

12 Steps to Social Media Success

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1st edition

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ISBN 978-87-403-3058-8

CONTENTS

	Introduction	6
	Just what is social media (and why you should care)	7
1	Step 1 – Have a plan	10
2	Step 2 – Create your personal policy	11
3	Step 3 – Decide on your message and audience	12
4	Step 4 – Get your image right	14
5	Step 5 – Write your elevator pitch	16
6	Step 6 – Play to your strengths	18
7	Step 7 – Pick your platforms	19
8	Step 8 – Connect and engage	21
9	Step 9 – Share often	23

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10	Step 10 – Use tools	25
11	Step 11 – Dive in – and be authentically you	27
12	Step 12 – Stay safe	28
	Myth Busting	29
	And finally	31
	Glossary	32

INTRODUCTION

Writer Seth Godin described social media as the greatest shift of our generation: in recent years it has certainly become a ubiquitous subject for organisations and professionals alike. Discussions abound on how to recruit with social media, how to get your CEO to be social, how to use social media to build a brand or sell products and services, through to headlines about employees who have made misguided posts and lost their jobs as a result.

For some, social media is a routine part of their everyday life – whether that is personal or private use (or indeed both). But there are still plenty of people and organisations who don't get it, are fearful of it or still aren't sure just what they should be doing in that space.

It is something of a cliché to say that we live in an era of unprecedented change. It is true however that the world of work and working life has changed significantly in recent years. Right at the centre of this intensifying change is technology, and social technology in particular; driving new ways of working, communicating and creating new opportunities for both organisations and individuals. We live in an increasingly open and transparent world. Many of us now think nothing of putting our entire CV online for people to view on sites like LinkedIn. We share our thoughts and our pictures with the world (or with our followers at least). For good or for ill, we are constantly connected.

Social media has changed our lives. How we communicate and collaborate at a fundamental level. How we buy, sell and market products and services. How we lead and how we learn. How we engage and communicate with the people that work for us and the people that buy from us. How we actually do the day job. No longer are we limited to or by our immediate team, organisation, locality or time zone.

The old rules of work and communication often no longer apply – or have simply been made obsolete by technology. These technologies challenge us to rethink the way we work, sell, engage, communicate, talk to customers and build and manage our reputations and brands.

The purpose of this book is to help professionals to get more social – to use social media networks to their best effect for learning, networking and engaging, whilst managing any risks along the way. Throughout this book we aim to explain why understanding social and getting social is so important for individuals and organisations alike and how it could benefit you – along with what we believe are the key steps to social media success.

JUST WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA (AND WHY YOU SHOULD CARE)

We've written this chapter for readers who really don't understand much about social media. When a lot of people hear the term social media, they think of the big networks like Facebook or Twitter. They think first about the social networking side of social media. But at its broadest, social media is much, much more than that.

Social media is essentially any online technology that enables the sharing of ideas and information and allows comment, discussion and debate. At its most basic level, social media is about any platform or application that allows you to share content with other people, sometimes publicly and sometimes to a prescribed audience chosen by you, and that allow you to participate in networking activity. It takes many forms.

It does include those social applications we have already mentioned.

It also includes blogging platforms like Medium and WordPress.

It includes content communities and vlogging sites like YouTube.

It includes professional networking like LinkedIn.

It includes messaging and photo apps like Snapchat, WhatsApp and Instagram.

It includes project management tools like Slack.

It includes web forums and virtual gaming.

It includes social bookmarking.

It includes collaborative (often called "crowdsourced") projects like Wikipedia.

Traditional methods of communication like email, post and the phone have declined. Fewer people now have a home landline. Some organisations are going entirely email free. Others are only accepting job applications via Twitter.

Let's look at some numbers to put this into context – but first, a health warning: these figures get out of date as soon as they are published!

At the time of writing, the UK's Office for National Statistics says 91% of UK adults use the internet daily; 99% if you limit that to 16–44 year olds. 67% of them are using social networking sites.

Figures from a January 2019 global report by Hootsuite and We Are Social show that the number of people using the internet has now reached 4.4 billion. That means 57% of the planet's population are accessing content on the internet.

From a social media point of view, there are now a shade under 3.5 billion active users, 3.3 billion of whom use mobile devices to access their accounts. **Facebook** is the biggest platform with 2.4 billion users. In their 2019 report, they estimate that 2.7 billion people use at least one of their core products (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Messenger) every month. **YouTube** has over 1.9 billion users worldwide. 1 billion people post their photos over at **Instagram**. 500 million tweets are sent every day (that's 5,787 per second!) by over 320 million **Twitter** users. **LinkedIn** has 303 million members. **Pinterest** has 250 million users.

Four out of five purchases are influenced by online content. Over 80% of businesses saying that they research and find suppliers online.

A 2016 report predicted that by 2025, 5 billion people would be connected by mobile devices. As of January 2019, that figure stands at 5.135 billion. Mobile use is growing exponentially and exceeding all expectations.

Part of this extraordinary growth in internet use is based on the smart phone. A tipping point was reached and breached in 2014, after which more than half of internet connections have been made via a mobile device. We're well on the way to that figure hitting two-thirds in the very near future. With the exception of **LinkedIn** - which remains mostly desktop - all of the main social media sites are now accessed primarily via a mobile device.

These figures go some way to indicate the importance of social media – and just why many people might want to use social media networks in some aspect of their professional life. Social media can bring many benefits, including:

- Building a professional network.
- Learning and continuing professional development.
- Promoting your business or employer brand.
- Listening to what people are saying about your brand or organisation.
- Connecting with people that work for you (or other stakeholders).
- Finding people with similar professional interests.

- Recruitment – whether that is finding opportunities for yourself or recruiting for your organisation.
- Personal branding (building your personal online profile or presence).

