The Basics:
Social Media for Event Professionals
Part 2

Contents

1: **What to share and when**

Now you've read Part 1, you're all set up with your social media account.

(Not set up yet? Need a refresher on those key terms? <u>Revisit Part 1</u> here.)

Great. Now you're ready to start sharing content.

But what should you post?

This section will help you crack the essentials, platform by platform. If you're not using one, just skip ahead.

Here you'll learn:

- the five golden rules for every social media post
- the optimum length of a post
- when, why and how to use images
- how often to post on social media
- the best way to get the most out of each platform

Five golden rules for every social media post

Every platform might have a different look, feel and audience – but some universals still apply.

Wherever you're posting, remember to make your posts:

1. Short and sweet

Twitter might be the ultimate short-form network, but every platform's stats show that brief is best.

2. Visual

This is a no-brainer for Instagram, but all platforms show increased engagement rates for posts with images and video.

3. Rich

Drive engagements by including links in your post – to your own content, and other people's.

4. Timely

Be responsive to current news and developments in your field – whether that's commenting on a relevant story the day it breaks, or letting your social media go quiet when the news makes your planned messages feel inappropriate.

5. Human

Even if you're representing a big company, it's not called social media for nothing. According to Sprout Social, 46% of users will unfollow a brand if they post nothing but self-promotion.

Talk like a real person. Be friendly – by telling someone you liked what they posted, or joining in conversations where you can add value.

Benchmarking

Now you're all set up, you're ready to start sharing content.

But what should you say?

Spend some time finding out what others in your field are posting on their accounts. Try searching for a hashtag you're interested in, or find the profiles of some of your competitors. Do your research, and you'll soon get a feel for what makes a good social post.

Let's break this down by platform.

Twitter

Post length

In 2017, Twitter upped their 140-character limit to 280, to mixed reactions. Now the dust has settled, it's clear that the change hasn't made much difference to users. It remains a short-form platform, and short is sweet. If you do use the full character count, remember that your full tweet may not be visible (for example on a mobile app), and might need to be clicked to see the entirety.

That doesn't mean longer tweets aren't worth your attention, however. There are plenty of creative ways to leverage the extra space that's now available. Check out this colourful tweet from National Geographic:

Or Pizza Hut adopting a popular meme to make a bold statement:
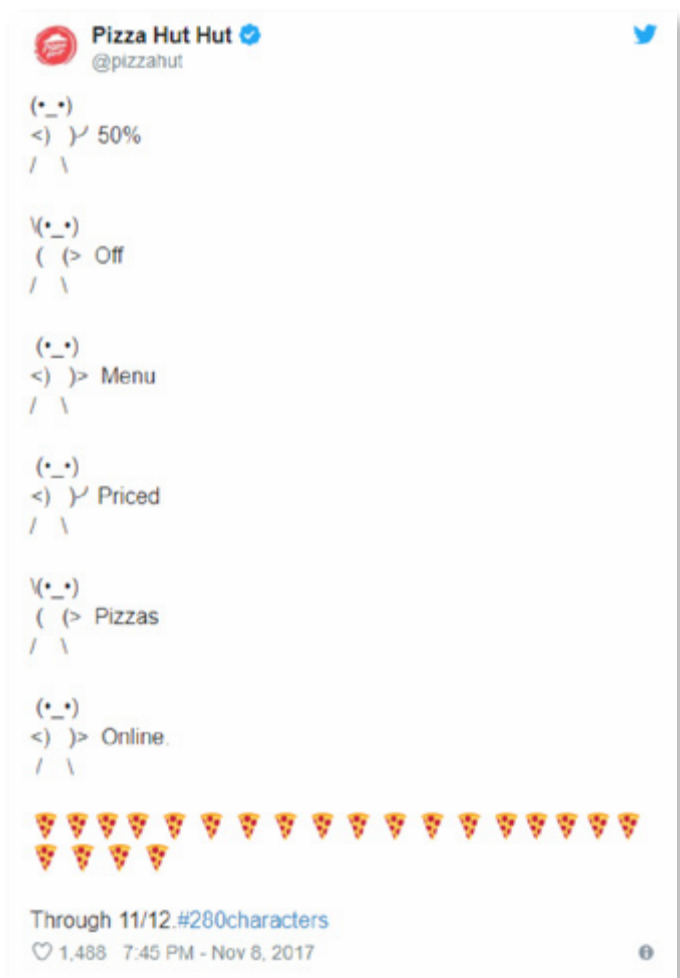
Images

