Using Social Media:
Practical Hints & Tips

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About this guide

This guide contains some basic information and advice. It is not a comprehensive guide to using social media for business.

The aim of the material is to give you some ideas about how you could use the various social media services, and how to manage the services once you've got them up and running.

Some of the concepts/techniques used in the guide are easy for even non-technical people, and some unfortunately are more difficult.

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What is social media?

Wikipedia – more or less – says

> 'Social media services are computer or smartphone based services that enable the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks.'

The key element of any 'social internet or smartphone service' is interaction between the users of the service. Also key is the interaction between users and the administrators of the part of the service run for and by a company/business.

For example: If you are running a Facebook Page for your business expect comments on your posts and comments on those comments. Comments may be positive or negative. You must be prepared to reply to comments.

Guide

A guide to terms used in this handout

- **Hashtag:**

    - Hashtags are used in a lot of social media services. They look like this '#Todmorden'. They help people to find things on the service. In Twitter for example clicking on a hashtag will bring up a selected list of all tweets that contain that hashtag

    - Unless you are starting some sort of campaign there is very little point in inventing your own hashtags. Location based hashtags work really well. As do activity based hashtags – for example #webdesign. Search your service for hashtags that could work for you

    - Hashtags do work on Facebook BUT very few users actually use the tagging

- **@ mentions/user mentions**

    - Used in social media services to flag a post to another user

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Do you need a website if you have a good social media presence?

That depends.

If you want to:

- Sell something online efficiently and cheaply

- Let people find your business consistently via a search

- Present your products or services in your own way

- Market your business to other businesses

- Market your services outside of a local area

Then you need a website.

"But social media is free and websites are not free" I hear you say.

This isn't true:

- in order to maximise a post reach or show your Facebook Page as a suggested Page you have to pay, and this is happening with Twitter increasingly as well.

  All pure social media services – such as Twitter and Facebook – tailor a users stream. What this means is that they will decide whether a user would be interested in your post. This is based on geographical area, what subjects of post a user has interacted with in the past, and a variety of other criteria that they keep secret. Therefore even a user who has liked and followed your Facebook Page or followed you on Twitter might not see a post.

  You can overcome this through a lot of work or paying a lot in Facebook and Twitter post promotion and advertising. But your time in posting to a set of social media services isn't free either

- You can sell through a Facebook Page but this isn't easy to setup – you have to integrate other services in your Facebook Page – so you may have to pay somebody to do this for you

- Additionally the selling platforms that integrate with Facebook take a fair amount of commission.

So the combination of a website and the free social media services may be cheaper overall.

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If you:

- Are a shop or service that is purely local to your location

- Are not selling products or services online

- Have a huge customer base who are willing to share, share and share your posts again

- Are willing to spend ages making sure that all your social media services are findable from each and every other service

Then you could probably do without a website.

A basic website is therefore a good idea for most businesses and this needn't cost an enormous amount.

A note about domain names

Domain names are part of your branding – they are the address of your website and form part of your email address.

If you getting a website than you will usually need to buy a domain name – this is the address of the website.

Some of the free website builder services offer free website addresses – for example if you use a Wordpress.com 'site' as your website your website address will be of the form XXXXX.wordpress.com. Where XXXXX could be the name of your business.

This can make your website address quite long, difficult to fit on flyers and business cards and hard to remember. Additionally you don't get a branded email address you can use.

By buying your own domain name it can reinforce your brand – both in your email address and website address.

Branding social media

- All social media services are able to be be branded with logos and other appropriate images, a simple search will give you access to templates

- All social media services have descriptive areas where you can add basic or detailed information about your business, contact details, etc. – ensure you fill these in

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Including social media streams on your website

Most social media can be embedded on your website. For example this means that your Facebook posts could be used to show business news on your website.

However this may not be appropriate for your business or your website – you should seek advice on whether this can be done on your site and whether it is appropriate.

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What social media services are available: Services that were designed as social media services

There are 10s of social media services out there, here are some of the services that were designed from the start as social media – and are probably the most useful for business promotion:

Facebook:

- Not the first social media service

- Is now probably one of the most used services

- Its average age of user is now getting older (less young people now use Facebook)

- Has lots of possibly useful ways of getting your information 'out there'. Can be quite labour intensive to run

- If your business target is just Todmorden and your potential customers are older than young adults then Facebook has a number of Todmorden based groups that could help you. Put Todmorden into the Facebook search box to find groups you can join. You should note that groups will have rules about advertising that you'll need to follow – if you don't you may get thrown out!