So now you know what social media is, the scale of its adoption and what it can be used for, it's time to consider how to make it a success. We have identified 12 key steps to using social media in your professional life.

First things first – you will need to set up accounts on your chosen platform. If you don't know what these are yet, step 6 will help you to decide. Each social media platform has its own sign up process and they make it fairly easy to engage with them. Just go to their website or download their app on your device and follow the simple instructions to get going. For most accounts, all you'll need is an email address and a password you can use (and remember!).

1 STEP 1 – HAVE A PLAN

One key consideration for your social media plan is whether you going to be using social media as yourself, or as your business. Both Facebook and LinkedIn have options for business pages (although on LinkedIn some business or brand options are premium, paid for options) and you can maintain a personal page too that is separate (good for those who want a personal, private Facebook account but also want to use it for business). Other sites like Instagram, Pinterest or Twitter allow you to set up your profile as either personal or business – or again you can have both and switch easily between the two.

Start with **why**. There are plenty of people having a go at social media. Some of them are doing it because they think they should or because everyone else is doing it. But without a clearly defined ‘why’ then it will be difficult for you to maximise its benefits and focus your efforts. Neither will it be easy to measure results and adapt your approach accordingly.

For some people, using social media is about establishing or building a personal brand. For others it is about learning or supporting continuing professional development. For others still, it is about developing a company brand, supporting other sales and marketing efforts, or simply finding new customers. Some users just want to join or build a professional community for networking purposes. It can even be about job hunting.

Whatever your reason for using social media it’s a good idea to have some aims and desired outcomes. Everything else flows from there. So first of all, decide why you are doing it at all and what you want to achieve from it. We suggest you write them down somewhere. This doesn’t need to be a huge piece of work or a series of particularly big, hairy or audacious goals. A few small goals at first are just fine.

The next thing to think about is what success would look like for you. You can measure social media through likes, shares, comments and reach. You can measure it too in the sense of sales, referrals or brand recognition. There are some things that can’t easily be measured – the value of connections, learning or long-term relationships. It’s a matter for you as to whether you feel the need to measure your efforts or determine a return on your investment. If it’s right for you, then identify the most appropriate measures for you and build it into your plan. Review it accordingly on a regular basis and change your strategy depending on what those measures are telling you.

As to what else needs to go into your plan – more detailed ideas are coming right up.....

2 STEP 2 – CREATE YOUR PERSONAL POLICY

We've now got a 'why' so it's time for a 'how'. This will help you to best plan your use of social media – and create your **personal policy**.

Go back to your 'why' from Step 1 to help you think through how you want to use social media. Here's an example. We use social media to engage with other people in our profession, learn from others, share and collaborate. We also use it to chat and share with friends. These two very different uses for social media take place on different platforms. For professional activities we mainly use LinkedIn, personal blogs, Slack and Twitter. There, we are very open about our work and our views. For personal photographs and updates, or just keeping in touch with old friends, we mostly use Facebook and Instagram. There is a little cross-over on Twitter because that is one of the platforms that bridges the personal and professional, and that is an accepted part of the platform. Our professional activity is open and accessible without barriers. Our personal use of social media is private and behind privacy settings. We never share pictures of the children on any platform or allow anyone else to do so. This isn't meant to say that you shouldn't, or that we are judging anyone who does, it's simply what we have chosen to do: it's part of our personal policy. There are options about what you share and to whom on every social media platform.

Here are a few things to think about:

- Is your social media use personal or professional? If it's exclusively for professional purposes, we would suggest you don't have protected or private accounts. Generally speaking if you want people to connect with your or your ideas, you want to make it easy for them to do so.
- If you want to use social media for personal use as well as professional, where will you draw the line? For example, will you accept friend requests on Facebook from colleagues?
- How much personal material will you share? It is absolutely fine if the answer is none. But there are at least a few personal items you might want to share. Firstly, it is a good idea to include a photograph – this will help you to connect with other people. You will want to say a little about who you are and what you do (we will talk about social media biographies – also known as 'bios' - later).
- You may also want to share a (broad) location so that people know where you are based. This doesn't have to be too specific; you can just refer to a city or an area.

If this sounds a little complicated it's not intended to be. We just think that it's better to think about this stuff at the beginning of your journey. If you aren't sure of the answers right now then keep reading. Hopefully the following chapters will help you make a decision.

3 STEP 3 – DECIDE ON YOUR MESSAGE AND AUDIENCE

We've considered the overarching need to have a plan and some of the first elements that it should contain. Now it's necessary to take that idea to a deeper level – not just your overall professional aim for social media, but **what** is it that you want to share – and with whom? What is your message and purpose?

In Step 9 we will focus on what content to share and when to share it – but there is a step that comes before simply having an idea about what content to put out there on your platforms of choice. This step is about deciding what content you want to create – your central message. You might want to tweet and post about all sorts of things, but it helps to have a focus when using social media in a professional context. This is all linked back to Step 1 – your why.

Let's begin with an example.

We both work in Human Resources. Gemma writes a popular HR blog. The subjects on the blog range across all aspects of work, people and organisations, but many of the posts reflect her key interests; wellbeing, flexible working and social media. The aim of her blog is to provide challenge and useful content to others who work in similar fields. As a freelance writer, there's also a secondary aim of generating more work, increasing her online profile and therefore (hopefully!) income. There's a defined aim and direction. It's unlikely that she would use her blog to talk about, for example, football. If it did, those regular readers who are signed up to receive updates would be confused and might just stop reading. From time to time Gemma gets request to either advertise on her blog, or to write content for it on her behalf. She's very clear that the blog is for her words only, and isn't to be monetarised in itself, so never accepts these requests.