Images should be a regular feature of your posting schedule. Scroll down your twitter timeline and you'll immediately see why: images catch the eye, and claim more space.

Be mindful of the different ways your audience might be viewing the same timeline. Images look very different in a mobile app compared to a hi-definition desktop screen used by a designer. Twitter will crop your image to fit the user's screen, and there's no way to select different images for different devices. That means you need to think carefully about how your image will be cropped.

Twitter's guidelines for 2019 suggest an image 16:9 ratio – think: if you don't want to spend time editing every image you use, you can minimise the impact of any cropping that will occur. Avoid logos and text. Centre-weight your images, so that the most important content is in the centre. There's not much more awkward than sharing a photo of your favourite new customer and finding you've lopped off their head.

You can also post multiple images. These will appear in a grid format, with one main as the focus, so think about which you'd like to be most prominent.

Frequency

Post on Twitter daily.

> ### Platform tip
>
> The Trends panel (located to the right of the timeline in desktop view) shows the major topics of the day in your country. This means you can see what other users are tweeting about, whether they're using hashtags or not. You can tailor these trends to you, filtering them by city location, and on the basis of who you follow.

Facebook

Post length

Facebook posts can be a whopping 63,206 characters long.

Unsurprisingly, you won't want to use the full limit. Posts containing 40 characters or fewer earn 86% more engagement.

Images

In 2019, Facebook recommends an image upload size of 1200x630 pixels. Your image will appear on a page at a maximum width of 504 pixels, and in the news feed at a maximum width of 470 pixels. Keep image clear, centre-weighted and without text.

Image sizes vary further for events, shared posts and more. See Part 3 for a great resource to keep you up to date with all the latest guidance.

Frequency

Post on Facebook a few times a week.

Instagram

Post length

Instagram captions can be 2,200 characters long, but the optimum length is 138 – 150 characters. It won't be truncated, and ensures easy readability as people scroll through their feed.

You can include as many as 30 hashtags, but be aware that many will look like spam, and pull you far over your ideal caption length. However, Trackmaven's research suggests that nine hashtags is the number that drives the most engagement.

Images

As an image-led platform, using them correctly is essential. Fortunately, Instagram takes the hard work out of it for you. The app works best directly from your own phone's camera, where you can upload photos you've already taken, or take new ones (and video too) through the app itself. Just bear in mind that if you're uploading manually from the desktop, or adding images via a scheduling tool, that they won't automatically be cropped to the familiar square Instagram format.

You can upload multiple images to Instagram, which allows a horizontal-scrollable carousel to appear (marked by a series of breadcrumbs beneath the image). If your followers check their timeline and see your post again, Instagram will automatically serve up the next image along in the carousel, not the one they've already seen. Alternatively, download an app like Layout to display multiple images on a single screen, using a customisable layout.