Google+:

- Google's equivalent of Facebook

- Not used in the UK by that many businesses but worldwide use is increasing slowly. The death of Google+ is widely reported from time to time but it goes on

- Has company/organisations profiles/pages

- It is useful to maintain at least some basic presence on this as Google uses this as a ranking measure in search results

Twitter:

- The service that enables you to reach a huge audience

- Twitter has a higher proportion of younger users – for example although Todmorden has a high number of Facebook users they tend to be older. There is actually a large active community of Twitter users in the Calder Valley. Ignore Twitter at your peril!

- You need to put in the work to get 'Twitter numbers'

- The audience is widewide but there are ways of reaching your potential customers – use hashtags, participate in the various 'hours' (set times when businesses can tweet using a special hashtag – Google 'Twitter Hour' for information), retweet tweets from your potential customers (useful if you are B2B)

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Instagram:

- 'Twitter with pictures and videos'

- Useful if what you do is very visual as a showcase for your work

- Probably not that useful if your business is B2B unless your business and potential customers are visually based

- Uses hashtags and user mentions so you can tag on potential searches by 'the public'

Pinterest:

- Enables you to set up collections of themed images and links

- Is used by businesses but needs a lot of work

- Useful if what you produce can be themed

- However successful business users are not afraid of including things from other businesses in their collections

- Not for B2B businesses

- Most useful for consumer products that are 'attractive' - clothing, crafts, artworks, etc

Linkedin:

- While this is most used to enable networking of individuals, there are company accounts/pages

- Probably most useful for B2B services providing training or consultancy

- It has special interest groups that may be useful to you

- If you can post useful or interesting material to your individual/company page it may lead to interest in your service.

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What social media services are available: Services that have a social aspect and can be used to promote your business

There are other services that were not designed as 'social media' but can be used to promote businesses:

Youtube:

- People share Youtube videos

- Unless you can produce something entertaining about your business, you'll need to be prepared to give something for free – e.g. for electricians how to do basic wiring, for plumbers how to fix dripping taps, for people who train in a craft how to make a basic item

- Unless 'you are your business' use a 'company branded' channel (a channel is a page on Youtube)

- You'll need to share other people's videos as well

- Youtube videos can be shared to other social media either automatically or manually and embedded in websites

Etsy:

- Etsy is a selling platform for mainly handmade/home business produced items. However it has a whole social aspect

- Good for craft product based businesses

Tumblr/Wordpress.com:

- These were designed as a blogging services but posts can be shared and liked

- It's very 'closed' (people don't shared much on Tumblr or Wordpress.com outside of the services)

- Before starting anything on these check to see whether your service/product is the sort of thing that is covered on the services

- Only certain types of businesses use Tumblr as their primary web presence – search Tumblr before you decide to have a presence there

Flickr/500px:

- Picture sharing services. If you can make nice images of your product then sharing them on these may generate interest.

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Podcasting/internet radio:

- The voice/sound equivalent of Youtube

- If you can be entertaining or provide a short programme giving advice on a situation then podcasting may work for you

- Podcasts need to be regular

Messaging services:

- These include Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp

- If your service is advice based and you are prepared to give away some of your service for free then you could set up a group on one of the messaging services to enable people to get basic advice

- You'd need to set rules for advice given and publicise it on some other 'platform' to start off

Which social media services should I use?

There are so many social media services that it can be daunting deciding which services to use.

- Check what other businesses like yours are using – however don't be limited by this. If similar businesses are not using Youtube and you have a brilliant idea that uses it, just do it

- Search the web for demographic information – There is a lot of research available on who is using which services. If you have a fairly good idea of who you want to sell to you can use that information to decide which social media services to use

- Get advice from somebody who knows about social media – even if this costs you money, it may well save the cost of your time in using a service badly or using a service that just isn't useful to you

Don't:

- Try and use too many right from the start – use one or two to start with and then add others

- Be afraid to drop a service if it doesn't work for you

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Facebook: Some tips

- Facebook is much more than the basic Facebook Profile Page you get when you sign up:

- Don't mix personal and business: Don't use your personal profile to promote your business. Your customers don't want to know what your cat/dog/child has done that is amusing or what your political views are. Also some of the linking of services won't work for personal profiles

- ## Facebook Pages:

  - These are like a website on Facebook.