We know people who use social media for a whole range of reasons relating to their professional life. They have a variety of aims and objectives.

Here are just a few:

- An academic who uses social media to advocate for a particular type of academic publishing practice, and blogs extensively about it. Their target audience is other academics. They want to raise awareness and challenge existing practice.
- An artist who shares examples of their work on social media – his target audience is extremely wide as his work may be enjoyed by almost anyone. He expressly encourages others to share with others if they like his content.

- An author who shares some of their thinking on a fairly niche topic with an aim of increasing awareness and engaging interest with this subject area – and also sell her books.
- A fitness instructor who shares her methodology and beliefs around exercise and nutrition – her central message is about making exercise practical and realistic for busy people. Her target audience is potential customers.
- A sales and marketing leader who has driving sales and brand awareness as his sole focus. He employs a vast range of methods for doing so, but for him it is all about brand.
- A leader of a large public-sector organisation who uses social media to listen to his employees and service users, to respond to them in a timely fashion in a place where they interact and to share key messages from the organisation itself. His audience is potentially everyone living and working in a particular city.

If you are still not totally sure what your key messages or focus should be, here's a couple of things to think about:

- How can you add value to your professional online network?
- What do you stand for?
- What do you want to promote?
- What would you want people to say about your social media presence?
- With whom do you most want to interact – and to have read your content?
- Who do you wish to influence?
- What are the interests and priorities of your desired audience? What matters to them? We recommend taking the time to reflect and understand this.
- What will make you different to others using social media in a similar way. How can you stand out?
- What is your competition doing – if relevant?

This process may feel a little formal. It's perfectly ok to get started and refine as you go. How strategic you need to be (especially at the outset) in deciding upon your message will vary. If your aim is about promoting a business and brand, and if you are considering investing financially in your social media presence then we recommend taking much more time in these early stages to understand what you really want from it – and how you will measure your success.

4 STEP 4 – GET YOUR IMAGE RIGHT

Images are mostly going to be photographs of you (probably doing whatever it is you do too add value) and also the images that you chose to share across social media. Choosing good quality and relevant images can add value to your social media activity in many ways.

To being with, let's look at images of you, particularly in your social media profiles. There are some real dos and don'ts here. Firstly, you need a photograph on each platform you are using. Some people don't bother but it looks unprofessional and will limit your interactions and therefore the number of people that will choose to connect with you. People like to see who they are connecting with. Social media images need to be tailored to the platform. If you are using a platform entirely for professional use, your chosen image needs to reflect that. Avoid pictures that aren't of you such as brand logos (unless it is a branded account), or - and this actually happens - your car. Also avoid pictures that are of you but are a wedding photograph, your children or friends, or are clearly a cropped social photo. For a professional networking site use a simple headshot with a clear background. If you don't have a professional headshot, that's no problem: just ask a friend to take a simple picture of you on their (or your) phone against a plain wall.

For consistency, especially if you intend to use social media exclusively for professional reasons, you may wish to use the same image on all social media platforms. This will make your efforts look clear and uniform. However, for slightly less formal platforms, or one (like Twitter) that crosses over the professional and personal, you can be a little more flexible on your preferred image. We still recommend a clear headshot presenting you in a way that aligns with how you want to be viewed by your followers or connections. This will of course vary from person to person. Your image will appear next to all of the things you post and therefore it influences how people "hear" what you say.

Sharing images is a key part of interacting on social media, and there are other ways that it can benefit your profile. Some professions and businesses lend themselves well to sharing images. Consider a party planner, florist, fitness instructor or cake decorator. All these professionals can benefit from visually sharing their products or services on the right social media platform (an image-based platform such as Instagram or Pinterest would be particularly suited for static images, YouTube is best for video content). It's often useful to share images from conferences or events to enhance your content.

Some general rules apply here. Where you are sharing images of others, make sure that they are aware and are happy to be included. Images can be informal, but still need to be professional and present you appropriately.

Images can also enhance blog posts or articles. If you don't have an appropriate image of your own to use, consider using one from an image site – just always be mindful of copyright or use copyright-free images.

It's also worth taking the time to think about what you *don't* want people to see. If you've used social media for personal reasons either in the past or present, you might not want professional contacts to see this content. This is especially important for young professionals. Is there anything from your teenage or student years on social media? Now is the time to check and remove what you wouldn't want a prospective employer or professional contact to see.

Of course there is more to your professional image than just photographs – it includes your entire presentation on social media, including what you choose to share, what you create and how you describe yourself. We'll be discussing these aspects of your image in later steps.



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5 STEP 5 – WRITE YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH

Most social media platforms provide an opportunity to have a headline summary saying something about who you are, although these vary in terms of length and style. On Twitter it's known as your 'bio' and you have 160 characters to play with. On LinkedIn, you have the opportunity of both a headline and profile. On Instagram it's your profile and over on Facebook and WhatsApp it's a bio again. On blogging sites like WordPress you have the option to say much more – even having an 'about you' page. For the purposes of this chapter we'll use the term 'bio' for ease.

Your bio tells people about you. It should give people an idea about who you are and – importantly – what sort of content you will share. Your bio will encourage people to connect with you on social media – or not. This is your first opportunity to connect – so make it count.

It's important to tailor your bio to the platform in question; what works on Twitter won't work for LinkedIn for example.

On LinkedIn, your headline will automatically default to your job title unless you change it. You can do this in your profile settings. You can change this to anything you like, although we would encourage you not to use gimmicky language (no 'ninjas' or 'gurus' please, unless this is your actual job role). Keep this brief and make it stand out. You can use your profile to go into more detail – think of this like your summary paragraph on a CV, explaining briefly who you are and describing your key skills, knowledge and experience. You can even include hyperlinks to other online content that refers to you or your work. Don't be afraid to sell yourself and highlight your successes – this is the very purpose of LinkedIn.

