean it can’t harm you. Create a routine of checking in

with yourself: what are the signs that you might need to soon disengage from online spaces, at least for some time? What tools do you have or need to reconnect with your body and not just rest, but truly recharge?

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These are just a few key considerations to keep in mind when engaging in online activism. Check out the link in our bio for more information.

Remember: online activism isn't the end-all be-all of organizing, but it is also far from useless. Our online worlds are inextricable from systems of capitalism, colonialism, and other dominating systems. As such, it's impossible to create a 'perfectly effective, ethical, and empowering' online presence, but there *are best practices* that we can learn and hone.