



Thirty tips to help you get the most from social media

Social media is not just a fad! It's a fundamental shift in the way we communicate, so it's important for voluntary and community sector organisations to be part of the conversation.

Millions of people use social media platforms in their personal lives, but when applied to organisational rather than individual use, the term 'Social Media' can conjure up a vast daunting landscape for many of the smaller voluntary and community sector organisations. And yet it offers a great, cost-effective way for organisations to connect with new supporters and tell them about how their work is making a difference.

So, whether you're a complete novice or you're already active on social media at home and simply want some ideas on how to use it to promote your work, this collection of 30 tips aims to help you get the most from social media for your organisation.

What can social media do for my organisation?

1: Help you keep in touch with existing supporters and engage with new audiences

Shared values and causes can hold communities together. Social media offer opportunities to bring together and engage with individuals who share your values, and will hopefully support your cause. Sharing good content on your platforms will allow you to scale up your communications to reach far more people than more traditional forms of marketing can, and help you to build relationships with new as well as existing audiences in real time far quicker than you could otherwise do.

2: Help build your brand

Think about your online brand presence as a spider's web, with your own website at the centre as your base for managing your social media activity. If you link great social media content to your website activity then, like a spider, you can draw in to your website those people who have been engaged by your interesting and timely social media content. With good content, you never know how far your brand will reach. If it goes viral you will have tens of thousands of people looking and sharing. And of course 'brand presence' is no longer just about pushing your logo out everywhere. With social media, it is just as much about people, voice and relationships.

3: Help raise awareness

Social media is a great way to raise awareness of your cause, to make the case for change and to make it easy for your supporters to take action. The most successful campaigns have a clear message aimed at a specific audience. Think [Movember](#) – a campaign about men's health that went viral, Scope's [End the Awkward](#) campaign, or the [No Makeup Selfie](#) campaign that raised £8m for Cancer Research, even though the charity itself didn't actually start the campaign. Good ideas like these can spread like wildfire.

4: Help you to fundraise

It isn't social networking sites themselves which raise money; it's the people who use them. Social media simply offers opportunities for organisations to nurture strong relationships that will allow

them to encourage supporters to donate. If you're going to be doing a sponsored fun run or organising a tea party to raise funds for instance, you could talk about getting fit on social media, or about the chance to meet other people from your area and make the ask as part of your content. Or you could talk about a particularly emotive case study and link your content to a JustGiving account or a page on your own website where you make it easy for people to donate.

5: Save you money

Traditional media is generally a one-way street with limited reach. You read leaflets, posters and press ads, listen to radio and watch TV but there are only very limited ways for people to give their thoughts. Social media is a two-way conversation online that available on 24/7, offers unlimited reach, and is free (nearly - you can boost your content to a carefully targeted audience for relatively small amounts)! Creating a profile on the vast majority of social media sites costs absolutely nothing, although developing and maintaining the site can be costly in terms of time – particularly in the early days (However, managing traditional marketing campaigns take time too). Also, social media is all about 'word of mouth'. If your content is good, your supporters will share it and so, in effect, it's about referrals, which every marketer knows is the best form of advertising.

6: Help you to manage a crisis

Crises come in many forms: from fire, flood or other natural disasters to the sudden death of a Chair or CEO, from cyber-attacks or data breaches to complaints on social media that suddenly get wildly out of hand. Whatever the crisis, there needs to be as short a delay as possible in telling your stakeholders, even if your information at the early stage of the crisis is incomplete. Using social media is an ideal way of responding rapidly with open and honest communications. Organisations that try to cover up or delay informing stakeholders about the crisis are generally criticized more afterwards for their delay than for the incident itself. And if the crisis is one that affects your physical place of work, like flooding or fire, then social media is something you can access from anywhere.

How can we get started?

7: Start with a social media strategy

Writing a social media strategy before you begin that defines your audience, what you want to achieve, and how you will do it is absolutely essential. Ask yourself a range of questions, such as: Who do you want to reach? What do they already know about you? What social media platforms are they using? What do you want to accomplish? What is your unique selling point (USP)? What key points do you want to get across? What resources do you have (including time)? How will your new social media strategy support and add value to your main organisational strategy? Who will be responsible for creating and posting your content? How can it help your team in their roles?

8: Decide how you can showcase your organisation at its best

You have the power to decide how you want people to see your organisation. Should your image be quirky, formal or professional? Think about your key messages, your tone of voice and any particular images you could use. What do you want them to convey? How do they fit with your brand? How can they help you to achieve your campaign goals? People are much more likely to follow and engage with your organization if they feel they're actually engaging with a real person, so use real people on your social media profiles rather than simply your logo.

