

Creating engaging content for social media

This Briefing can help your voluntary group make the most of social media as a marketing tool. It describes the benefits of creating content that people value, as well as how to measure your impact against what you have done in the past, and other groups similar to yours.



It mostly focuses on Facebook and Twitter. However, many of the principles still apply for other popular platforms such as Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, Vine, Google+, etc. Although different techniques are required to get the best out of these other social media platforms, the principles of great content and engagement remain the same.

A. Creating content that actually gets seen

Before deciding what content to post, it's important to consider why people use social media. If you can tap into the why, then you're already half way to creating an effective strategy that works.

People go on sites such as Facebook and Twitter because they like to interact with or observe what's happening with their friends, families and communities.

These communities can be both communities of interest as well as geographical communities. They even occasionally like to follow brands and businesses because they support their goals, hope to find special deals, or want to get the latest news and information or a 'backstage pass' to what's going on behind the scenes.

This is no less true when it comes to your voluntary arts or craft group. If people have given your social media presence a 'thumbs up' or a 'like', then you have their permission to communicate useful, entertaining, informed and educational content to them. However, the big 'thumbs up' does not give you permission to bore, annoy or confuse them.

Too many voices

Even if you have set everything up correctly and you have a loyal following, there's still some work to do. Facebook has become so successful that most people have an average of 330 friends and 'like' around a dozen brands or organisations. The problem is that if all these friends spoke at once on the same day, their newsfeed would be packed full of noise.

Instead, Facebook and other social media platforms try to make your newsfeed a pleasant and useful place to spend time. It selects the material from people for whom you have most recently indicated you value.

For example, if Great Uncle Jock posts about his prize chickens and you tend to actively click 'like' on most things he posts, chances are you will continue to see his updates. However, if Aunt Tess posts gossip from her bowling club, you may not actively 'like' her posts. Therefore, Facebook won't carry on showing them to you.

Edgerank – the 'selection process'

This selection process – 'Edgerank' to use its technical term – is not managed by humans but by computers working with mathematical algorithms.

The pages or people you are most likely to see are the ones that you have tended to 'like', comment on or share in the past. This means that if you have clicked 'like' on the International Feltmakers' Association's Facebook page, but subsequently not actively 'liked' anything they posted, you will be very unlikely to see any future posts, unless one or two have been particularly popular.

Nowadays, the 'reach' on most Facebook posts by brands or organisations can be as low as three per cent. In other words, if you have one hundred fans and you put up a post, only three people will actually see that post. If those three people actively 'like' the post, then the reach of that post is slightly increased.

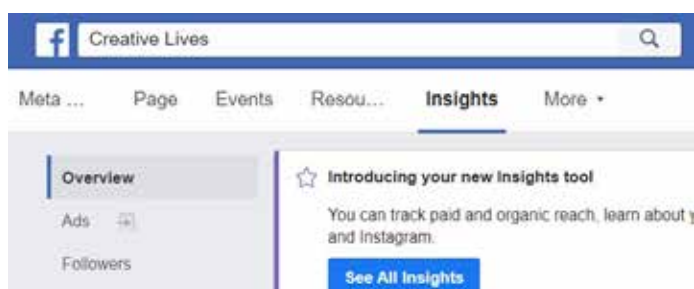
Therefore, putting up great content that will be actively appreciated by your target community becomes much more important. If you are not getting good engagement (clicks, likes, comments or shares) on each post then according to the Facebook algorithms, you are not providing 'value'. The assumption therefore is that your organisation is 'spamming', by putting out content that nobody appreciates.

On the other hand, if you put out content that people look forward to, appreciate and share willingly, and which nurtures comments and discussion, then Facebook will assume you are disseminating quality and value that your community genuinely appreciates. When your group puts up content that achieves some great engagement, Facebook will show your content to more people both within your Facebook fanbase, and those loosely connected to it.

In other words, if your group does a good job of putting up quality content then instead of only 100 people seeing your content, more than 100,000 might see it.

B. Engagement rates on Facebook

A great engagement rate on Facebook is three per cent. This means that three per cent of your fans have actively engaged (liked, commented, shared or clicked) on your Facebook page over the last seven days.



