 

**Lairg and District Learning Centre**

**Business Start Up Guide**

**Using Social Media for Your Business**

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This guide aims to equip you with a broad understanding of social media and will cover the basics of what social media is and how social media can be used by businesses to engage with current or prospective customers. It touches on the different roles played by different social media channels and how engagement differs between these channels.

**Staying safe online**

As we are talking all about digital, let’s start by thinking about the kinds of information you might already be sharing about yourself online.

**What is your ‘digital footprint’?**

Your ‘digital footprint’ is the information you share about yourself online. Lots of people use social media to share information and talk with friends, family and colleagues. It’s worth checking what people can find out about you. Why not take a moment to open do a Google search of your own name? Any surprises? If you see anything unexpected or that makes you feel unsafe, go back and review the privacy settings on your accounts.

Maintaining a positive digital footprint can even help you when applying for a job. So it’s not just about safety, it’s about your reputation in a digital world.

**Your Data Online**

It is also possible to check and get a hold of the data that different social platforms have on you. You will be surprised at the amount of data that is out there, so it is important to be mindful of what you share and with who.

To check your data on Facebook, follow the instructions in this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/help/1701730696756992/?helpref=hc_fnav>

To check and get a copy of all the data that Google has on you, follow the instructions in this link:

<http://takeout.google.com/settings/takeout>

**What is Social Media?**

Social media is tools, websites, applications and is a collective of online communications channels which are dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration.

There are many different types of social media channels, including websites and applications which are dedicated to forums, blogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation.

Social Media provides businesses and individuals with a powerful tool for marketing products, services, and initiatives, and for building a receptive, engaged audience. I will outline the ways in which social media can be used to achieve business and professional goals.

Social media allows businesses to communicate via an interactive, two-way medium compared to traditional one-sided mediums such as tv, radio, and print. Social media has brought companies much closer to their customers; dialogues can now be established which brings with it major challenges and opportunities.

Here are some prominent examples of social media:

**Facebook** is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. According to statistics from the Nielsen Group, Internet users spend more time on Facebook than any other website.

**Twitter** is a free microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets. Twitter members can broadcast tweets and follow other users' tweets by using multiple platforms and devices.

**LinkedIn** is a social networking site designed specifically for the business community. The goal of the site is to allow registered members to establish and document networks of people they know and trust professionally.

**Pinterest** is a social curation website for sharing and categorising images found online. Pinterest requires brief descriptions but the main focus of the site is visual. Clicking on an image will take you to the original source, so, for example, if you click on a picture of a pair of shoes, you might be taken to a site where you can purchase them. An image of blueberry pancakes might take you to the recipe; a picture of a whimsical birdhouse might take you to the instructions. They're all great for sharing, creating, content, videos, ideas, pictures, even your opinions of what you have for breakfast. And you see all these things every day that help you build those networks across the world.

These are all things that we use in our everyday life—Facebook was released in 2004, Twitter in 2006, Instagram in 2010, and even Snapchat just more recently-- all of these things, you are probably using on a daily basis. But now, it's becoming more and more prevalent to see these networks become established in big business. How can these be relevant for the business world of today? That's what we're going to look at.

**Interesting fact!**

If you think about the last 60 seconds or so, there have been over 276,000 tweets, 246,000 Facebook posts, with 1.8 million likes, and 72 hours of YouTube video uploaded, and about 120 LinkedIn members. Now that is a serious amount of information, insights and data that businesses can make the most use of.

What are the benefits of using social media for business? Consider that there are now more than 3 billion people using social networks across the globe.

And these people are using social to engage with businesses. Let’s look at the many ways in which social media can help you connect, engage, and grow your business.

**Benefits of social media for brand building**

**1. Increase brand awareness**

With nearly half of the world’s population using social media platforms, they’re a natural place to reach new and highly targeted potential customers.

Think people only connect with brands they already know on social media? Consider that 60 percent of Instagram users say they discover new products on the platform.

**2. Humanise your brand**

A UK study from Trinity Mirror Solutions found that more than half of adults do not trust a brand until they see “real-world proof” that the brand is keeping its promises.

