Libraries social media toolkit

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This toolkit has been created for Libraries Connected as a guide for all public library services on the use of social media to create more open lines of communication between library services and users.

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1. **Social media platforms**

There are so many social media platforms to choose from, so it is important to choose the right one for the right job to get the best results. Whether you’re looking to increase awareness of your library services or reach new audiences or provide more avenues of communication to your users, there is a suitable social media platform for each. Here we will look at some of the most well used platforms and consider the pros and cons of each.



**Facebook**

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

Facebook is one of the most well-known and well used platforms for businesses and organisations. It has over 36 million users registered as living in the UK, with individuals in the 25 – 35 age range making up the largest percentage of user. Individuals in the 13 – 17 age group make up the smallest percentage.

Pros:

* Very large user base in the UK
* Posts are not limited to the number of characters used
* Paid advertisements will reach further into your community
* Facebook networks people, by sharing through your friends list.

Cons:

* Other social media platforms may be better for outreach to teenagers and young adults
* Your followers won’t necessarily see your posts unless you pay to boost them, or they prioritise your page in their newsfeed.



**Twitter**

[www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

Twitter is becoming increasingly popular, with nearly 14 million users in the UK. The largest user age group are individuals aged 18 – 29, so it has a slightly younger audience than Facebook.

Pros:

* Allows for direct two-way communication with customers
* Good tool for engaging teenagers and young adults
* Twitter networks ideas and topics
* Lots of journalists are on Twitter if you want to attract media coverage.

Cons:

* Tweets are limited to 280 characters, although direct messages can be up to 10,000 characters long
* Requires much more regular engagement, so five or more times a day as opposed to 1-2 times a day for Facebook and 1-3 times a day for Instagram.

**Instagram**

[www.instagram.com](http://www.instagram.com)

Instagram is the photography based social media platform. It offers users the ability to edit and post photos and videos to create high quality visual content, as well as use hashtags to increase the audience numbers. There are over 24 million users in the UK, with roughly a third of all users being aged between 25 and 34.

Pros:

* Visually engaging content
* Best tool for engaging teenagers - one study found that 72% of people aged 13 – 17 used Instagram although Tik Tok is growing rapidly.
* You can use a hashtag to keep track of all related content.

Cons:

* Favours app use rather than desktop
* Lots of advertisements.



**YouTube**

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

YouTube is a video sharing service where users can like, comment and share your videos. It has over two billion active users each month, with a wide range of user ages.

Pros:

* Video length is unlimited
* Creators can respond to viewers comments
* Customers can subscribe to your library’s YouTube page and be notified when new videos are posted.

Cons:

* This platform is only for videos, it’s not particularly varied.
* It is time consuming creating videos and producing high-quality videos does require some skill and/or training
* You still need to post content regularly to maintain engagement.

**Pinterest**

[www.pinterest.co.uk](http://www.pinterest.co.uk)

Pinterest is a website for sharing ideas. Instead of community engagement, this social media platform is useful for inspiring, collating and sharing creative ideas such a book displays, children’s events and even library layouts.

Pros:

* Much more niche. A user can choose what they’re interested in and only see that.
* Pins are weighted, so if content is pinned by others multiple times, then it will appear near the top of results lists.

Cons:

* Can be a timewaster – there is a lot to search through before you might find the ideal pin for you.
* Slower moving than other platforms. It can take a pin 3.5 months to get 50% of its engagement, where twitter might take less than half an hour.
* There is no timeline. It’s not as good as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram for advertising events as the weighting of pins might mean out of date pins return to the top of results lists long after the event. You would have to delete the event after it had happened.
1. **Planning ahead**

**Timing and regularity**

It is important to consider the timing of your posts of social media. Studies have shown that the busiest times for social media on weekdays is early morning, and early evening (commute times), and a small increase between 12pm – 2pm. This makes sense as people quite often scroll through their social media while waiting for their bus to work, or during their lunch breaks. Take this into consideration if you’re posting content where working age adults are your target audience.