Some platforms will allow for more informality. Twitter is a good example of this. Here it's considered acceptable to say something about the work that you do – but also a little more about what you are interested in or passionate about. Don't forget to include a link to your website, blog or other social media profiles.

If your social media accounts are primarily promoting your business or services, make sure that your bio includes a succinct summary of what you do and give clear instructions – or better still, direct links – on how to contact you.

If you aren't sure quite what to say in your bio, check out bios written by others in similar roles or professions. This will help you understand the etiquette for each particular platform.

There are a couple of things to note. It really isn't necessary to include a statement to the effect of 'all views are mine'. This really goes without saying – who else's would they be? Whether you choose to identify yourself as working for a particular employer is normally also a matter of personal choice – but it's always worth checking if your company has a policy on this first. Some professions or professional organisations (for example, medical professions) have specific guidance around social media use, so it is worth considering whether this could also apply to you and your work.

Finally, don't forget to update your bio if things change, or just to keep it fresh or current.

6 STEP 6 – PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

This is a fairly simple step and should form part of your overall plan – as well as influence your platform choice (more on that in a moment).

When it comes to using social media professionally, make it as easy to fit into your life as possible. You can do this through using the tools we will discuss in a later chapter but also by using the skills and strengths that you already have. Here are some examples:

- If you enjoy chatting to people and think you come across well verbally, why not try recording a podcast? Podcasts are simple to record and publish and there are low cost options for publication through sites such as Podbean.
- If you are handy with the video camera on your phone, then create a YouTube video channel. There are cheap (and free) apps which even enable video editing on your phone, such as KineMaster.
- If you are good at written communication and think you can get a point across in 400-500 words, then consider writing a blog. WordPress is the most popular site to host blogs and can be used for free.
- If you have products or services to showcase that look great and you can take a good photograph (or perhaps you already have a bank of images) then look for platforms that suit image sharing and make the most of them. The popularity of the auction site eBay means that equipment such as photo light boxes are readily available to make your products look as good as possible online. There are good options for editing photos built into most smartphones, with many more apps available for the more creative (for example, PicStitch to put more than one image together, or Over which lets you add text to images, amongst other things).

Bring your existing strengths to your social media usage for maximum effect.

7 STEP 7 – PICK YOUR PLATFORMS

You can't do every platform and do them well – and often enough - to gain maximum benefits from their use. Whatever it is you are considering using social media for, our advice is to pick two platforms (three at most) and focus on using them to best effect, rather than trying to be everywhere. If necessary, start with just one platform until you build your experience and confidence, and whilst you refine your message and content.

So, which platform do you choose from the multitude available? To a large extent, this goes back to your Step 1 'why' – just what is it you are trying to get out of your social media use? The second element that it is important to consider is where the people are that you want to connect with. Where are your customers, stakeholders or employees? There is plenty of data, freely available, that will tell you more about who is using which platform, particularly around user demographics. You can also find information about the best times to post for maximum reach on a platform by platform basis. We haven't included any data here as it changes on a regular basis – but a quick Google will secure you the information you need. Be mindful that this will keep changing over time, so you may need to develop your own strategy to match.

Different platforms come and go, and popularity levels fluctuate too. For example, Facebook started out on a University campus for students, but as we write this book, its fastest growing demographic is grandparents. The students have gone elsewhere.

Although there is regular new research available about platform use, other social media users are a valuable source of data. Don't be afraid to check out the competition – or just other people in your profession. Who are they following? What hashtags do they use? When and what do they post? What tools do they use? All of this is valuable, and publically available data.

Here's some advice on platforms that doesn't depend too much on changing demographics or trends:

- If you are looking for work or to make professional connections, you should consider having a LinkedIn profile. As a platform, LinkedIn has its limitations: it is unfortunately a place that is subject to sales spam and it isn't quite as easy to build personal relationships in the same way that you can on other platforms (more on that later). However, it is a default place to be. Many recruiters will check out your profile on LinkedIn. The platform also makes it easy to showcase your work and skills, through customisable headlines, its own blogging platform and space for links to your work and publications.

- Blogging can be a powerful way of generating traffic to your website, and can be used to demonstrate your areas of professional expertise. It gives you content to share on the other social media platforms and is more in-depth than the fast interactions of somewhere like Twitter (although that is an excellent place to link to your blog). There are many blogging platforms and are mostly free (although some have some paid for options such as bespoke URLs that are worth considering).
- Whatever platform you choose, ensure that you have a method for monitoring people interacting with you in this space – and respond accordingly. This shows that you are listening and engaging. For example check comments on your posts, blogs or videos. Check your notifications on Twitter – who has mentioned your Twitter handle and why? If you find that you are being criticised via a social media platform, then we recommend acknowledging the comments and offering a way of discussing the situation in more detail away from the platform (privately – through direct message – provide an email address or a phone number to facilitate this).
- If you have multiple accounts on the same social media platform (for example, you have a more than one Twitter account, or you have both personal and business Facebook accounts, make sure you are sharing from the correct one every time!
- Don't overshare and keep your content suitable for the platform. Each social media site is different – the best way to learn what works where is to be guided by other users. Watch and learn!

8 STEP 8 – CONNECT AND ENGAGE

So, now you know who what your key message and audience is. It's time to connect with them in your chosen space. Most social media platforms are designed so that people can follow your content easily. On Facebook, a simple 'like' of your business page will ensure that future content appears in that individual's timeline. The same applies to following a business page on LinkedIn.