To connect with customers—and potential customers—you’ve got to show the human side of your brand. How are you embracing your brand values? (Do you even have brand values?) How are you looking out for the best interests of your customers and employees? Does your product really work?

The ability to create real human connection is one of the key benefits of social media for business. Introduce your followers to the people who make up your company and showcase how existing customers are using and benefiting from your products.

**3. Establish your brand as a thought leader**

No matter what industry your business is in, social media offers the opportunity to establish your brand as a thought leader—the go-to source for information on topics related to your niche.

Thought leadership is a great way to build consumer trust.

LinkedIn is a great social network to focus on when aiming to establish yourself as a thought leader.

**4. Stay top of mind**

Most social media users log into their accounts at least once per day, but many people are checking social multiple times per day.

Social media gives you to the opportunity to connect with fans and followers every time they log in. Keep your social posts entertaining and informative, and your followers will be glad to see your new content in their feeds, keeping you top of mind so you’re their first stop when they’re ready to make a purchase.

**Benefits of social media for growth**

Social Media is a great tool for not only developing your business’ brand but also to help you to grow your business.

**1. Increase website traffic**

Social media posts and ads are key ways to drive traffic to your website. Sharing great content from your blog or website to your social channels is a great way to get readers as soon as you publish a new post

Offer great value in the chat, rather than being too promotional. Just make sure your website address is included in all of your social media profiles so that people who want to learn more about you can do so with one easy click. By using a pinned post to highlight your website can allow potential customers to quickly find and visit your website.

**2. Generate leads**

Social media offers an easy and low-commitment way for potential customers to express interest in your business and your products. Lead generation is such an important benefit of social media for business that many social networks offer advertising formats specifically designed to collect leads.

**3. Boost sales**

No matter what you sell, social media can help you sell it. Your social accounts are a critical part of your sales funnel. This is the process through which a new contact becomes a customer.

As the number of people using social media continues to grow and social sales tools evolve, social networks will become increasingly important for product search and ecommerce.

**4. Partner with influencers**

Word of mouth drives 20 to 50 percent of purchasing decisions. When you get people talking about your product or company on social media, you build brand awareness and credibility, and set yourself up for more sales.

One key way to drive social word of mouth is to partner with influencers—people who have a large following on social media and can draw the attention of that following to your business.

**Benefits of social media for content creation and distribution**

**1. Promote content**

Promoting your content on social channels is a great way to get your smart, well-researched content in front of new people, proving your expertise and growing your audience.

To maximise the social media for business benefits, make sure to have a content marketing plan in place.

**2. Source content**

There are two key ways businesses can source content on social media:

1. **Source ideas:** Ask your followers what they want, or engage in social listening, to come up with ideas for content you can create yourself. Put simply: Give people what they’re asking for. It’s a sure way to create content that people will want to read and share.
2. **Source material for posts:** Create a contest or use a hashtag to source user-generated content (UGC) you can share. Getting your followers involved can build excitement about your brand while also providing you with a library of social posts to share over time.

Just how much content can you get through a UGC campaign? National Geographic used the hashtag #waderlustcontest, which has generated more than 60,000 posts.

**3. Going viral!**

As people start liking, commenting on, and sharing your social posts, your content is exposed to new audiences—their friends and followers. Going viral takes this concept one step further. As people share your content with their networks, and their networks follow suit, your content spreads across the internet, getting thousands or even millions of shares.

This exposure is especially beneficial because all those shares, likes, and comments show an existing connection with your brand. If I see that my friend likes your article, I may be inclined to check out what you have to say, even if I’ve never heard of your company before. In a world where there is far more content than any one person could ever consume, a friend’s social share acts as a kind of pre-screening.

Going viral is not something you can choose to do but without social media it would be next to impossible to reach the number of people that you can potential reach, through using social media.

**Benefits of social media for communication**

**1. Reputation management**

Your customers are already talking about you on social media, whether or not you’re there to respond. If you and your team are on the ball, you can pick up on important social posts about your brand to highlight the positive and address the negative before it turns into a major issue.

Is someone saying something about your business that’s not true? Be sure to share your side of the story in a polite, professional way. Someone singing your praises? Send them plenty of thanks and draw attention to their kind words.

