

KC Press Announcement 1st September 2014

Kennel Club Issues Advice On Social Media Use

The Kennel Club has issued advice to people using Facebook and other social media platforms to discuss issues concerning Kennel Club-based activities such as breeding, competing with and judging dogs.

The Kennel Club is made aware on a regular basis of conversations held on public internet forums which sometimes include disparaging comments on dogs bred, one-sided accounts of private disputes, criticism of judging from exhibitors and other judges, and in extreme cases threats made against individuals.

The Kennel Club is unable to directly intervene in the majority of such cases and has issued the following guidance which is intended to provide advice to people who have been the subject of such allegations and criticism, those who have been involved in such discussions, and also to give direction on when the Kennel Club can and cannot intervene.

To those conversing on social media

This is addressed to those who think that careless, uninhibited and ill-considered comment and criticism aimed at judges, dogs and exhibitors on Facebook and other forums is acceptable and that its impact will not offend, hurt or deeply distress, alongside damaging people's reputations.

Freedom of expression and opinion is, of course, a right of all - but that should be in the context of normal and civil behaviour. In other words if you have something worthwhile to say, then it should be said in a spirit of constructive criticism and not in an offensive manner.

Judges should take great care in joining in such conversations since it is not acceptable for judges to criticise fellow judges' decisions in a disparaging way. Judges should keep a distance from contentious issues and maintain an independent and private view. This is a matter of perception, public confidence and general respect for those involved in any breed at a senior level. Judges should certainly not give indications about preferences and intentions on placing for a forthcoming appointment.

Anyone judging at Kennel Club licensed events is warned that in certain circumstances the Kennel Club will refer inappropriate content to the Judges Sub-Committee for a review of status and future appointments.

To those reading social media content

Anyone who finds him or herself targeted, or the subject of such conversations, is advised to ignore such material and not to read, respond or engage in the conversation. The law is intended to offer protection from the more extreme material.

Try to put the matter into perspective; everyone's reality is subjective and most of the material is a matter of opinion, on occasions an expression of anger, and is often not based on verified fact. Rude, spiteful and ill-informed comments say more about those writing them than about those who they seek to criticise.

In extreme cases of direct threat or harassment, then the police should be contacted.

The Crown Prosecution Service recently issued guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent by social media and these can be found at www.cps.gov.uk/legal/a_to_c/communications_sent_via_social_media/.

These guidelines take the approach that there must be something more than 'the expression of unpopular opinion about serious or trivial matters, banter or humour even if distasteful to some or painful to those subjected to it' before intervention is possible.

The Kennel Club has to apply a similar approach and policy and is therefore unable to intervene in the majority of cases.

It remains our advice that it is better not to read, engage or respond to this sort of material. Sometimes it is better to allow those who choose to air views on these channels the freedom to do so, even if they do not do so in an adult and mature fashion. Those who wish to read such postings should treat such content, particularly if critical, with caution and not make any judgment or assume the truth or foundation on the basis of what is being written. Social media content should generally be treated as gossip and not a validated and reliable source of information.

Ultimately if you feel you have to join in, be informed and be polite; if you have to read the content, do not assume what is said is true; and if you are the subject of gossip or rumour then treat it for what it is. And remember that the most effective and practical way to deal with offending material is not to join in or respond.

A few general guidelines that all social media users should follow are included below:

You are responsible for what you post since it is a public medium.

Maintain privacy: Do not post confidential information. Do not discuss a situation involving named or pictured individuals without their permission.

Does it pass the publicity test: If the content of your message would not be acceptable for face to face conversation, over the phone or in any other medium, then it is not acceptable for a social networking site.

Think before you post: If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it is wise to delay posting until you are calm and clear headed. There is no such thing as a 'private' social media site, even if you delete a post.

Be aware of liability: You are responsible for what you post on your own site and on the sites of others. Individual bloggers could be held liable for commentary deemed to be libellous, obscene or which infringes copyright.

What the Kennel Club can and cannot do

The Kennel Club's jurisdiction lies primarily with the enforcement of its Regulations and issues arising out of registrations and incidents at licensed events. It does not have any remit or authority to censor material on the internet, or to censure those involved, and is therefore unable to intervene directly in the majority of cases.

However, there are ways to deal with the extreme versions of offending material online, including complaints for defamation or harassment or sending malicious correspondence. These are criminal or civil offences and forum moderators are usually (or should be) quick to respond and remove content that has no place being published.

Extreme cases of threat or bullying should be reported to the legal authorities and to the Kennel Club for consideration and advice.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Maintain privacy

Do not post confidential or proprietary information. Do not discuss a situation involving named or pictured individuals on a social media site without their permission. As a guideline, do not post anything that you would not present in any public forum. Ask yourself, would I want to see this published in the newspaper or posted on a billboard tomorrow or 10 years from now?

Does it pass the publicity test?

If the content of your message would not be acceptable for face-to-face conversation, over the telephone, or in another medium, it will not be acceptable for a social networking site.

Think before you post

There's no such thing as a "private" social media site. Search engines can turn up posts and pictures years after the publication date. Comments can be forwarded or copied. Archival systems save information even if you delete a post. If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it's wise to delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed.

Understand your personal responsibility

You are personally responsible for the content you publish on blogs or any other form of user-generated content. Be mindful that what you publish will be public for a long time—protect your privacy.

Be aware of liability

You are responsible for what you post on your own site and on the sites of others. Individual bloggers have been held liable for commentary deemed to be copyright infringement, defamatory, proprietary, libelous, or obscene (as defined by the courts). Be sure that what you post today will not come back to haunt you.

Be accurate

Make sure that you have all the facts before you post. It's better to verify information with a source first than to have to post a correction or retraction later.

Correct mistakes

If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and be quick with your correction. If you're posting to a blog, you may choose to modify an earlier post—just make it clear that you have done so.

Respect others

You are more likely to achieve your goals or sway others to your beliefs if you are constructive and respectful while discussing a bad experience or disagreeing with a concept or person.

Respect your audience

Don't use personal insults, obscenity, also show proper consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered sensitive. Users are free to discuss topics and disagree with one another, but be respectful of others' opinions. You are more likely to achieve your goals if you are constructive and respectful while discussing a bad experience or disagreeing with a concept or person.

Take the high ground

Remember that you're most likely to build a high-quality following if you discuss ideas and situations civilly. Don't pick fights online.