In a similar vein, if you’re posting a live story time for preschool children, then it is most likely to be viewed at around 10am and 6pm. Any earlier and you risk parents being out taking older children to school, and any later than 6pm and the children are likely to be asleep.

These things may seem obvious, but often libraries are so keen to get content out that they miss the opportune moment to capture the biggest audience. However, during this period where many children and adults are now at home these timings are no longer as reliable.

The other thing to consider is how regularly you want to upload content across your social media platforms. There is a fine line between being appealing and bothersome. People do not want to have their devices and timelines showing the same information over and over again – they will soon unfollow and your audience numbers will suffer.

**Launching big events**

For major events, an online countdown is a good way of keeping users interested and involved. A weekly post counting down the number of weeks until the launch of something, whilst also providing something visual and snippets of information, can build excitement and interest, i.e. “Six weeks until the Summer Reading Challenge starts! Find out more here!”

Refurbishments are always something the public want to be a part of – they look forward to the new spaces as much as we do! Regular photographic updates explaining what is happening, helps build excitement, and reassures customers that the closure will be worth it in the long run.

**Audiences and accessibility**

When using social media to promote your services to a targeted age, it’s worth considering which social media platform would be most likely to achieve the desired results. A lot of library services use Facebook and Twitter to promote everything, and that works well because that will reach a lot of people, as discussed earlier in the user figures. However, if you’re looking to recruit young volunteers to help with your Summer Reading Challenge then responses from Facebook would likely be low due to the low percentage of teenagers using it.

The government has created a guide to [producing accessible social media campaigns](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/digital-communication/planning-creating-and-publishing-accessible-social-media-campaigns/) with useful tips on what to consider and templates to help plan and produce accessible content.

**Social Media schedulers**

As already noted, getting the timing right for posting content online can significantly increase your audience and response. There are a growing number of schedulers now available such as [Hootsuite](http://www.hootsuite.com) or [Buffer](https://buffer.com/). Some of these are focused on a specific platform such at [Tweetdeck](http://www.tweetdeck.com) for Twitter or [SkedSocial](https://skedsocial.com/) for Instagram. Using a social media scheduler can make it possible to plan ahead and schedule uploads over a 24hr clock. It has a dashboard from which it’s possible can see your organisations Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and many more social media platforms. It’s relatively simple to use and makes planning across different platforms much simpler.

1. **Creating eye catching content**

**What is the ideal post length?**

Studies that shown that for Facebook, posts with less than 50 words are more engaging than long posts. This may be due to the fact Facebook cuts off longer posts and adds a “see more” link. If readers aren’t already engaged by that time, they’re not likely to want to read more. Twitter has a limit of 280 characters, so it’s easier to be succinct. Instagram is based on visuals, but brief and well written content can build upon your brand.

In summary, the ideal social media post is concise and punchy. It needs to catch the attention of the person casually scrolling through.

**Hashtags**

Hashtags make your content more discoverable. Using the right hashtags will link your content to similar articles, making your content visible to those who perhaps would not have looked at a library’s social media.

For example, using the hashtag **#LibrariesFromHome** in a post will mean that anyone interested can click on the hashtag. This will take them to a list of all other posts, created by anyone anywhere, using that same hashtag.

There is a danger of using too many hashtags. One or two per post is ideal. As recently stated, posts with too many characters can disengage readers, so keep it concise.

It’s not about being seen by a large number of people, it’s about being seen by the right people. Keep your hashtags relevant and don’t be repetitive. Posting the same hashtags every day is not interesting to online users.