An important principle to remember here is that at its heart, social media is about **dialogue** – not broadcasting. Too many people using social media professionally just talk about themselves, or their products and services. We recommend avoiding the hard sell. There is little we dislike more than accepting a LinkedIn connection request and a few minutes later getting an email from them to 'introduce themselves' – along with a handy link to their website or product. If your focus for social media is about promoting your business, you should aim not to mention your products or services more than once in every five social shares, as a maximum. It's important to strike a balance – and that balance needs to be weighted heavily in favour of being an interesting and useful member of your professional community as opposed to telling people about yourself – and there are plenty of people using social media for just that. If you put the connection and engagement first, then the professional benefits will come in time.

A good starting point on Twitter is joining in on a Twitter chat. Many professions have them. We both work in the field of Human Resources, and often join in on HR and Learning and Development specific chats. These typically happen at the same time each week, have a moderator, use a dedicated hashtag and will feature a nominated topic or a question for discussion each time. It's worth searching for chats in your profession as they can be a great way to get to know others and expand your network.

Some sites have their own etiquette about connecting. LinkedIn is one such site. It's possible on LinkedIn to send someone a 'blank' connection request. This is a request to connect but without an accompanying note or introduction to yourself. This is generally considered okay when you know someone, but if you don't it is polite to include a comment with you request. Think about the equivalent in real life – how would you behave at a face-to-face networking event?

Once a social media platform gets to know you are your interests, it will suggest people or accounts with which you might want to engage. Over on LinkedIn check out 'people you might know'. It's often (but not always) uncanny. Facebook and Instagram will put these suggestions into your timeline for ease. Twitter will also recommend accounts to follow and tailor your trends to topics that are relevant to your interests (this will also help you with finding content to share – more on this coming up in the next chapter).

When it comes to engaging with others on social media, we are advocates of joining in with conversations – as well as starting them. Another good way to increase engagement with your content is to make an express request for feedback. For example, if you write a blog, consider posing a question in your post and inviting people to comment. Share a post on your chosen social media platform and ask others what they think about it. Consider creating a poll or even a competition. If you are conducting research, then it's fine to say you would be obliged if others would share the content. If you are polite and don't do it too often, many of your followers or connections will be happy to comment or join in.

Finally, don't forget to take your connections offline. Social media can lead to effective professional relationships. We have known people who first engaged through a social media network to have formed effective collaborations as well as great friendships. So take opportunities to meet your online connections too – where that is safe and sensible.

9 STEP 9 – SHARE OFTEN

Sharing content will help you build a network and make connections. Everyone likes someone who shares their content. Sharing interesting content that you have found makes you a useful member of your professional community.

When it comes to sharing, you need to think about what, when and where. Hopefully by now you have made your platform choices so your decision about ‘where’ to share has been addressed: it’s time to turn to **what** and **when**.

Some people find it hard to know exactly what to share when they first start using social media. As we said earlier, it’s important to avoid only sharing your own content. What you share should also ideally align with your bio: for example, if you state in your bio that you work in marketing but spend all your time tweeting about football, there’s a disconnect there that might mean you lose followers.

There are a few ways that you can collate good information to share with your network. When you have connections within your profession, you will find that articles and things of interest will land naturally in your timeline because of the people you follow on each platform. Depending on how many and what kind of people or accounts you follow, you may find the vast majority – or even all – of the content you share there. On Twitter you can check out ‘moments’ to see what is trending or what others are talking about. You can also search relevant industry or profession hashtags to see what people are currently talking about as a way of finding good content. It’s also worth checking out bloggers in your specific field as they will be sharing their own work. Follow relevant news outlets or publications for your professional field. And of course, share your own content and talk about your own work – just make sure that it isn’t your entire timeline.

When sharing someone else’s work, make sure to tag them in it. For example: “*Just read this fab blog post by @HR_Gem.*” This will increase your visibility to the content creator – quite often you will find they will reply even if it is just to say a simple thank you. You might even get a follow back or strike up a conversation.

Content that you share should be interesting, relevant, thought-provoking – and it should be something you would be happy for your boss to see, too!

When and how often to share varies depending on the platform itself and who it is you are trying to reach. On slower-moving platforms like LinkedIn or Facebook, you might only need to share something once a day – if that. Over on Twitter a single tweet has a very short shelf life as most people just don’t scroll back that far in their timeline. More regular sharing is required on Twitter to maintain a steady presence.

Data is available online about when is the best time to post content on what social media platform. As these analytics will change over time, your best source of up to date information is to do a search for the platform you want to know more about in real time. Once you start typing “best time to post on...” into Google, you’ll see there are a lot of options! It’s also important to experiment by engaging at different times and different days to see what works for you and your network. The broad data is useful but it’s also about what the particular crowd you are trying to reach are doing – and your use of social media might be more niche.

When you get established on social media, you can get data about your own efforts. Blogging platforms will give you data on who is visiting your site and when, along with how long they spend there. You can find out your most popular posts, days and times. Twitter has an analytics menu that you can find in your settings which will also show you your reach, most interacted shares and top followers. LinkedIn can tell you who has visited you profile and how many people have seen your posts – additional features are available for a fee.

Another sharing option is the conference or event share. Most conferences these days will have a social media backchannel – official or otherwise. There is usually a hashtag, and often a number of people tasked with getting content on that hashtag (sometimes known as a “blogsquad”) to give a virtual element to the event for people who can’t be there in person. If you are at an event, a great way of sharing is to tweet, live blog or take photos in real time and share them with your network. Tell your followers where you are and share what you are learning. Make sure whatever you share uses the event hashtag for maximum exposure. Even if you’re not actually there in person, sharing content, using the hashtag and giving your opinions (constructively!) can still help get you noticed as someone working in that field.

Remember that using hashtags will also make your content searchable in the future, and not just at the time that you post it.

