

How to guide: Top tips for increasing your social media impact

Marketing budgets for community groups are often small or even non-existent. Thankfully, there are a number of things that you can do free online to promote your activities and ideas to a wider audience. Our tips for social media below will help you get started with the basics.

General social media

For all social media platforms, it is a good idea to set up a separate page or account for your activity or cause, rather than simply using your own account. Make sure that this profile is kept up to date and is not simply a dead or static page. Think about your audience. A Facebook page works best for individual interaction and community networks, while a Twitter account may be best if you think you might network more with organisations or businesses. If what you want to achieve is very visual and will not require much text, and Instagram account may be useful.

You may want to consider setting up a distinct profile if you are going to manage a page or account, as this will give you a more professional front and allow you to be a little bit separate from any negative comments or trolling. To do this you may need to use a different email account to the one linked to your personal account. This can be easily done through an online email provider such as Google, Outlook or Yahoo.



Make a calendar of key dates to ensure that you don't miss out on relevant and opportune moments to promote your activity. For example, you may want to link to a national campaign or day of action. Thinking laterally to utilise different opportunities may work to generate interest from wider audiences too. For example, utilising World Refill Day to highlight the advantages of using refill bottles rather than disposable bottles if you are planning a beach clean, may help to promote your cause. Don't forget to use any key hashtags in your post to ensure that your post can be found (eg: #ChooseToReuse). You can access an awareness calendar [here](#).

Tagging others, individuals or organisations, into your posts can help to spread your idea or activity further and can create an engaged and energetic network. Creating a network takes time, so keep going!

Using scheduling can help you send out multiple posts during a specified time. Twitter and Facebook both have their own scheduling facilities, but you can manage multiple social media accounts at the same time, by signing up to a social media scheduler like [Hootsuite](#) or [Buffer](#) .

Remember that social media is always about the visual element. This could be a photograph, illustration, infographic or video. Use a free image bank such as [Pixabay](#) or [Unsplash](#) to bring your posts to life, or if you need to create a specific image then use a graphic design website such as [Canva](#).

Don't forget to read and respond to anyone who comments or direct messages you. Check your notifications regularly to make sure that you haven't missed something.

Make sure that what you post is factual and correct before you post it and if you make a mistake, then admit to it.

Facebook

If you are planning to use Facebook, it is a good idea to set this up as a page rather than a group, as this will give others the ability to share what you post to their networks. You will need to have at least one administrator who manages the page and this format restricts non-admins from posting. However, setting up as a page allows you to schedule posts and could be useful if you want to release your posts at specific times.



If you decide to create a group, changing the privacy setting to “Public” is one way of overcoming the inability to share content. However, you need to bear in mind that anyone who is part of the group can post to it. You may end up spending considerable time deleting inappropriate posts.

If you create a page, there is nothing stopping you from sharing posts with relevant, local Facebook groups. It is a good way for communicating to wider networks and generating interest in what you are doing.

If your idea or action involves specific events, then you may consider promoting them through the creation of events on Facebook. This spreads the word and gives you an idea of how many people may attend.



Twitter

Twitter is a simple way of getting your message out there, but may be more audience specific and you need to check that it is right for you.

You will only need to create an account on Twitter; there is no distinction between an individual, organisation or group. Make sure that your Twitter handle (the part after the '@') is appropriate to your activity or cause, and allows others to recognise you quickly and easily. Be aware of creating a long twitter handle, as this will limit your ability to be tagged in other people's posts. (ie: try and shorten @Nonesuchvillagecleanup to @Nonesuchcleanup if possible).

It is important to use hashtags and to tag other users in Twitter. These are two slightly different things. Tagging someone by using the @ sign, means that they are specifically alerted to what you are doing. For example, if you are planning a beach clean, you may want to tag the organisation Beachclean.org by using @BeachCleanOrg. However, you may also want to use the hashtag #beachcleanup to alert anyone who is actively searching Twitter for information on beach clean-ups, that you are doing something.



Consider whether you want to get involved in Twitter hours. These are 'events' on the Twitter that allow you to contribute to a thread of tweets by using a specified hashtag (#). The event is held at a specific date and time and there can be many people watching the thread, which means increased visibility for your activity or cause. More information can be found [here](#).

As your character count is limited in Twitter, it is a good idea to use a URL (or website) shortener if you want to include links to websites in your posts. Some, like [Bitly](#), even track the number of clicks to a link which helps you to see what engages with your audience. Don't forget that your character count per post is limited, so if you are unsure whether your post is too long, a character counter such as [this](#) one is useful.

Social media can be a fantastic tool for getting your idea or activities noticed by a wider audience. If you approach it in the right way and are mindful of your audience, it can help to give your idea energy and momentum, connect you with others and help you achieve your goals.