**Canva**

[www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com)

Canva is a free online tool to create social media content, PowerPoint displays, posters and more. It’s particularly useful for organisations as it allows you create an account and design templates which can be used multiple times. To build on your library service’s brand, it’s good to follow a certain style or theme that reflects your services values for content

**Language**

It’s important to convey the right message when you’re posting content or replying to messages online. Communicating via social media is a bit different to responding to emails where a certain standard of professionalism is expected. The most effective way to communicate is as if you’re talking to a friend you haven’t seen in years. A polite and helpful tone will go a long way, but the important thing to remember is that in all your communication you’re selling your brand (that is, your library service).

Consider the subject material. Having a lively tone can be a positive thing and can build excitement if you’re promoting an event or sharing a progressive change to your service. However, if someone wants to make a complaint, or is asking for help with a serious personal issue, then being too jolly could come across like you’re not taking them seriously.

**Emojis**

It may feel unprofessional to use emoji’s in content on social media, but studies have shown that having emojis will increase engagement significantly. 57% of Facebook posts get more likes and 33% get shares and comments if they have emoji’s in them. Instagram engagement can increase by 48% if emojis are used.

Here is a simple example of how they can be used to increase engagement:



**Competitions and giveaways**

Social media platforms work best if you have a large following. If your social media platforms are relatively new, then competitions and giveaways work well to increase numbers and cost relatively little.

A book giveaway works well. Invite your followers to like your page and share your post to be included in a draw to win the book. By encouraging users to share your post and like your page you are getting free advertising. Each shared post may be seen by that person’s contacts, who may in turn share the post.

However, it is important to lay out the rules of the giveaway clearly at the outset so that there is no disappointment. It’s wise to keep the giveaway to a UK address, or suggest the items need to be claimed by a certain date, otherwise you may have to keep the uncollected item for an extended period of time, long after the giveaway has ended.

**Groups**

Many library services are now reassessing the way they can reach their audience at home through more interactive means. On Facebook, this could be through the development of Facebook groups on your library service’s page. Lego clubs and online or virtual book groups are rapidly increasing in popularity, and some library services also provide health and wellbeing videos, such as cookery, crafts, yoga or mindfulness.

Be conscious about the tone and advice given in instructional videos. Keep them interesting and ask for feedback on how to improve.

1. **Creating interactive content**

The ultimate goal of social media is to create content that increases user engagement and keeps users returning to your page, enabling you to promote your services and events to a wide audience. If your content is the same each day it will soon get tiresome, even if the idea is initially entertaining (see Big Ben’s twitter feed for an example of that).

Posts that require participation tends to result in content that is more engaging to your audience. An option to have some input on a post will often pique the reader’s interest while also giving you an insight into what your audience does or doesn’t like.

A good social media page for a library service is one that feels informal and welcoming, and one that shares promotional material without the reader feeling like you’re only active for self-serving reasons. The goal is to increase interactivity on your posts to communicate more effectively digitally.

**Links**

One of the simplest and quickest ways to engage with your audience is to share posts from other pages. During the COVID-19 crisis, many museums and art galleries are offering virtual tours on their social media. Sharing content like this will keep your page interesting, and also help support others.

Most organisations will appreciate the extra views and engagement brought on by sharing their content with your audience, and some will reciprocate by sharing your content if it is relevant to their organisation. This is particularly beneficial if it is a national organisation with large audience.

**Questions**

Another very simple way of interacting with your users is to ask uncomplicated questions. Library service users often share a keen interest in reading, so asking them to share a photo of their bookshelves at home, their favourite reading spot, etc. can really get conversations flowing.

Bear in mind that not all service users are prolific readers. Some customers might use their library service for personal development or social engagement. Be sure that over time you have asked a range of questions that might cater to different ages, and appeal to different types of people.

**Polls**

Polls are a way of creating two-way communication with your customers. It’s a simple way of engineering some market research in a way that doesn’t immediately cause the customers to turn off. It could be anything from a question about what sort of events people want to see in your library, to which online resources they use most, to finding out what support people would like to see.

Here is an example of an Instagram poll by Penguin Books. As you can see, if gives customers the feeling of inclusivity, and creates a discussion point rather than always having one-way communication.



