



Fáilte Ireland

National Tourism Development Authority

DEVELOPING A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Creating a social media strategy for your business

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Introduction

This guide is an overview of creating your social media strategy. You can waste a lot of time and money on social media without any benefit if you do not have a strategy in place. You need to work out the message you are going to deliver, the tools you are going to use, how you are going to promote this content etc. This guide will help you define your strategy.

Skill Level

Basic

This guide is suitable for anyone that is new to social media.

Video Tutorials



Indicates a video tutorial. Click on the icon to watch the video. These videos demonstrate how to carry out a particular task. In order to watch the video tutorials in this guide, you will need to have Adobe Flash Player v9.0.28 or above installed on your computer.

Note: When you go to watch the video, a check is done to make sure you have the correct software installed. If you do not have the correct version installed you will be provided with a prompt to download and install the correct version.

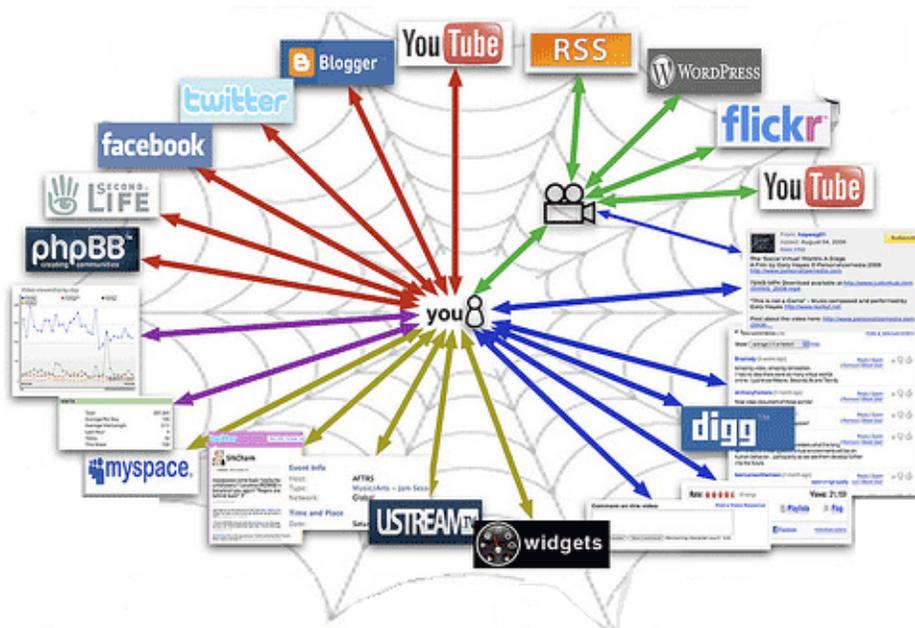
Getting Started with Social Media

Before you jump into social media it is very important to have a clear strategy in place. Although social media may not appear expensive as the majority of the tools are free, it can be very expensive in terms of time you have to allocate, and as we all know time is money. So you need to ensure that you are making the most effective use of your time and not wasting such a valuable commodity. This guide will certainly help you reduce the amount of time required and will give you a better understanding about what social media is all about and how it can be very effective.

The value of social media is not only the popularity of the websites but how these sites connect a company directly to their current and potential customers. Social media can be used to generate awareness and buzz about a company's product or services and it can drive significant traffic to its website. However, to truly capture mind share it is important to have a clear strategy in place that defines the message, delivery, execution and evaluation of any proposed social media plan. With clear objectives in mind it makes it significantly easier to select the appropriate platforms to deliver your message.

What is Social Media?

Social media content in the form of video, audio, text or multimedia that is published and shared in a social environment by your or your customers. There are many forms of social media applications available on the web and to come up with an effective strategy the appropriate platforms need to be reviewed and assessed.



Marketing has Changed

How companies market products and services is radically changing. In the old days you broadcasted your message out through newspapers and TV and hoped that somebody would buy. You placed an untargeted advertisement out to a large audience and with a 2% conversion rate you would consider it a big success. However, consumers now do not have time for this type of advertising and consider it an interruption. You are interrupted by untargeted, non-interesting pieces of information that are not relevant to you.

The new form of marketing is permission-based marketing. This is where you as a consumer give the brand, product or service specific permission to market the product or service to you. For example, you sign up to a newsletter, become a member of a product page within Facebook, or subscribe to a blog. Each time you are giving a company permission to communicate with you and establish a relationship with you.