You can also add filters to your images to give them a consistent look and feel, and even play with creating a pattern – like this simple checkerboard from @cerebralmist:
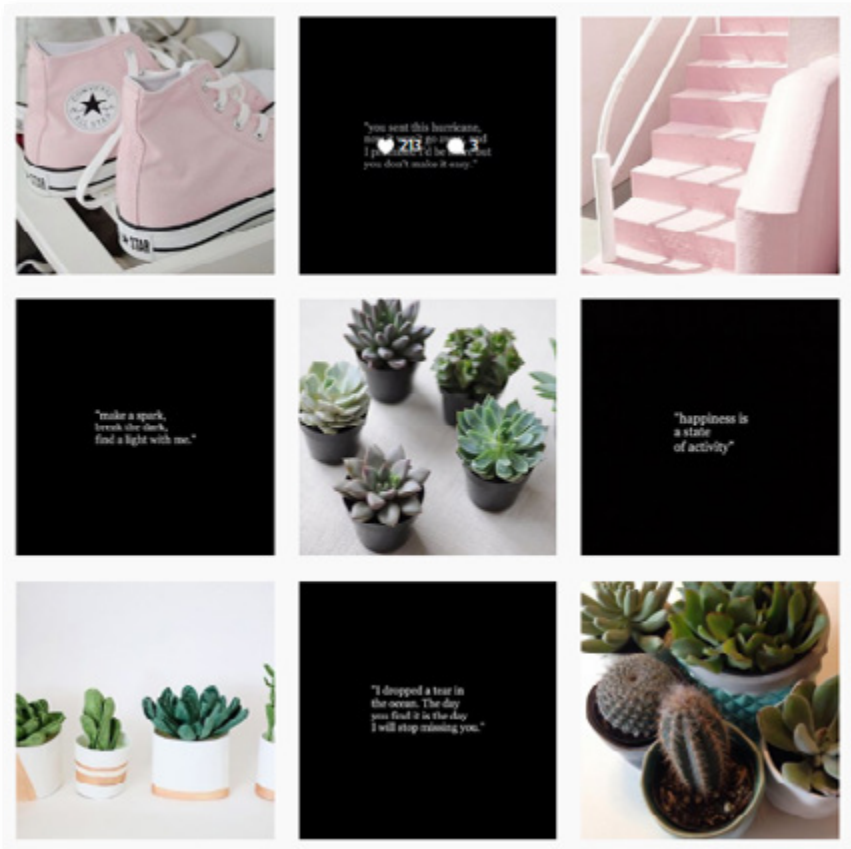
Frequency

Post in Instagram daily.

Platform tip

Instagram Stories are a clear evolution of the short-lifespan content boom pioneered by Snapchat.

Stories are a way to share a sequence of images and 15-second videos, with added text, drawings and 'stickers'. This content disappears after 24 hours (unless added to your 'Highlights'), and it might seem a little juvenile for business. However, Stories have the advantage of appearing at the top of the Instagram feed, giving them prominence. For the right kind of event, they're an essential.

2: **How to create a social media strategy with SMART goals**

Now you know how to post, what to post and when. But who is going to see it, when you're a brand new profile?

It's not enough to post, sit back and hope the followers will come. They won't. Organic engagement on Facebook is particularly hard to pull off, with paid ads taking a lot of business traffic. Building up a genuine list of followers can feel agonisingly slow, and if you're going to be held accountable for the time invested, you may struggle to show the value of your efforts.

That's why you need to move forward with a clear strategy, and a clear idea of what success looks like.

Define your strategy

Your strategy will be dependent both on your line of business, and the nature of your individual role. However, a strategy for your first year might look something like this:

- Grow your network
- Increase brand awareness
- Higher quality of leads/sales
- Improve ROI
- Improve your industry awareness and network

Having defined the goals, your strategy should also build in the right kinds of evaluation, to monitor how successful your strategy is.

In case you're not familiar with them, here's a quick refresher on SMART goals. All your plans should fulfil the following criteria:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time bound

Now let's look at how to enact this strategy in practice.

Activate your strategy

Research

This will be fundamental. To grow your network of followers, you need to know who you're trying to reach.

Demographics are an essential piece of the puzzle here. Spend time developing your customer personas and identifying your customer demographics. Then consider which platform(s) will be most useful to you.

Comscore's data shows clearly the growth rates of three major platforms over the past few years in the UK, defined by age.