Experiment with what works best for you – always remembering your overall reason for being social.

10 STEP 10 – USE TOOLS


For those of you that are time poor, there are some social media tools that can make using social media easier or more manageable.

Hootsuite / TweetDeck


These are platforms that can help you organise your social media accounts (especially useful if you are trying to manage more than one account on the same platform). They allow for scheduling of tweets so that you can plan social media content to be shared on an ongoing basis, without the need to action each time. Just be careful about it. For example, if there is a serious news incident or national disaster, make sure you turn them off, quickly. Also recognise that there are limitations to too much scheduling as it limits your ability to interact with responses.

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Lists

A useful way to organise your Twitter timeline is a list. This simply means that you create lists of people and accounts, in order to organise or categorise. This means that when you want to catch up, you don't have to check back through a busy timeline, but can just select a few key areas to view. You can set up multiple lists or follow those set up by other people.

Apps

There are specific apps (such as 'If That Then This') that allow for simple sharing. You set the rules on the app. For example, you can engage a setting to ensure that when you post content on your business Facebook page, it will automatically also post it on Twitter or LinkedIn (sometimes called 'cross-posting').

Also make use of quick tools built into the site you are using. For example, if you use WordPress to blog, you can activate settings that will automatically share the blog on social media platforms of your choice rather than doing this task manually.

If you want to invest financially in your social media activity, there are even more tools that you can use. For example, there are social media listening services that monitor every mention of your name (or the name of your business) and send detailed reports. You can also find a range of lead generation tools, tools that give you a much deeper analysis into your follower information (and help to grow it) and even tools that can help you create content. Our view is that these tools can be helpful but aren't usually necessary for most people who are using social media just for themselves. They can however be very useful for larger brands and organisations that need to be much more strategic about their efforts.

11 STEP 11 – DIVE IN – AND BE AUTHENTICALLY YOU

It has been said that to *get* social media, you have to *do* social media. It is fine to ‘lurk’ a little to begin with (by which we mean just watching and consuming content, without engaging too much). But you will get the most out of social media when you fully engage. This doesn’t mean spending hours on it every day – social media is continuous, so you could never consume or keep up with everything. It is however important to make it a habit – and commit to it. If you need to, until using social media becomes more natural to you, consider scheduling yourself a little time each day. You could also consider setting yourself a manageable target, such as publishing one blog post each week. If you want to build connections and join online communities, you won’t fully realise the benefit unless you dive right in. No one wants to see an abandoned (or apparently so) account.

It’s not difficult to fit social media into your daily life as you can dip in and out to suit you. Whether you are waiting for a train, in the back of a taxi, standing in a queue for a coffee, you can just drop into your feed, see what’s occurring, and make a quick contribution.

We are big believers that you should (for the most part at least, and always taking into account your personal policy) be yourself on social media. It’s easy to tell when someone is not being authentic. Being yourself is not the same as sharing everything about yourself. Some people on social media use it to boast or exclusively present their best (and highly polished) version of themselves. You will find people who talk often about what a great person they are. In our experience, these people aren’t much different when you meet them in real life (‘IRL’).

Remember that you can be authentic without sharing your every thought or moment. If you are focused on building a professional personal brand on social media, consider carefully what discussions to engage in or what content to share. Some issues will always be divisive – politics and religion being just a couple of obvious examples.

Although we advocate connecting and getting involved, also remember the importance of switching off. Social media has been described as the conversation that never sleeps; if you try to keep up with absolutely everything, neither will you. Being constantly connected isn’t always good for our wellbeing. Social media can be a little addictive. So make sure that you step away from all your technology on a regular basis. Unplug yourself!

12 STEP 12 – STAY SAFE

Social media has great potential. Unfortunately it is also a space in which inappropriate behaviour can take place, or a place where if people are not careful they could cause themselves a security concern. We have some simple advice for staying safe online:

- Don't put your full date of birth or even just the specific day of the year on a publicly available social media platform. If a fraudster can determine your birth year, they have your full date of birth – a critical piece of identify information. For the same reason, don't put your year of birth in your handle (we have seen people with handles like @Gem78 – maybe she's the 78th Gem to sign up, or maybe it's the year of her birth).
- If you have decided that some of your content is private and just for friends (such as on a closed Instagram profile) then don't accept friends or follow requests from people you don't know.
- Many smartphone apps have location settings within them, which, when you use your phone to upload photos for example, will show where they were taken. This could therefore give people a good idea where you live or work. If you don't want to share this information, go into your phone settings and turn off location settings.
- Check the privacy settings on each social media platform that you are using to check what you are sharing with whom. Check these every once in a while as from time to time the app or platform may update these.
- Use strong passwords for all of your social media platforms to reduce the risk of them being compromised – whatever you do, don't use *Password1* or the like! It is good practice to ensure you don't use any recognisable words because programmes exist to help hackers identify dictionary words. The best advice we've seen is to use mnemonics for a memorable phrase e.g. *IaaaTwi2019* – “I am an awesome Twitter user in 2019”, obviously. Use different passwords for each of the platforms you are using. Where they are an option, set additional security measures such as security questions.
- Work on the basis that nothing you ever post on social media can ever be truly, 100% private. Even when a conversation or profile is private, they can still be copied and distributed without your knowledge. Consider keeping your really personal stuff personal.
- Be careful 'checking in' to places such as hotels on certain sites such as Facebook, if you have a public profile. Do you really want people to know where you are?
- Be cautious about what links you click. If something doesn't look right, don't engage with it.
- Think before you post!

MYTH BUSTING

You have now read through all twelve of our steps, so you are probably already fairly interested in using social media professionally. But even with an interested audience, we find there are some barriers to overcome, often in the form of myths and misconceptions. So just in case you still aren't too sure, here are a few of the things people say to us about social media, and what we say to them in response.