As the company, you have to be careful not to abuse this relationship. Don't start selling and broadcasting your message the minute they sign up. You do the same as you would with any relationship, you nurture and grow it and when you do have something interesting to share about your business, such as the launch of a new service or product, then your customers/potential customers will be more than happy to read about it.

Creating a Social Media Strategy

The biggest significant issue with social media tools is the amount of time you could spend on them. It can be very time consuming unless you have a clear strategy in place. As part of this strategy you will define what social media tools you will use, what you will ignore, how long you will spend on them, and what you will say. Once you have a clear strategy in place it becomes less time consuming.

When you are creating a social media strategy one of the last things you look at are the tools. Very often people start with the tools but that is not the way to go. Once you decide your direction then you can decide which tools best suit your needs.

The following gives an overview of the main steps involved in developing your social media strategy.

Step 1 – Listen

Before you start using Twitter, Facebook or anything else it is important to listen to the conversations that are taking place online. If you arrived late in a meeting before you give your opinion you may want to listen first to see what is being said and who is saying it before you can determine whether you can add anything to the conversation that will add value.

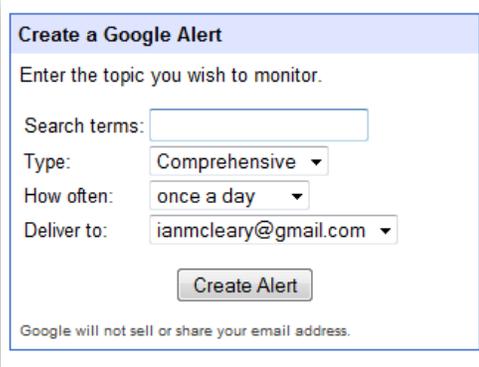
People will not listen to you if you do not add any value and this is the same problem online. So listen to the conversations first to find out what people are talking about in relation to the area of your business, what gets people interested enough so they will talk back, and so on. There are various ways of doing this.

Search for your Topics of Interest

Go on to Google and do a search on terms that your customers are likely to search on. Try and find some websites where potential customers are having conversations. See what they are saying and see what interests them.

Google Alerts

Google Alert is a fantastic tool for monitoring conversations. You can go to www.google.ie/alerts register a Google account and set up alerts for particular words or range of words. If these words are mentioned anywhere on the Internet you will get an e-mail about it. So the best thing to do is create an alert for your company/product/service/your name.



Create a Google Alert

Enter the topic you wish to monitor.

Search terms:

Type:

How often:

Deliver to:

Google will not sell or share your email address.

TIP: Put in a Google Alert for your competitor to see who is talking about your competitor and where on the internet are they talking about them.



VIDEO: Create a Google Alert

This video demonstrates how you can set up a Google Alert so that you are notified whenever someone mentions or is talking about you, your business or your products/service.

When you are ready, click the PLAY icon to start the video.

Perform a Twitter Search

Without even registering with Twitter you can go to <http://search.twitter.com> and search for certain keywords or phrases. This will show you conversations that are happening around the world about certain topics.



VIDEO: Performing a Search on Twitter

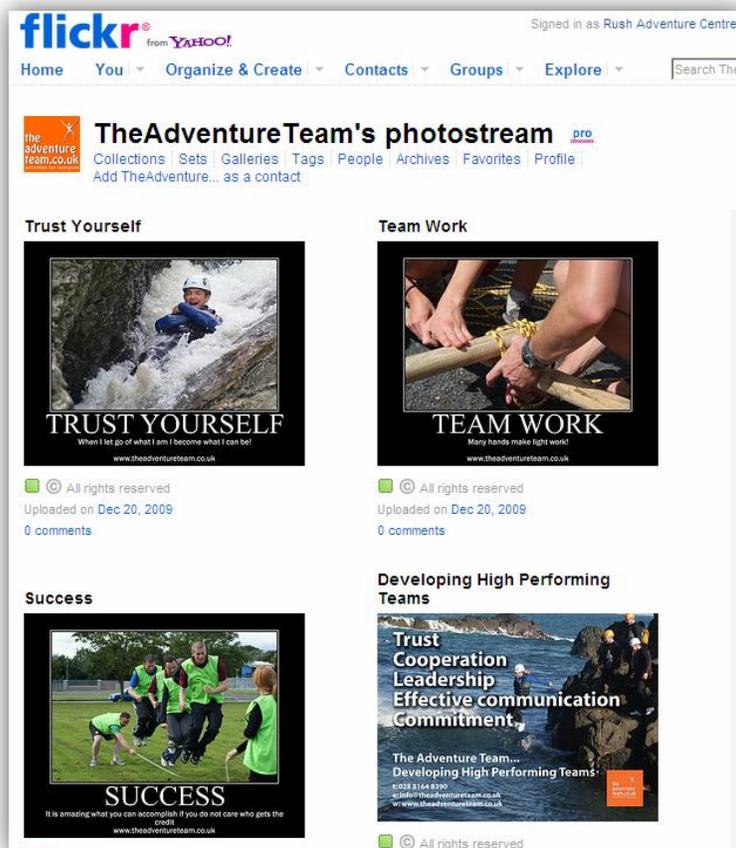
This video demonstrates how you perform a Twitter so you can listen to the conversations that are taking place about a particular topic.

