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## Making the most of social media

Why use social media? Because your customers, clients, members, volunteers, donors and funders do!

Social media is *the* way to listen, respond, engage and interact more effectively with your target audience. It also gives you more human appeal as you can respond quickly and hold real-time conversations with the people who matter.

It is easy to use once you understand how to use it most effectively, BUT it can be time consuming, particularly in the beginning while you set up your networks and get a feel for the platforms.

Social media must be integrated into your overall marketing plan and linked up with your website, Facebook page or blog; whichever you use as your main web presence.

Facebook has so many features available now that often a small voluntary organisation doesn't need an additional website – and of course it's free to set up.

If you simply post regular updates to your members and don't need a feature-rich static website, then perhaps a blog such as Wordpress.com is sufficient (although even this has many other features available). Again it is free to set up unless you want to add your own domain name to the site at a cost of a few pounds a year, which is nice and easy to do.

Both a blog and a Facebook page allow you to add more than one administrator so several people can edit your site if necessary.

### Getting started

First of all, sit back and think exactly what it is you want to do and how much time you have to do it in. Don't rush in without doing the research, having a plan and setting targets, as an abandoned blog or a Facebook page that is never checked can be bad for your online appearance.

The main social networks to consider include:

- Facebook
- Blogs (such as Wordpress)
- Twitter
- YouTube
- LinkedIn

If you are new to social networking, choose just one network to begin with, create a personal account and have a look around before launching in to a campaign.

For example, on Twitter, create a personal account and follow a few people first – perhaps the BBC, your favourite brands, friends and other people from your local area. See what and how they post and get involved in the conversation before starting your organisation's account.

## **Allocate time**

Choose your network on how much time you have available to maintain it. People expect fast responses to questions posted on most social media sites, Twitter being the fastest, so it needs to be checked often.

If you have only a little time each day to manage your account set up a Facebook page or a YouTube account, where your followers can help with content by posting feedback and messages. The most effective frequency to post on your Facebook Wall is every other day. Of course, better maintained accounts will always be more effective.

Never forget that social media is a conversation! Be prepared for anything people might say. Quickly and publicly responding to a negative comment is a very good way of turning it around.

It also takes time, so remember to allocate time for a member of staff to do the work.

Don't leave it to an intern or the youngest member of staff just because they've used Facebook before; social media marketing should be carried out by a dedicated person and/or have input from more senior members or staff.

## **Consistency**

Make sure your message always follows your overall business strategy and is consistent. Having just one or two people looking after the social media for your company means this can be done more effectively.

## **Running out of content?**

Take a look at what you already have. You don't always have to use brand new content specifically written for your networks. How about e.g. adding old videos to your YouTube account to show where your organisation has come from, post old press releases to your blog from when your organisation started up or post photos from past events.

Explaining your organisation's history can be as effective and interesting as saying what your next plan or campaign will be.

Make sure content production doesn't always fall to whoever is in charge of social media. Get other members of the organisation e.g. to write short blog posts, or to say what they're doing or what they've done for an interesting tweet or Facebook status update.

Include photos and videos – users love multimedia content.

## **Planning and measuring**

Include social media in your marketing campaigns and maintain a social media calendar so account users know when and how to start promoting an event or promotion.

You can record the success of your social media campaigns using various metrics available on each platform. Combine these with Google Analytics on your website for the full picture.

Using a link shortener such as bitly.com allows you to see how many people have followed the links you post and through which website you have posted them on.

There are also many tutorials on the web about the best way to use these networks, [we have some here](#).

### The most popular networks:

**Facebook** allows you to set up a page for your organisation (although be careful not to set up your organisation as an individual or you will miss out on features specifically designed for organisations). Create your own Facebook account and through this you can set up a page and add other people as administrators.

Facebook allows you to post regular messages, news, links, photos, videos and send messages to people who 'like' your page. You can also add extra pages e.g. about specific campaigns, although this is a fairly advanced feature and requires knowledge of HTML.

You can set up a **Wordpress** blog to post regular news for your members, volunteers, clients etc. Wordpress can either be used as a simple blog or you can add static web pages to turn it into quite a complicated website. You can also add your own domain name to the site.

**Twitter** is a fast-moving status-based platform where you can post messages to the world in 140 characters or less. Twitter is now the first place many people go to for the latest news. The most effective use of Twitter is to combine it with a website or blog that provides more static content you can link to, or to provide your followers with updates that can be received, read and replied to quickly.

**YouTube** is the largest video hosting platform in the world. Web users love video and many organisations find it a really useful way to show them what they do. This is where you can be really inventive – post videos of your products, of your group taking part in an activity, of members doing a video news bulletin etc. YouTube has become the second biggest search engine after Google.

**Flickr** is a photo-sharing network. It is not necessarily somewhere that you can build a community for your group or organisation but there are many tools that can be used to link your Flickr account to Facebook etc. Many groups use Flickr to host photos (and videos) of events etc. and then display the feed on other networks and websites.

**LinkedIn** is more of a business network where you can get in touch with individuals in the same field. LinkedIn hosts member-created groups on a huge range of subjects where you can get advice and promote your services, or just give advice to others.

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