How do you find the time?

The answer here is simple – and brief. If you want to do something enough, then you will find a way and make the time. And, as the saying goes, if you don't, you will find an excuse. Using social media doesn't even take that much time, if you are smart about how you use it.

I know I should give it a go

In our experience this is a comment often said without a great deal of conviction. As we said in step number 4, if you are thinking about using social media in your professional life, you need to be clear about why you are doing it. If you don't understand your 'why' or overall aims, then you will find it hard to be motivated to get and keep going.

Isn't Twitter just about people saying what they had for breakfast?

No.

There are people who share what they had for breakfast – but if this is the majority of your timeline (and you aren't interested in food) then we respectfully suggest you unfollow these people and follow someone else instead.

I don't know what to say

Our advice here is not to worry too much about this. If you overthink it or try to force something, you might never do it. As discussed in step 9, share a mix of your content and that of others, join in on discussions and stay away from inflammatory subjects.

How do you cope with the constant stream of content on social media?

Cognitive overload is a real thing and it's not just about social media. In our working lives there are a constant stream of interruptions, many of them technology-based. With emails, phone calls, text messages, voicemails, instant messages and other alerts we are both constantly connected and constantly interrupted. It is easy to see how social media can feel like just another potential interruption or channel to be managed. Of course, the additional challenge with social media is its potential to spill into non-work time through our smartphones.

As with all interruptions in the workplace, it is about how you *choose* to respond – or not – to that interruption. Don't be afraid to switch off when you want or need to.

I don't know how to use social media. There is all this terminology that I don't understand.

Social media does involve a lot of terminology and it changes from platform to platform. It does take a little getting used to, just like anything new. In most areas of interest, professions, disciplines, hobbies or pursuits, there will be welcoming communities who will help you along the way. Watching how other social media users interact and use the platform will also help you to learn the ropes when you first start out. Plus you now have a handy glossary at the back of this book to help!

Isn't social media just for the younger generation?

Definitely not! It is true that the younger you are, the more likely you are to have grown up with technology and therefore it might feel more normal or easy to use. For those currently at school, there was no time before the internet or the mobile phone. The evidence on social media use confirms that it is truly multi-generational.

It doesn't apply to us / me / our business

Whether we like it or not, or believe it or not, social media is normal – even expected. This is the world that we live in, today and tomorrow. Whilst individual platforms might come and go, trends will rise and fall, we now live in a mobile, connected, digital world. Your customers and colleagues are there, your potential customers are there, your employees are there, and your friends are there. You can choose whether you want to be there too. And it is a choice. But there are risks with not engaging too.

AND FINALLY

Remember that social media is a long game. It will take time to build a network and connections. Keep putting content out there, sharing and engaging. Focus first on adding value to your followers and professional community. Follow these tips and the momentum will build, slowly but surely.

Social media shouldn't be an additional burden on your never ending 'to-do' list. It needs to add value to you professionally, either through creating opportunities, building your network or supporting your continuing professional development. Although in this book we have aimed to present the professional benefits of using social media, there is no doubt that it can have its darker side too. It is another channel of communication to be managed, another potential distraction and therefore has the potential to cause additional work and stress. Like any tool available to you in the workplace, its use and value must be assessed. Where tools are helpful, they can continue to be used. Where they are not, we should feel free to disregard them. You don't *have* to do social media – but if you do, enjoy it! We are both examples that there is much to be gained personally and professionally. Good luck – and we hope to see you on social media very soon.

If you want to engage with us on Twitter (our own personal platform of choice) you can find us at @HR_Gem and @TimScottHR.

GLOSSARY

Here you can find just a few of the popular terms and abbreviations used across social media.

AFAIK

Stands for ‘as far as I know’. Used on Twitter, where there are lots of abbreviations due to the character limit in posts. We’ve included quite a few in this glossary to help you along.

App

An app (short for “application”) is to your mobile device as a programme is to your computer (although the word “app” is creeping into computing now too). It’s the specific software that allows you to do – well, anything. Hence the phrase originally coined by Apple that “there’s an app for that”. There almost always is.

Blog/Blogging

A blog (originally an abbreviation of the word “weblog”) is essentially text that an author has published online. Blogs are usually informal and cover any topic of personal or professional interest: from leadership to fitness, fashion to music. People blog about their mental health, their politics, their favourite recipes. Popular blog platforms include WordPress, Tumblr and Medium.

Bio / Biography

Your headline or summary describing you or your business on a social media platform. Has various names across different social media sites. Also known as profiles.

Check In

A Facebook thing. ‘Checking in’ to a named location indicates your presence there.

Clickbait

Slang term for when the title of an article or blog is cunningly designed to pique the reader's curiosity and make them want to click on it to find out more.

Connection Request

As it suggests – a request to connect with you on LinkedIn. On Facebook this is a 'friend request'.

Content

In the context of the internet, content is anything that is produced and can then be shared: articles, blogs, photos, videos, presentation slide decks...

Direct Message

Social media platforms provide options for private or direct messaging as well as public sharing. These can be 121 or to groups. These messages will only be visible to the recipients or participants in a group conversation.

Freemium

Slang term. A common business model, particularly in selling apps, is to make the main product available for free but then to charge for certain features or additional content. Some social media sites such as LinkedIn have a premium offering too.

Hashtag/#

Originating on Twitter but now used on multiple platforms - the hashtag is basically a keyword that allows you to tag or "file" a tweet against a particular subject so that if you search for that particular term, you get a list of tweets which contain it, regardless of whether or not you follow those people.

You can start a hashtag if you want to – just put the hash sign in front of some text. Good practice is to capitalise each word of a hashtag to help people with visual impairments who use screen readers.