**2. Crisis communication**

Does your company have a plan in place for dealing with a crisis? While smaller brands may not have a crisis blow up to such a large scale, a smaller number of shares can have a devastating impact within a tight-knit community or niche.

Silence is not an option when it comes to responding to crises on social media. Maintaining well-run and managed social accounts and having a plan in place can help make sure you’re present and ready to engage if the worst occurs.

**3. Customer and audience engagement**

Social networks give you the opportunity to interact directly with customers and fans, and likewise give them the chance to interact directly with your brand. Unlike traditional media, which offers only one-way communication, social media is a two-way street.

If you want customers and followers to be engaged, you have to be engaged yourself. Stay active and respond to comments and questions on your own social media posts in a way that’s appropriate to your brand.

You can also use social media monitoring to keep an eye on what people are saying across the social web.

**4. Customer service and customer support**

People expect brands to be available on social media and seek out their social accounts for customer service. Research published in the Harvard Business Review shows that brands who don’t meeting those expectations damage their bottom line.

The HBR research, which specifically looks at Tweets, shows that customers who receive a response to their Tweet would be willing to spend more with the brand on a later purchase, especially if they get a response within five minutes. That holds true even when the initial Tweet was a flat-out complaint.

**Benefits of social media for gaining insights**

**1. Monitor conversations that are relevant to your brand**

We mentioned social media monitoring above as an important element of audience engagement. But it’s also important as a key source of intelligence about your brand, your competitors, and your niche.

**2. Learn more about your customers**

Social media generates a huge amount of data about your customers in real time. You can use that information to make smarter business decisions.

All of the major social networks offer analytics that provide demographic information about the people interacting with your account. This can help you tailor your strategy to better speak to your real audience.

**3. Gauge sentiment around your brand**

Lots of mentions is a good thing? This might be true in many cases. But if you’re getting lots of mentions with a negative sentiment, you need to do some quick thinking to work out what’s gone wrong and address the problem.

While it’s important to know how much people are talking about your brand online, it’s also important to know how people actually feel about your brand.

Using social media for your business allows you to stay on top of what people are thinking and feeling about your company.

**4. Keep an eye on the competition**

It’s also important to know what people are saying about your competitors.

For example, tracking mentions of your competitors might reveal issues with their products or services that you could reach out to address, winning new customers in the process.

Monitoring the competition on social media also means you’ll be aware when you competitors launch new products, run promotions, and release new reports or data.

**5. Stay on top of industry news**

In the online world, things move fast—and you can’t afford to be left behind. By keeping a virtual ear to the ground, makes sure you’re always informed about upcoming changes to your industry that could affect the way you do business.

**Benefits of social media for advertising**

**1. Targeted advertising**

Social ads are an inexpensive way to promote your business and distribute content. They also offer powerful targeting options so you can reach the right audience and make the most of your budget.

With ad targeting options including demographic information, geography, language, and even online behaviours, you can craft specific messages that best speak to different groups of potential customers, and only pay for the exact viewers you want to reach.

**2. Retargeting**

Nearly 70 percent of online shopping carts are abandoned.

People who have abandoned products in a shopping cart are prime potential customers. They have already found your website, browsed your products, and made a decision about what they might want. People abandon shopping carts for many reasons, but someone who has expressed this degree of interest in your company should not be ignored.

Using tracking tools like the Facebook Pixel, you can show these potential customers social media ads for the exact products they have browsed on your website or placed in the shopping cart.

**Benefits of social media for proving ROI**

**1. Reporting and analytics**

It is always a challenge for marketers to prove return on investment (ROI). With social media tracking and analytics tools, you can see the full impact of your social media activities, from follows to engagements right through to purchases.

Tools like Google Analytics and Hootsuite Impact track website traffic generated from social media, conversions, email sign-ups, and ROI for both organic and paid social media campaigns.

As we can see from this guide social media is a powerful tool that can be used by businesses to help connect and interact with customers, carry out marketing and gaining insights, on both your own business, your competition and how customers are feeling about company. Without social media it would be a lot more difficult to gather this data and to create a direct connection with your customers.