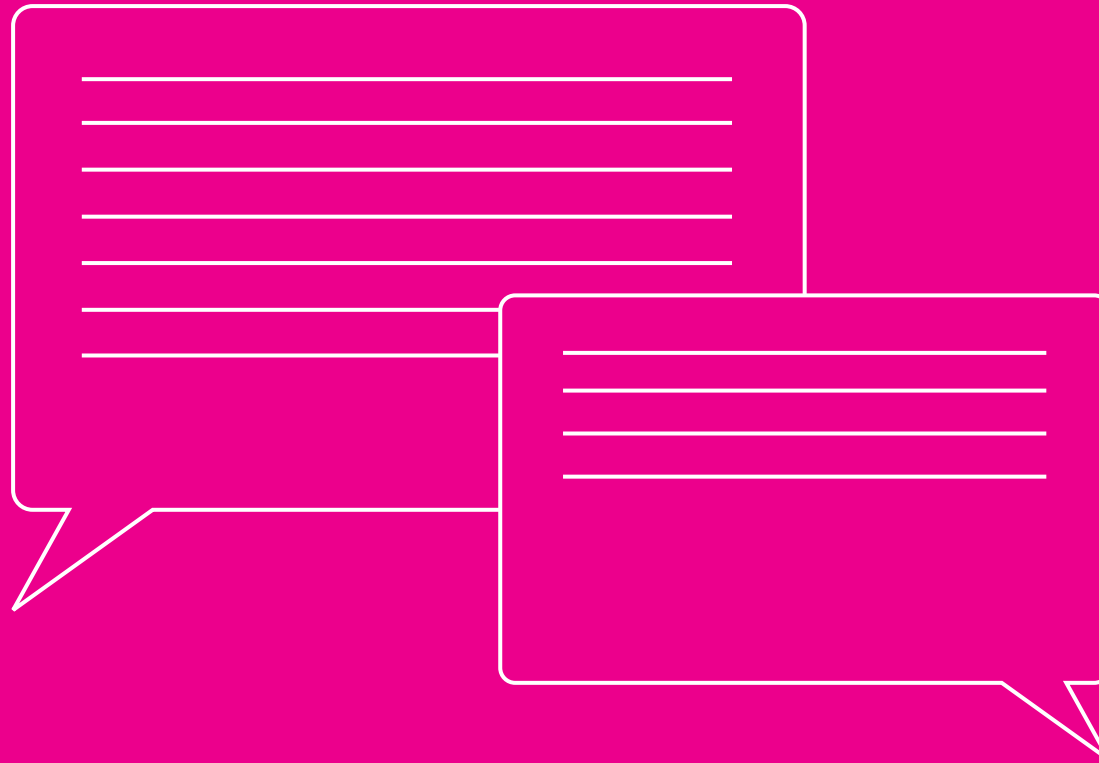


A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA



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INTRODUCTION

This is one of a series of Beginners' Guidance Notes produced for cultural services officers working in the London Boroughs.

It is part of a programme - run by Visit London with London Cultural Improvement Programme, and funded by Capital Ambition - to develop the marketing skills of non-marketers working in London's local authority cultural services.

For all the guides in this series, case studies and other local tourism resources [click here](#), or click on the coloured boxes opposite.



**VISIT
LONDON**
VISITLONDON.COM

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A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
**CUSTOMER
RELATIONSHIP
MANAGEMENT**

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
**MARKETING
EVALUATION**

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
**PROACTIVE
MEDIA WORK**

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
WEBSITES

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1 UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA

What is Social Media?

Social Media is about sharing, communicating and publishing knowledge and information online. It encourages openness by way of voting, commenting, posting and following. People can participate in these interactive online conversations by using a variety of social media 'tools' or channels.

Many of the social media 'tools' are free to set up and easy to use, and connect people, businesses and organisations online instantly and spontaneously.

Social media channels make it easy for customers to 'spread the word' about absolutely anything - products, services, ideas, events, arts & culture, news, politics, fashion, lifestyle - and it's this social network 'buzz' that generates yet further excitement and exposure.



What are the social media 'tools'?

Social Networks

Social Networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn allow individuals and organisations to build web pages that can be shared with fans, friends and colleagues, who in turn can share their news, stories, photos and videos.



Blogs

These are online journals that anyone or any business can set-up with the help of a blog interface such as Blogger, WordPress, or TypePad. Entries are made using a content management system, with the most recent entry appearing first.

Microblogging

This is social networking combined with bite-sized blogging, where small amounts of content (updates) are distributed online and through the mobile phone network, e.g. Twitter, Tumblr and Posterous.

Podcasts

Podcasts are online audio files that are available by subscription, or as one-offs, using software that automatically detects and downloads new broadcasts over time. Not to be confused with listen again tools such as iPlayer, through which audio and video is 'streamed', not downloaded.



Forums

These are online discussion areas that encourage individuals and customers to post and comment on specific products, services, topics and interests.

Content Communities

Online communities that organise and share particular kinds of content. The most popular content communities are Flickr - photos, del.icio.us - bookmarked links, and YouTube - videos.