9: Choose your platforms

Although it's tempting to sign up to as many free accounts as you can, you need to keep in mind that keeping them all up to date can be very time consuming and so it makes sense to limit the accounts you set up to those that will do you the most good. For example, Twitter is a good platform for campaigning and engaging with key influencers, Facebook is great for creating communities and encouraging conversations, and LinkedIn is the place to be to make connections in the private sector. Instagram is best for sharing high quality images with engaged audiences, YouTube for posting short, snappy and funny videos, and Pinterest is great for creating and collecting visual pieces of multimedia. If you work with young people, then [take heed of the message from one 15 year old](#) who spent a week doing work experience with nfpSynergy and was asked to write a report and a blog on his experience of social media and how charities can use it to engaging with young people.

10: Listen

What's a conversation without listening? Remember, it's not all about you. If you want to join in a conversation you need to listen to what's already being said. And if you want to spark a new conversation, you still need to listen first to find out what people are interested in talking about. So take some time to learn the etiquette of your chosen platform, find out what other VCS organisations in the same sector are saying first, and find some relevant conversations to join in with.

11: Jump in!

To get a feel for it, start by replying to those sharing information about topics your organisation is interested in, strike up conversations with key stakeholders. Take it to the next step by posting about your upcoming events to get people there, or posting great photos during or after the event and thank people for getting involved. Post links to stories you think your followers might find interesting. Celebrate your achievements by announcing any awards you receive etc. Don't worry if you don't get it right first time – everyone on social media had to start somewhere.

12: Continue to participate

Aim to post something new weekly. Continue adding events, sharing links to blog posts and press releases. Ask for and give recommendations. Ask and answer questions. Take part in group discussions. The more you participate, the more you'll build credibility and trust within your area of work/speciality. But be careful not to overshare. Your message is far-reaching and generally speaking, once it's out there, there is very little you can do to retrieve it.

What can we use for content?

13: Keep it relevant, valuable and interesting

Ultimately, you want readers to see your content, read it, like it, comment on it and then share it with their own followers, so it's worth taking the time and effort to create and deliver content. Get it right and the return on investment can be amazing. However, making your content interesting enough so that people want to view it and engage with it can be difficult and time-consuming.

14: Questions, questions, questions

Proactively engaging with existing supporters by asking questions is a great way of opening up the lines of communication for new audiences and those who want to make direct contact with you. Why not reach out to your supporters with Q&As or polls based on the work you do and then build

your content around the responses you get. That way, people will feel an investment in your content. They are then more likely to be happy to help share the content on numerous social networks so they can continue to be part of the wider process.

15: Say it with images

Use pictures to make your content stand out. It's been said that one picture is worth ten thousand words and it's true that on social media it's images, videos and human reactions that really bring your work to life. Case studies told through eye-catching, inspiring or emotive images can help forge deeper, more emotional connections with your supporters. Donations will be more forthcoming too if people can see that their contribution could help somebody just like themselves or people they know. Potential volunteers are more likely to get involved if they can picture the people they will help.

16: Become a trusted source

If you are a specialist organisation or have expert knowledge, then tell the world. If you regularly create and share compelling content that will help your followers, your credibility and reputation will grow and you will become a trusted resource that your followers know they can look to when they need help or have a question.

17: Employ the rule of thirds

Hootsuite advises using the '[rule of thirds](#)' – all you need to remember is that one third of your content should be about your own organisation's work, one third should be content relevant to your organisation and your audience and the final third should involve talking to your audience.

18: Be generous

The best way to make friends on social media is to help others promote their own events, share their news and celebrate their achievements. In return, they're then far more likely to like what you say, comment on it and then share your content with their own followers.

How can we manage it all?

19: Create an editorial calendar

Knowing what you'll say and when you'll say it saves time so you can get other important things done, and having a clear plan can solve the problem of getting stuck when inspiration fails. Using a calendar also allows you to schedule your messages for optimal times – increasing the odds they'll get seen – and helps to make sure you're on track with deadlines. Having an editorial calendar means you can plan ahead around key events such as Christmas, Easter and whatever awareness days /weeks are relevant for your work. It can ensure you create variety in your content rather than getting stuck focusing on one channel. There are lots of examples of editorial calendar templates that are available to download from the internet.

20: Integrate your social media with your other communications

This can be as easy as timing communications to go out over different channels at the same time. For instance, you could launch a press release, an online video, a Twitter hashtag and a Facebook campaign all at the same time to maximise your impact. You could set up a Hootsuite or Buffer account to schedule social media content in advance across multiple platforms, although you mustn't forget to still check regularly to see if you have any feedback from your followers.