  - Advantages – you can stop comments on posts and stop people posting to your wall

  - There are many other services that you can add into your Page – Polls, document downloads, event systems, etc.

  - Posts on Pages can be scheduled so you can set up a while lot of posts to go out over a period of a few days

  - They have analytics showing reach, post views, etc.

- ## Facebook Groups:

  - Can be public – viewable and joinable by all, semi-public – viewable by all but join by invitation or closed – not publicly viewable, people have to be invited to join or ask to join

  - Could be used for customer support. Or for a free advice service

- **Join and post to Facebook Groups:** There are Facebook Groups for all sorts of things. Or for geographical areas. Do some searching to see whether there's a group that might be useful to you. Be careful though of group rules, some don't allow obvious advertising

- **Linking other social media services to and from Facebook** – most services can be linked to or from. This is usually fairly easy and instructions ca be found by a Google search

  - Be careful what you link into Facebook: Most other social media services can be linked to Facebook – i.e. when you add something to another social media service it can post to your stream automatically. Here for example is a tweet that was posted to Facebook. In Facebook the '@ mentions' and hashtags won't work

    JUNGLE LION return to @thetradeslive back by popular demand Tickets ow.ly/s1Bs30aMkeW @RothTownCentre @Rotherhamis #reggae #ska

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- Twitter will post ALL your tweets, replies and retweets to Facebook – you can't pick and choose. In most cases these will NOT look good on Facebook

- **Be careful what you link to out of Facebook:** Facebook can post to other services when you post BUT certain things don't work. If you want to link Facebook to other services do some testing on what works. For example:

  - If you link Facebook to Twitter and you post an image to Facebook – Twitter will either show a link to the image or the words 'I posted a picture to Facebook' with a link

  - Facebook posts over 140 characters will be cut and a link to the Facebook post will show. Very few people click on Facebook links in Twitter. Make sure you put the important information in the first 100 characters

  - If you include a website link in your post ensure you place the link in the first 120 characters of your post

Reducing the work involved in social media: Some tips

- Post from your website to social media: Most websites can be configured to post to social media when you add a news piece

- Let your customers share from your website: Most websites can have sharing buttons so that customers can share to their social media

- Link social media services: However:

  - Make sure your source post (the place you use as your primary posting place) is formatted correctly for other social media

  - Don't set up circles of posting – make sure you don't link back to your source service

- Use a tool to manage most of your social media in one place: Tools like Hootsuite can mange a wide range of social media services. Enabling you to post to all of them at once, reply to messages, etc.

- Make sure you actually check the other social media you link to: Social media is interactive and you need to reply to people contacting you, share other peoples stuff, etc.

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Measuring your social media success

- Use the built-in analytics: Facebook and Twitter have analytics. For Facebook these are only for Pages. These can track individual posts and track a certain amount of overall stats

- Don't rely on the analytics: You should be able to see what works and what times of the day work just from looking at numbers of views

- Don't be depressed if numbers go down

  - On Twitter at the moment the streams of most people are full of election stuff so views will go down

  - Numbers over weekends and bank holidays can be variable

  - Post when your customers are up – if you have customers outside the UK then ensure you post when they are awake – post scheduling is useful for this

  - See if posting outside of business hours works: You might get more views at times when your competitors are not posting – weekends, bank holidays or late at night for example

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Links

The following are a small selection of useful links. Business user guides for social media services can be found via a search.

Facebook for businesses: https://www.facebook.com/business/
Scroll to bottom of the page for links to user guides

Twitter for businesses: https://business.twitter.com/en.html

A guide to setting up Youtube for your business: http://sproutsocial.com/insights/how-to-create-youtube-account/
Also includes setting up Google+

Google+ for businesses: https://blog.hootsuite.com/create-a-google-plus-page/

Instagram: https://business.instagram.com/?locale=en_GB

Pinterest guide for businesses: http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/7552-pinterest-business-guide.html

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