The way to discover your Facebook page's engagement rate is to click on 'Insights' at the top of your page.

This will open up to a page that tells you how healthy your page is.

On this page, look at the 'Engagement' number. This is the number of people liking, commenting on, sharing or clicking on your posts over the last seven days.

Post engagement

20 July - 26 July

197

Post engagement ▲ 186%



This example shows that 71 people have engaged with the page over the last seven days. Therefore, as a percentage of the overall total of fans (1,740), you can see that this page has an engagement rate of around four per cent – a good week in which the page is delivering value to its community that they appreciate.

Try this...

Check out some other brand company or organisational pages to see how well they are delivering value to their communities on Facebook. Click on the follower number on their page to see the number of people talking about the page compared with the number of page 'likes'. Even with extraordinarily high numbers, if the engagement rate is less than three per cent they are not making the most of Facebook.

B. Engagement rates on Facebook

Here are some tips to creating posts that stand a better chance of engagement:

1. Post at a time when most of your followers are online

To find out when that might be, go to the Insights tab on your Facebook page. Then look at the Posts tab to get all the information you need on optimum posting times.

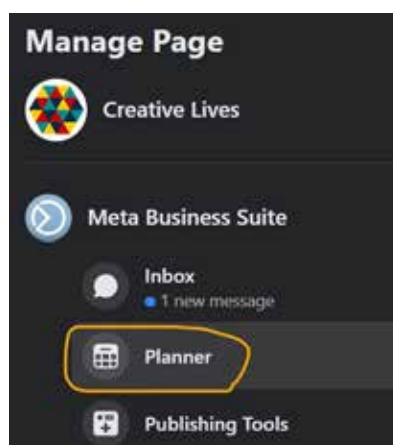
When you hover the cursor over each day, you will find the chart changes.



According to the above page, the best time to post would be anytime between 9am and 2pm. That's when most of the fans of that page are actually online. Conversely, the worst times to post would be between 3pm and 8am the next day on most days.

On this particular page, it is clear that the quietest days to post are at the weekends. However, many pages find that weekends can be the best times to post. The trick is to keep an eye on your analytics to work out what's best for your particular followers.

If your optimum time to post is at 8pm, you don't have to sit around waiting for the due moment and cancel your dinner plans. Instead you can use Facebook's scheduling tool shown in the menu on the lefthand side of your page.



Click to open, then select the date and time you wish the post to be published. If you like, you can schedule your content for days and weeks ahead. However, it is essential to keep an eye on the page to see if anyone has asked a question or has left a comment which you may need to respond to.

2. Post personally

When you put up a post ask yourself the following questions: Will people value this post? Will it make them think / laugh / cry? Is it useful for your community?

Putting up content on social media is good. But giving a context and curating that content well is even better. Here is an example of a post we shared on the Creative Lives Facebook page, which encouraged engagement with us.



3. Ask questions

A sure-fire way to get some type of engagement is to ask people questions.

4. Brevity is the soul of wit

If you can keep your posts and comments short, this has a greater appeal to a time-pressed audience.

5. Call to action

After your follower has read your post, let them know what to do next. Unless you tell them, they will just fade away. Instead, ask them to 'click the link', 'share with friends', donate, book a ticket etc.

6. Images tell a thousand words

Social media is a very visual place. Posts with images are twice as likely to be seen and engaged with. For example, rather than telling your followers about the wonderful event in the town centre, share photos and videos of the participants, the responses etc.

7. Inspirational quotes

These can be straight text or text on an image. They might not have anything directly to do with the organisation but the quotes can reflect the values you hold. Plus they regularly get good responses.

8. Competitions

Set up a competition that offers relevant prizes that appeal specifically to your community (don't, for example, offer a tablet computer as a prize, as you may get a lot of random people liking your page who will never again engage).

9. Challenges

People love to help out a good cause. Can you think of a fun and relevant way people can participate in raising funds for your organisation? And send in photos or videos to prove it. These ideas can get good engagement and lead to an increased awareness of what your organisation is trying to achieve within your target community. Two recent examples are the

'Ice-Bucket Challenge' to raise money for the Motor Neurone Disease Association or the 'No Make-Up Challenge' for Cancer Research.