Wikis

These websites allow people to add content or edit the information on them, acting as a communal document or database. The best-known is Wikipedia, an online encyclopaedia which has over 2 million English language articles.

2 THE ESSENTIALS OF GOOD SOCIAL MEDIA

Marketing your Social Media presence

Social media marketing is all about communicating and interacting with customers. People tend to be sociable creatures who like to share ideas, cooperate and collaborate in business and pleasure, and pass on 'word of mouth' recommendations. Social media allows them to do this quickly and spontaneously.

Organisations are using social media marketing alongside traditional marketing activities as an effective and powerful way of interacting and engaging with their customers, and are putting together Social Media marketing plans that build up a loyal following.

Local authorities have started to do this as well, as they realise the power of social media to reach new audiences, raise awareness of their services and increase users. For instance, residents are encouraged to voice an opinion and participate in everyday local issues such as litter, potholes, fly-tipping and dog

fouling; Council leaders use blogs to keep residents up-to-date on topical issues; and more and more local authorities are reaching residents via Twitter as they tweet about local events, library services, electorate news, school updates and much more.



Social media marketing:

- Gets people talking and 'spreading the word'
- Creates a 'buzz' about your organisation, an event, a place, a product
- Raises awareness of your services
- Drives visitors to your website
- Helps to build up loyal customers
- Generates new customers.

Where to start?

Look around at other London Boroughs and what kind of social media marketing activity is already happening in leisure, sports, arts and culture. Take a look at the kinds of conversations that are going on that relate to your work, e.g. film, arts, dance, theatre, community events, festivals, arts centres, physical activities etc. And listen to the conversations that are happening about them and your own organisation.

Check out how organisations such as museums, arts centres, community centres, youth groups, sports clubs and art galleries are using social media. And, if they are, what channels are they using and how, and how are they talking to their audiences?

Begin to identify communities that you can start conversations with, e.g. on a local community blog, artists' Facebook page, local news, Twitter etc.



Questions to ask first

- What do you want to achieve? What do you want to start conversations about, e.g. your organisation, or an event you are planning, or a new arts venue? Do you want to generate more interest in a particular area, district, park, venue, community project? Would it benefit from its own Facebook page that would then generate interested fans /customers?
- Who is your audience and how are they using social media channels?
- How would social media marketing fit in with your current marketing strategy and activities? Think about a particular task you do that would really benefit from the social media 'buzz' and what you would accomplish from 'getting it talked about'
- What kind of social media channel would help you best achieve your goal - e.g. a blog, a Facebook page, a Twitter feed? And do you have the resources to keep it going once you've set it up? Work out whether you may be able to use a social media channel for a one-off event or short-term campaign
- Social media is all about 'letting go of a brand' and encouraging others to talk about it - is this possible within your organisation?
- Does your organisation have a policy on social media marketing in the workplace, and are there any social media channels that you may be barred from using? Is there someone in your team / organisation who is solely responsible for updating the website and interacting with social media, e.g. a web editor, who you may have to coordinate with?
- Is there someone in your organisation who can help install the technology that makes the social media channels work?



Listen and join in

It may be enough that you simply start to 'listen' to what's being said about your organisation, your Borough, your product and services, and your area of work. Find out how your stakeholders and users are using social media channels and ask yourself would it be beneficial to join in.



Read blogs and Facebook pages that relate to your work. Search Twitter - www.twitter.com - and see what people are saying, or simply register on Twitter yourself and follow people/organisations that will feed you with useful and interesting information. Read comments on blogs relating to your work and see which ones get a response.

Join in with conversations and comment on blog posts that relate to your work.

Sign up to 'google alerts' (for free) that will bring daily email alerts (and links to websites and blogs) into your inbox on any topic that you request, e.g. 'arts in Brent', 'events in east London', 'community projects in Chelsea'.



Start to link

Consider social media channels as traffic generators for your website (where your marketing campaign or event information may sit). Posting content and links on like-minded blogs and Facebook pages will start to generate interest and will help people become more familiar with your organisation and brand.



Build a starting place to hold your conversations, e.g. a blog

Setting up a blog is free. Blogs are good for generating links and visits to your website, and come with built-in analytics so you can monitor visits to the blog and where they've come from. Make sure you, or a dedicated web editor, will have time to keep up with regular blog posts.

Think about what you want to say on the blog - are you using the blog to promote events, culture within your Borough, community arts, a new venue, a green space? And could you become recognised as a good source of information or an expert on a specific topic that builds a following of regular readers? Keep posts short and relevant, incorporate images and film if possible, and link to further information. It may take time to receive 'comments' to your blog; the important thing is to keep going.

Do you have time or resources for anything else?

Don't feel that you should be doing everything. The important thing is that you have started to join in with conversations and to look around at what social media channels would be best suited to creating and generating interest and conversations about your product, events, or services.

If you want to attract certain types of people you need to use certain types of social media. As a starting point, Twitter lends itself well to distributing information and news, as well as being able to monitor your followers.