Figure 5.12: Number of visitors, by social media platform and age: March 2016-March 2018
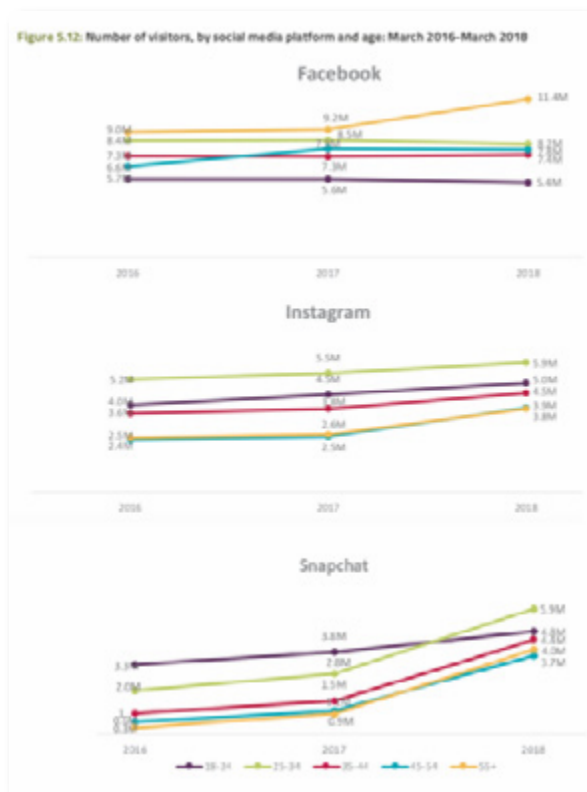
Competitor analysis is also important. Observation and benchmarking allows you to set plausible, achievable targets for your own social media campaigns.

Identifying **engagement opportunities** will push you post effectively from the start. What are peak engagement times for your followers? Which hashtags can you leverage?

Identify your metrics

As we saw in Part 1, there are multiple different ways to measure the success of a social post: engagements, likes, clicks, shares and so on.

The bad news is, most of these might feel like more of a success than they really are. Retweets and likes, while encouraging, are known as 'vanity metrics'; they don't show a proven ROI for your business.

Instead, focus on **key metrics** such as conversion rates and web referrals.

Apply analytics

Tracking these key metrics means using analytics tools.

There are many paid tools that offer in-depth insights for multiple metrics, and allow you to enhance your competitor analysis too. However, Google Analytics is an effective place to start, with a simple interface and easy data sharing to show stakeholders what you're achieving. Their beginners' online courses will help you get set up. They'll also walk you through some useful tricks for creating a trackable campaign in a lightweight way, by building tracking into links when you post them on social media.

If you're using a scheduling tool like Hootsuite, it will offer its own analytics suite too. What's a scheduling tool? More on this in Part 3.

Remember: you should get your analytics set up at the start of your social strategy, not three months later when you want to see how it's going. It will be harder to track where you're being successful if you don't put the work in at the foundations.

Optimize your content

Thinking strategically helps to avoid what can often happen with new social media for business accounts: an enthusiastic start, followed by abrupt changes in posting frequency and tone of voice.

Optimizing your content means applying **brand consistency** across a social channel. That means a consistent tone of voice as befits your brand values. It also means consistency in images, for example applying the same filter to all your photos, or always including a video on Mondays.

Leverage user-generated content

It's always tempting to think about your social media in terms of push. The content you send out is key, of course. Second to that is your interaction, whether that's a customer-facing role answering questions, or you seizing opportunities to join in popular hashtags or current conversations.

Don't restrict yourself to what happens on your timeline, however. Social media can be leveraged in a range of other contexts: on your website, in print, in promotions. If you've had a positive interaction, or a happy client has Instagrammed your event, how will you ensure that more people can see that?

Set goals

Look back at what your strategic aims are. Now turn them into targets, making sure they're all SMART.

That might mean hitting a certain follower count after three months, or growing your lead conversion rate by a set percentage as a result of a campaign.

These time-limited goals allow you to see what you're doing right, and what's not worth your time. Don't be disappointed if it's a slow start; growing your network takes time. But if your numbers really aren't cutting it after three months, take a step back and re-evaluate. Are you using the right platform for this audience? Is the content right?

3: **Tools, tips and tricks**

Congratulations! You now know why and how to set up a social media account, and how to make it purposeful and objective-led.