10. Testimonials from beneficiaries

There's nothing quite like receiving some kind of validation from your target audience. This can be a quotation with their photo, or a video of them talking about how your organisation helped them to achieve something.



Coming to this creative group makes you feel so much better mentally, physically.



11. List posts

These perform surprisingly well. Simple and straightforward to create, they compel followers to continue reading right to the end. Examples could include, 'Ten ways to volunteers with us'. 'Five ways Lady Gaga inspires needlecraft'. Or '50 ways [your group] makes [this community] stronger'.

12. Conduct research

Ask your social media followers questions about their preferences and opinions. Often the results can be sporadic but sometimes this kind of interaction can generate an idea for a whole new project or campaign.



For example, do they want more or less content from you? Do they agree with the new community centre being built? How can your organisation help make the town/village/city a better place?

13. Recruit staff and volunteers

Social media can be a very productive place to find and publish paid and unpaid jobs. Even if you only have five followers, those five could share that content with their communities, who in turn share with their communities and so on.

For example, Taigh Chearsabhagh, in the tiny Western Isle of North Uist, advertised for a part-time Arts Development Worker. It touched the imagination of so many people, that a total of 22,000 Facebook visitors saw the advert through thousands of 'shares'. Needless to say, they were inundated with applications from around the world.

14. Special events

People love to hear about interesting or fun events in their area. Even if they can't make it along themselves they may share it with their friends and family.

Facebook Business offers a learning hub with useful how-to advice (video and written guidance), including how to set up an event on Facebook available at

www.facebook.com/business/learn/lessons/get-started-with-events

15. Offers and discounts

There's nothing like a great deal to attract people's attention, and encourage them to share the post with their community. Could you introduce any two-for-one or buy-one-get-one-free offers or 'early bird' discounts?

16. Updates from the blog

Could you arrange for Board members, staff, volunteers or participants to contribute to a blog? It helps spread the work of writing content and captures people's passions in a way in which others can relate. Remember, a blog entry can be a short article or video, series of photos or slides, etc. The possibilities are endless.

17. Check your analytics

The best way to continually create effective content is to check what has worked in the past. Go to the 'Insights' tab on your group's Facebook page, then the 'Posts' section. Scroll down to 'All Posts Published' to find precisely how many people saw each post and engaged with it. For Twitter, go to analytics.twitter.com and click on the Tweets tab then the 'Top Tweets' link. You will quickly see the posts that tend to get the most engagement, and therefore the best reach. Once you figure out what works best, do more of it!

18. Tag your advocates

Every group has a core circle of advocates who would be delighted to share the good news coming out from the group. Tag them by adding an @ symbol in front of their Facebook or Twitter name so that the information shows up in their timeline.

19. Share with Creative Lives

Finally, Creative Lives is here to help you share the good news of how voluntary arts groups benefit local communities. If you tag us in a Facebook or Twitter update using @CreativeLivesCL, or email us at info@creative-lives.org, we will happily help spread the word.

Conclusion

The key to social media is to be social. You get back what you give out. Therefore, if you regularly support other related organisations and people in your community, chances are that when you need help to get the news out, they will be happy to oblige. The key here is to think of social media as a social tool, not a 'broadcasting-all-about-us' tool.

Having an active and engaging group Facebook page and/or Twitter profile can boost engagement with potential participants, volunteers, audiences and the media, but you might need some additional help to manage this.

To find out more about recruiting volunteers and the support available, visit Arts Volunteering section on our website www.creative-lives.org

Acknowledgements

This Briefing has been written in collaboration with Fin Wycherley, of Supersize Media – a social media and design consultancy based in Edinburgh that works with small to medium sized organisations, businesses and entrepreneurs.

Supersize Media

Fin Wycherley teaches teams and individuals how to build an engaging and profitable business presence online using social media marketing. Find out more at www.supersizemedia.co.uk

Further resources

Creative Lives Briefings

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