Polls are particularly useful for finding out how your users feel without them having to invest too much time or energy in their response. A simple click or touch of the screen to choose a poll option gives you their view and creates a feeling of involvement for your users. The fact that you have shown you’re interested in their opinion can make people feel valued as a customer.

You can involve users in simple polls such as asking whether they prefer traditional books or ebooks, or create polls offering the public input into what colour the walls in a refurbished areas of the library should be painted. All types of polls created can give you a better understanding of what your audience wants from your service.

Be aware that the British general public has a good sense of humour, so make sure to only give options that would actually be acceptable to your service. The NERC learned this the hard way after nearly 130,000 members of the public voted to name their new polar exploration vessel ‘Boaty McBoatface’ in 2016.

**Quizzes**

Quizzes can be a fun way of engaging with your online community. It doesn’t need to be anything serious or investigatory – a simple “Which author would you be?” multiple choice quiz could be enough to entice even the quietest member of your group to find out.

Try Interact (<https://www.tryinteract.com/>) is a good free tool for creating quizzes that you can embed in your social media. This website also provides analytics for your quizzes. If the purpose of your quiz is to discover trends in reading interests, the analytics will help you see these.

**Live videos**

Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms offer the ability to stream live videos. This has helped to cut through the stuffy corporate impression of some business pages and create a face-to-face feel for its customers. For libraries, it may be that seeing a familiar face from their library team makes the social media page seem more approachable.

Videos can be pre-recorded, which has many benefits in itself, but by hosting a live chat online you are allowing the members of the page or group to feel a lot more in the moment and be able to ask questions and get answers in real time, rather than waiting for a response.

An advantage to live streaming your events on social media is that your reach is far wider than having the event in your library alone. Some may see your event advertised and be unable to attend due to factors such as distance or mobility issues. By streaming your event online, it can be seen by anyone around the world, and there is no travel, cost, or other implications involved for your customer.

Another advantage is that you are not restricted by the size of your audience. During live streaming you can have many members watching your event as there is no limit to the numbers that can join in and watch.

Most public libraries’ buildings are currently closed due the COVID-19 crisis, so in-person events are not possible at the moment. But the likelihood is that, due to social distancing regulations, libraries will be unable to hold events with large crowds for some while after libraries can reopen to the public.

An alternative to the traditional ways of encouraging people to attend your events is to have your event in the library while following social distancing guidelines, but also bring the event to people in their homes via computers, tablets, and other digital devices.

In libraries, a good example of this would be to have an ‘ask me anything’ session with a well-known author or member of the community. Members of the public can post their questions for the author online and a member of staff can interview the author using the live questions provided, while the session is being streamed online.

This allows both staff and the author to adhere to social distancing guidelines while creating a comfortable space for the public to feel they have got close to authors they admire.

1. **Copyright and sharing content**

When creating content for social media it is important to consider where the content is coming from. Often images are taken from the internet to support a statement or reflect a mood, but this does not necessarily make it legal. Just because an image is free to find on the internet, it doesn’t mean it’s free to use.

All work is subject to copyright, even if it isn’t kite marked or doesn’t have the copyright symbol on it, the creator still owns it and may not give permission for it to be used in this way. You cannot use a photo without prior permission.

The only exception to this is if you’re sharing something that is in the public interest to see, such as a missing person image.

Sharing content that you have seen online is acceptable as long as you have credited the creator. For social media this is simply done by sharing the original post. Be aware that whatever you share is seen as your library service’s brand, so only share content that would support the development of your brand and appeal to your audience.

Be aware of copyright issues if your live stream has background music or any other content that may be subject to copyright.

1. **Summary**

A good social media account will:

* Post regular content and respond to comments and messages (if appropriate)
* Engage with external content by commenting, sharing and liking
* Make full use of all the tools available with each platform
* Think about the target audience
* Have a social media plan or schedule
* Use open and considerate language to encourage interaction.

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