That means you've earned a little help.

Good news: social media is prevalent, useful and embedded enough to have grown a world of add-ons, apps and extras to help it work even better in practice – and lighten the load for you.

Here are a few handpicked options.

Scheduling tools

You'll already have noticed references to Hootsuite, Buffer and other scheduling tools dotted around this guide.

These are absolute gifts to the event professional. They make it much easier to manage multiple social media accounts on different platforms. You can send the same message to all your accounts at the same time, or tailor each with ease. You can bulk schedule messages to send at particular times of day. You can use their tools to gain useful analytics data, like what the interests are of those who are following you, or what time of day your posts get most engagement.

They also allow you to view a 'dashboard' of multiple streams of information. Each platform's native interface (say, your Facebook homepage, or Twitter's app on your phone) shows you one page of information at a time: your own posts, for example, or a timeline of posts from people you've followed. These tools allow you to view both of these at the same time, from the same dashboard – as well as scheduled posts, individual hashtags, posts from specific users, and more.

Better yet, you can add not only accounts from different platforms, but also multiple accounts from the same ones. If you're running three different twitter accounts, you can access them all in one place, without any logging in and out.

And best of all, these tools are free – for simple use, at least. If you're investing in social media, paid options will give you more analytics, advertising opportunities, and the ability to add multiple users and more account profiles. But a basic free setup is still pretty great.

To explain how is beyond the remit of this introductory guide. But take it from a regular user: you will find it infinitely easier to manage multiple accounts with the help of this kind of tool.

Professional image tools

With such a huge a range of image sizes and requirements across platforms, it can feel laborious to tailor even a single image or video for use across different campaigns. Even if you have time, you might not have the design skills to make it look professional.

Don't worry. There are multiple tools out there to help create simple visual campaigns with style, consistency and polish. Adobe Spark is a very lightweight web app that, if you're already using an Adobe account, allows you to apply branding across multi-platform image sizes and types. Even the free version provides a decent selection of options. Try Crello for a free alternative that lets you customize photos, stock images and simple animations, or Pablo to auto-resize images for any platform.

If you want imagery to include in web pages and blog posts as well as social content, and don't have a designer on hand, Canva is worth your investment. Its easy interface allows customisation within a massive range of pre-designed templates, from page headers to infographics.

Browser add-ons

Like Pablo above, Google's web browser Chrome offers a host of extensions that can support your social usage.

Ritetag is a gift for anyone managing social media at work. It finds related hashtags for you (based on your posts' images and text), and uses traffic-light colour coding to tell you if a hashtag is too competitive or too niche to be valuable.

Social networks don't tend to cross-communicate, and it can be hard to link potential leads together. Discoverly lets you find a LinkedIn profile from a Facebook account, see tweets from a Gmail contact, or find mutual connections. While you don't want to overstep someone's privacy, it can be helpful to locate a work email address, or improve your personalisation.

If you're already using Hootsuite, Hootlet is a neat time-saving add-on that lets you instantly share a webpage across all your social media, including a chosen text excerpt. Buffer offers their own version too.

One last thing

Social media is not something that stays still.

Every year, social networks evolve. Some disappear (remember MySpace?). Some merge with other networks (did you know that Facebook owns Instagram?) Some arrive fresh on the scene, and we wait to see their uptake (heard of MeWe?).

Even within platforms, the rules are changing and evolving. Facebook only started offering video in 2015, evolving into Facebook Live's shared stream which followers can comment on. Facebook adopted Stories in 2017, borrowing them from sister platform Instagram. Twitter broke all its own rules by doubling the character count. All platforms constantly adapt their advice on using images, as responsiveness needs to keep moving to cover new screen sizes and devices.

And, of course, in a global economy, we need to be aware that reach isn't the same everywhere. China's stringent internet laws - not to mention the potential language barrier - means their major network, Weibo, feels like a closed shop to Westerners; if you're in China, you need a private VPN to access Facebook.

What seems unlikely to change in the immediate future, however, is the potential social media can offer to you.

What are you waiting for?

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