When you are ready, click the PLAY icon to start the video.

Step 2 – Decide on what content you are going to provide

After you listen to the conversation you will have a better idea of what customers or potential customers are saying and what interests them. You need to match up what interests them and what you are passionate about. This is the topic you need to write about and promote. For example, if you run an adventure centre people that are interested in adventure sports love to see pictures, videos and read stories about people that run activities. If you run a hotel your tourists may be interested in things happening in the local area.

The following is an example of an Irish Adventure centre that uses Flickr to display pictures related to their events.



Once you decide on a topic try to stick to this and become the expert in this area. It is not about self promotion, which is something you need to avoid. It's about providing value and building up a community. Of course when you have a special offer or something interesting happens within your business you are free to tell your community but you don't constantly promote your business as this puts people off.

Step 3 – In what format are you going to deliver this content

On the internet most people have little patience and on average they spend about 6 seconds on a web page. That's not a lot of time so you need to instantly attract their attention. Writing a long piece of text is not going to interest them. Most people tend to be more visual so try and use pictures to help capture their attention and mix them with a bit of text to support the picture. That will probably attract most people's attention.

You can even go one step further and add in some video. You could even record your voice (Podcast) and allow people to listen to this. The best form of content is user generated content so if you can get people that use your services to talk about them then other potential customers are more likely to believe that it is true. It is also better to use methods where customers upload their own content rather than you doing it for them. I am more likely to believe a testimonial from an independent forum such as Trip Advisor than the ones on a hotel's own website. The most believable stories do not come from owners of businesses.

Step 4 – What is your general tone online?

Your tone online should reflect your personality offline. If you like humour, make sure to include humour in the content you deliver (but don't overdo it). Most people like reading and watching information that is straight from the heart. Say it as you see it, don't worry too much of having the best English and the most professional videos, most of the time this doesn't matter. Deliver your content and see what the reaction is. If it's good deliver more of it, if it's bad then change it for the next time.

Step 5 – Decide how often

People often ask how often should I be putting up blog posts, sending tweets or uploading pictures. Well it doesn't have to be every day but it should be regular. If you decide to write a blog post every week then commit to this for at least a year. Don't start something and then discontinue it 3 months down the line. Be persistent and whatever you start be sure to follow through on it. And finally, only provide content when you have something interesting to say.

Step 6 – Where to put the content

This is where most people start; they look at the tools without having the clear strategy. When you know what content you are going to provide and in what format then it's much easier to select the appropriate place to put it. Here is a list of some of the many social media platforms and tools that you can use.

Name	Type	How to use
Facebook	Business and Consumer social networking	Over 350 million active users, a great community to promote your services. As a company create a 'page' not a group or a personal profile. When you have your page up and running get all your guests to contribute to it as much as possible. Very powerful platform.

Name	Type	How to use
Twitter	Micro blogging	This allows you to send 140 characters of text to a lot of people at the same time. Can be very useful for promoting your products/services. Can be time consuming so start with Facebook and when you see success with Facebook then start with twitter.
Blog	Bloggng	Write interesting articles and put on your website. At a minimum it will help you with Google search ranking as you will have new data on your site regularly. But it can also attract a lot of attention.
LinkedIn	Professional Social Networking	Create an account for yourself and make sure to link back to your website. It is particularly useful for promoting your services to corporate companies. Very little work required maintaining your profile so certainly one to set up.
TripAdvisor	Recommendations	Recommendations are extremely important on the internet with up 60% of people trusting recommendations from people they don't know. Make sure you are watching TripAdvisor and equivalent recommendation sites.
YouTube	Video	If you have any video create a 'channel' on YouTube to put your content in one place. On your website it is very easy to reference this content rather than copying it to multiple places.
Flickr	Photos	If you have good pictures of your hotel, guests, B&B, location etc make sure to put them on Flickr and share them out. If people are going on holidays to a certain location a lot start off looking for pictures to get some inspiration. If they find you on Flickr they may then come to your website.
Google +	Business Social Network	Google + is relatively new but growing quickly. You can set up a personal and/or company profile and communicated with your customers, network connections etc.

