

Using social media

A Guide for Community History and Heritage Groups

Using social media

What is social media?

'Social media' refers to a number of websites which enable interaction between users. Indeed, unlike 'traditional' websites, social media websites provide little original content themselves.

An example of a social media website is Facebook. Its content is entirely generated by its users, who interact with each other. This is a very different approach to that taken by traditional websites. A website such as BBC News, for instance, features content generated by the BBC, with no input from readers.

There are also social media sites which are dedicated to particular types of content. YouTube and Vimeo host video, for instance, while Flickr is a popular website for sharing images.

Why use social media?

Social media websites are used by millions of people in the UK. They provide an excellent place to promote your work or your community group. As with blogs, social media websites tend to have an informal atmosphere, which makes them easy to use. They can be a good way to make new contacts, to spread news about a project, or to attract new volunteers.

Twitter: a case study in using social media

What is Twitter?

Twitter is an information network that delivers short headlines, from people and sources that you choose, to a rolling stream on your Twitter homepage. You can make new contacts and start discussions, as well as sharing your own opinions through 140 character Tweets.

What are the benefits of using Twitter?

Twitter is updated instantly and is popular worldwide meaning you can keep up to date with your personal interests. Twitter is quick and easy to update and maintain and has a growing membership, meaning your account could be seen by anyone, anywhere in the world (depending on the security settings you choose).

How often should I tweet? What should I tweet about?

This is totally up to you. Some people just tweet about professional work, whilst others document their food, family and daily lives. Many people do a mix of the two. You don't have to tweet at all if you don't want; just following others keeps you updated and informed.

Which social media tools should I use?

The answer to this question really depends on what you are trying to achieve. How much time do you want to spend interacting with other people? Do you want to make regular updates, or infrequent ones?

The table below provides some suggestions of websites that you might consider using. You will be able to find them by searching for them in a search engine such as Google.

Facebook	Creating a page about your community group, which Facebook users can 'Like', allows them to receive any messages or media you post. This is a good option for infrequent updates and communicating with an existing membership. Additionally, making a private group facilitates a discussion forum to which Facebook users are invited or request to join.
Twitter	Twitter is a 'microblogging' service on which people make posts which are limited to just 140 characters. As a consequence, some users have made thousands of tweets, and update their Twitter accounts very regularly. The site is perhaps not quite so widely used as Facebook, but it has a more interactive nature to it.
YouTube	A video hosting website. People are given the option to 'Like' or 'Dislike' your videos. The videos that you upload will often appear in Google search results. Be aware that the comments that users place beneath videos are often highly offensive. Fortunately comments can be disabled.
Vimeo	Another video hosting website. The videos that people upload are often of a higher quality, and the comments more friendly, than YouTube. However, it has much fewer users.
Flickr	An image hosting website. It is possible to add tags to images, create photo collections, and leave comments. This is very useful if your project is generating large numbers of photographs. It's also possible to share pictures that you have uploaded with sites such as Twitter or Facebook. You can also embed slideshows on your blog or website.
SoundCloud	An audio hosting website. Much the same as Flickr, except for sound.

Google+	Google's rival to Facebook. As well as creating personal profiles, Google+ allows you to access communities and resources; store, enhance and share photos; and make video calls. It has relatively few users, but you may consider using it.
Tumblr	Tumblr is a blogging platform, with an emphasis on sharing images that other people have created. If your project is generating interesting images, you may find that a Tumblr blog is a good place to present them. However, if you don't want people to share your images without permission, this is definitely not for you.
Pinterest	Pinterest allows you to share and search for images which you store in a form of pin-board, akin to a visual brainstorm. The interface is more appealing than Tumblr, and the thematic collections of images can create some interesting juxtapositions.

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