Humblebrag

Refers to social media posts that are boastful in a humble sort of way. Often used to indicate someone highlighting their own achievements.

ICYMI

Short for ‘in case you missed it’. Used to indicate that content is being reshared... in case you missed it the first time around.

IMO / IMHO

‘In my opinion’ or ‘in my humble opinion’.

IRL/In Real Life

Slang term, most often found on Twitter, to describe meeting someone physically (i.e. In Real Life) rather than communicating online, as in “It was fab to meet @HR_Gem IRL today”.

NSFW

Short for ‘not suitable for work’. Used to indicate potentially risky content!

Notification

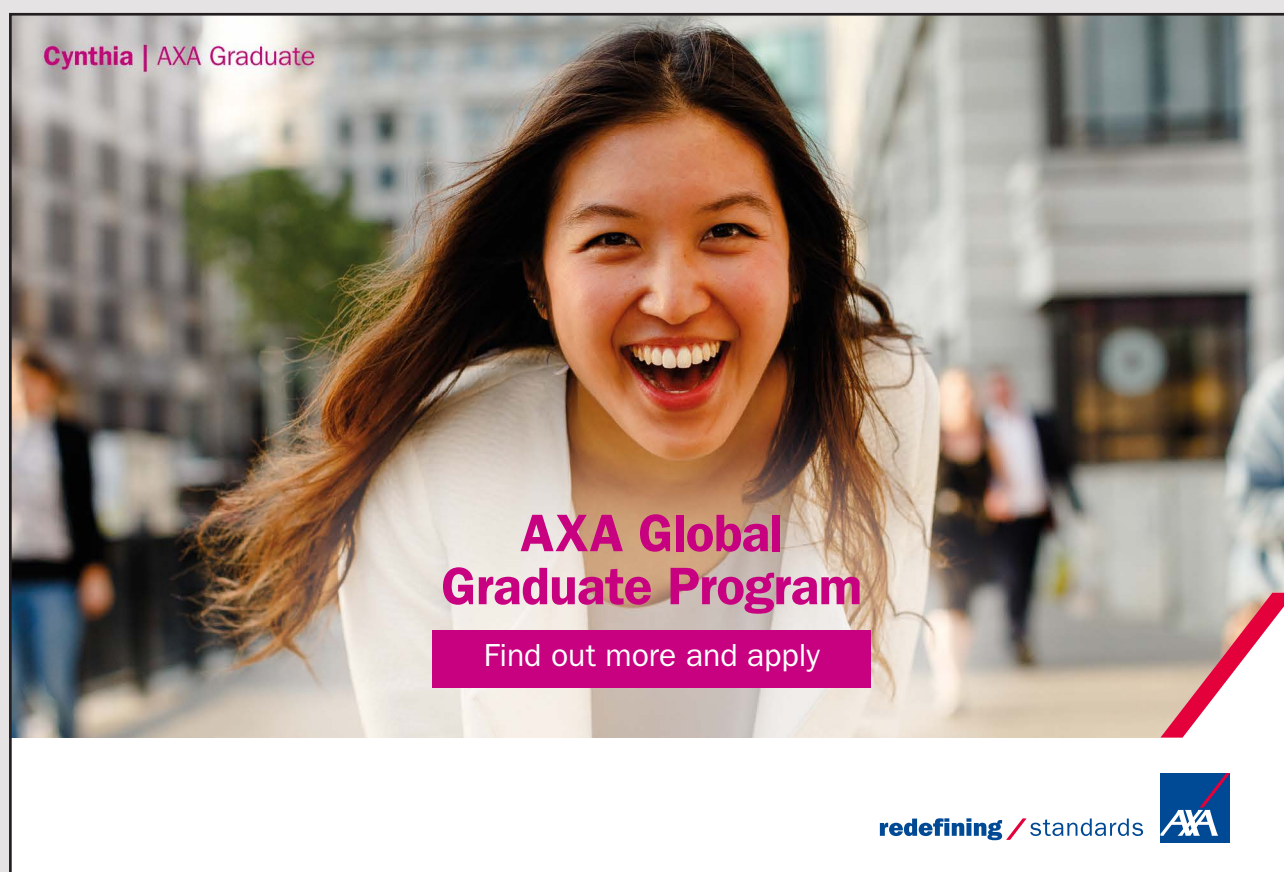
An alert from a social media platform. This could be to tell you that someone has liked your blog post, shared some of your content or sent you a direct message. You have the option to customise the notifications you receive in the platform itself – normally in the settings menu. If you are using social media on a smart phone, you will also be able to tailor your notifications in its settings menu.

RT / Retweet

A term from Twitter, which means directly sharing someone else's content. You have an additional option in Twitter which is a 'quote tweet' which is sharing the tweet with an additional comment from you. Other sites use slightly different terminology for essentially the same thing – reshare or repost being two examples.

Timeline


The way you see updates from people or businesses that you follow or are connected with, in (mostly) chronological order. We say 'mostly' chronological order as each platform has its own algorithm which will influence how content is presented to you. Some sites give you the option to change the order in which you see content (for example, Twitter gives you the option of latest tweets, or top (most popular) tweets. Also sometimes referred to as your 'feed'.



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Trending

A term used mostly in connection with Twitter. It refers to hashtags, terms or words that are the most popular at any given time. Trends can be shown as worldwide, local or personal to your interests. To make a conference or product hashtag trend is the Holy Grail of all social media coverage activity.

Twitter Handle

Your username on Twitter that begins with '@'.

Viral

Content that has gained significant traction on line and has had many thousands of shares, views or comments.

Vlog

Short for 'video log': a vlog is simply a blog using the medium of video rather than text.