Step 7 – Define your goals

When you understand what social media is about and how you are going to implement it then you can decide what you want to achieve. You might initially just want more awareness about your brand so the more fans the better, or you might just want sales so you would start tracking people that come from Facebook to your site and actually book a room, pay for an activity, and so on. There are many ways of measuring success. Here is a list of examples:

- Subscribers to your blog, followers on Twitter or fans on Facebook
- Sales and Leads generated from social media
- Partnerships created through people/companies you meet through social media
- PR you received through your presence on social media which in turn may lead to sales
- Recommendations you received that turned into business

- Google Analytics is a great way of monitoring traffic to see how much of your website traffic is coming from social media channels. You can also track to see if people come to your website through Facebook, LinkedIn etc and then subsequently buy products. The following shows an example Google Analytics screen.



Step 8 – Implement your strategy

Implementing your strategy is now not so difficult that you have a clear strategy in place. Each of the tools are not that difficult to use and they are all very easy to set up a profile.

So create your profiles or accounts within each application and make sure you put some effort into making it look similar to your website and brochure. Make sure you include details of who you are and what you do and always include links back to your website.

Start uploading content and initially tell all your friends and family. Promote it through your website, business cards, brochures and word of mouth. Tell all your customers about it and ask them to upload content, reviews, pictures, and videos.

You need to create a community. It’s not easy to create a community but when you put a lot of work into it, it can be so valuable. Remember people want to deal with real normal people not big brands. You can now compete with the biggest brands and it’s not got to do with the amount

of money to spend, it's more about the time you spend developing it and how smart you are with your time.

Step 9 – Make it work

This is the hardest part. You can have lots of content spread across many different applications on the web but if you don't get people signing up for this content and/or becoming your customer then there is no point.

Making it Work

- **Promote** – in order to make it work you need to promote your online presence. As mentioned previously, if you have a Facebook page, a blog or a Twitter account then include the details on your business cards, websites, and brochures. Make sure people know that they can connect with you on these platforms. If you have a presence on Facebook promote it the same way you'd promote your website.
- **Encourage Participation** – Get all your friends and family to sign up and become fans, followers or subscribers. They may not be potential customers but their friends could be. Give people a reason to become a fan of your Facebook page, whether that's through offering discounts to Facebook fans or by simply providing really engaging and interesting content. Ask your fans and followers what they are interested in and provide information related to this.
- **Reply, Reply, Reply** – when somebody enters a comment make sure to thank them for their comment and try to continue the conversation. If people comment on your pictures, videos, blog posts or whatever you have and you comment back this will encourage more people to join in. The more people that comment, share and like your content the more people will see your content and the more people you will have in your community to promote your services to in the future.
- **Branding** – On everything you do make sure you make it look like your normal branding. Include your logo, use similar colours and a similar tone in any text. And finally the one golden rule is always include links back to your main website.
- **Don't Over Promote** – Resist promoting your business with every opportunity. Promote it when you have something interesting to promote or some interesting news to share.

Making a sale

When you are running a discount/sales/special offer tell everybody about it. 41% of people follow people on Twitter just for discounts. People love discounts and will especially like it if you restrict it to certain people e.g. only Facebook fans can avail of this.

After people read, see or hear about you and they get to your website they don't want a 10 step booking process. Have a very clear call to the action very visible on your home page "BOOK NOW". You want to turn a visit to your website into a sale as quickly as possible. Maybe somebody has seen a wonderful testimonial on video about your hotel and now wants to book. Let them book straight away.

Step 10 – Review and Improve

You will not get this right the first time around. You will put up posts that you think are great but will be ignored and you will put up something that you think is not that interesting and you'll get sales from it. So you have to monitor, track and improve. Over time you will see what works and what doesn't work and this again will reduce the time required.



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