21: Always include a call to action

Calls to action encourage followers to dig deeper into your organisation. Of course, each social media platform has its own calls to action— think Facebook’s ‘Share’ or the Twitter ‘re-tweet’ buttons – that can help to spread your word and do your campaign the world of good. But consider the spider’s web analogy again: to attract people into the centre of the web – your own website – in order to build your brand, you need to include links in your content itself that will take them to a specific destination. It’s all very well engaging people with great text and pulling their heart strings with wonderful images, but if there is no call to action your efforts will be wasted. So think about what you want followers to do when they view your content – donate, register for an event, sign a petition etc. – and make it easy for them by taking them to a place where they can do just that.

22: Give staff and volunteers clear guidelines on what they can and can’t say and do

You need to decide yourself whether it’s better for your particular organisation if its people have individual social media accounts, which can become difficult to control and measure, or if there will simply be a common organisational account. There are very definite plusses to having individual accounts though, in that people are more likely to engage with real people, with real personalities, but there are negatives too. For instance, you do need to be sure that they are behaving appropriately in a way that fits with your brand. Having guidelines that cover these issues makes good sense so that keeping up organisational social media does not bleed too much into the personal and dilute your brand messages.

23: Be realistic about your resources

Social media does not stick to normal business hours; it’s 24/7. Some organisations are prepared to monitor their accounts at any time of day or night, whilst others fit it in when they can. If you fit into the latter group, then you need to set expectations so your supporters know to expect a delayed response – try pinning community guidelines to the top of your page. Also, be realistic about the time commitment you really need to make to do social media properly and allocate the resource for it. Once you’ve built up a following, there’s nothing worse than having only outdated information on there and no new content for months.

24: Keep your profile updated

As more people look to social media to find out information about organisations, it’s vital that your social media profile is current and professional so you don’t waste the opportunity to promote your organisation and gain new supporters. Keep it up to date with contact details, projects, awards etc. to give viewers as much information about your organisation as they need to prompt them to engage with you.

How can we measure our success?

25: Think about your overall aims

Think about what you need to be able to report on. This could be the number of signatures on a petition, the amount of money raised, or the number of volunteer recruited. Whatever it is, use this language to create SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) goals, be specific about how social media can help you and how you will measure it.

26: Take a snapshot of your starting point

Benchmark where you stand right at the start of any campaign, so you will know what to measure activity against later. Don’t just think about the obvious, such as existing Facebook friends and

Twitter followers, referrals you've had already from social media, and website traffic etc. Also consider things like SEO (search engine optimisation) rankings and referrals and customer satisfaction scores, as well as the return on investment you've had before using traditional marketing methods.

27: Use a URL shortener

A URL shortener is an online application that converts a regular URL (the web address that starts with http://) into its condensed format. [Bit.ly](#) and [Goo.gl](#) are good examples. There are several advantages to using a shortener: not only will they save on characters in sites like Twitter (which limits posts to only 140 characters) and can usually be customised to link with your campaign, you can also access metrics via the shortened link to keep track on activity through the link.

28: Take advantage of the other metrics available

There are a whole host of other tools available to help you measure the impact of your social media efforts. Many of the main social media networks have their own analytics, including [Facebook Insights](#) and [Twitter analytics](#). Then there are other tools such as [Hootsuite](#), [Tweetreach](#), [Buffer](#) and many more. [Google Analytics](#) offers the option of setting up a personalised dashboard that will keep track of the goals critical to your business via URLs, time, pages per visit, or events. It will measure not only how much traffic is coming to your website via social media but also what people are doing as a result, and you can print the results to show in pounds and pence the real impact your social media efforts are having.

29: Get your board on board

Think about how your reporting could encourage your board or management team to support social media. Don't only present them with the raw data. Instead, use the data to tell the story – as with traditional forms of marketing, it's always more effective to illustrate the real impact of a campaign through case studies of the people you've helped, so tell stories about individual supporters' journeys that have involved social media.

30: Don't forget, not everything that can be measured matters

Einstein said, "Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts". Just because you can report a number, doesn't mean you always should. In social media it can be easy to get carried away with statistics like follower growth, but they may not be the best way to demonstrate achievement towards your organisational or project aims – particularly if this activity is not then being converted into measures of real success such as funds raised or volunteer recruitment. If you're not careful, you may miss the signs that something is not working, which is why it is always best to measure both on and offline metrics and to only report the numbers you can take action on.

In putting together these 30 tips to help you get the most from social media, we have relied on some invaluable resources, the main ones being from [CharityComms](#), [NCVO's KnowhowNonprofit](#), [Inspiria Media](#) and [Kiss Metrics](#). Thank you to all of these organisations for providing such a wealth of information.