3 PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Best practice examples

<http://islingtonwildlife.typepad.com/islingtoncounts>

Islington Council set up an Elections blog using the host Typepad. As one of the authors says, it was a great way of 'raising awareness of voting to groups that don't always get the information they need or are not always heard', as well as creating an election 'buzz' locally in the build up to Election Day on May 6.

There is now a summary on this blog page thanking followers, announcing the election results, and some feedback about this first-time blog: 'this is the first time we've used social media for the elections and we had over 20,000 visits to our blog. We also had hundreds of people follow our Twitter feed.'



The url for this temporary Elections blog was created as an add-on to the Council's permanent wildlife blog url: <http://islingtonwildlife.typepad.com/blog>

- There is a clear link to the blog from Islington Council Home page www.islington.gov.uk
- The Islington Wildlife Blog gives the Council a colourful and interactive platform to promote inner-city wildlife, interact with residents, and link to like-minded blogs and other websites
- The left-hand button, that simply says 'follow', leads users to login to Typepad so that, when registered, they can comment on the blog posts as well as receive automatic updates. There's also a link to Facebook
- Authors of the blog can comment on other local 'community' blogs to generate awareness and interest and include a link back to this blog.

www.facebook.com/BarbicanArtGallery

The Barbican Art Gallery Facebook page has over 3,000 fans. It's easy to set up a business Facebook page, although it takes time to build up fans. Think about how you will do this, e.g. add a link to the Facebook page from your website home page or, if you have a customer database, you can launch the Facebook page to customers in an e-news.



- Facebook pages are mini websites, i.e. as well as the home/profile page there are extra pages on Events, Photos, YouTube, Info
- The author is encouraging interaction by asking questions, e.g. 'Did you have a good Easter?' and then linking to a video of what was going on at the Barbican over Easter



- The author is using the page for offers, e.g. 'Giveaway! We have 20 tickets for our online fans for a Ron Arad talk tonight!'
- There is lots of interaction between Fans: some fans just click on the 'like' button and some leave posts, e.g. 'we can't wait to visit'
- There is a clear link on the Barbican Art Gallery website home page www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery to their Facebook page.

www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/site/index.php

Lichfield District Council's homepage includes applications for Flickr, Twitter, and 'ratemyplace'.

- The Council has incorporated a web app that allows people to report problems to councils via Twitter. FixMyTweet allows residents to report street problems such as potholes, fly tipping, littering, etc while they're out and about www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/site/custom_scripts/newsblog.php?id=270. There is also a Twitter feed on the home page for residents to comment on latest news
- The Flickr feed brings in a rotating selection of photos of the area that have been posted in Flickr by residents and linked up to the District Council by way of the Flickr 'sets', i.e Lichfield District
- Latest News pages are set up as a blog. Residents can sign-up to the RSS feeds to automatically receive the News and to make Comments.



www.barnet.gov.uk/

London Borough of Barnet website home page includes applications for Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter and FixMyStreet.

- Both the YouTube and Flickr feeds show the latest films and photos to be linked from the host sites to the home page. The council is using the films to tell residents about community projects, e.g. Barnet in Bloom and Walk the Walk and things like 'gritting the streets'
- The London Borough of Barnet Facebook page - www.facebook.com/barnetcouncil - has 380 fans. There are comments from the public, e.g. 'hello, I am very interested about flexischooling and homeschooling, could you please send me some information or links', as well as regular posts from Council authors, e.g.

'you can report pot-holes here!' and 'Hi, as Chair of Age Concern Barnet, can I ask you to highlight all the opportunities and support we offer to people over 55 in the borough'

- Their Twitter feed has 852 followers. Many of the Council tweets are headed up 'What's On'. When clicking on 'Twitter' on the homepage, it takes users through to an easy-to-understand introduction on how to get messages via Twitter from Barnet Council.

<http://twitter.com/HaveringLibrary>

The Havering Library Service presents itself in its Twitter Bio as being 'the only Library Service in London with attendance going UP!'



The Twitter feed is used:

- To remind residents of library services, e.g. 'check out our free audio books and e books – all you need is a library card and a PIN number'
- To connect with new audiences, e.g. 'If you live in Havering and don't use our libraries – tell us why?'
- As a B2B communication channel, e.g. 'If you want to advertise your business on our plasma screens contact Havering Libraries'
- To connect audiences to Havering Library via other social media channels such as YouTube, e.g. 'check out Havering Libraries on Havering Libraries YouTube page.'

4 TOP TEN TIPS

1. Remember that social media is actually just about being human beings – sharing ideas, cooperating and collaborating to create art, thinking and commerce, vigorous debate and discourse - it's what our species has built several civilisations on (from an ebook by Antony Mayfield from iCrossing).
2. Before you start, check whether your organisation has a policy on social media and what's possible and what's not. Is it easy to incorporate social media channels into your web pages or website?
3. Rather than 'plunging in head first' just because everyone else is doing it, be clear about why you're doing it - e.g. starting an interaction with your community, getting feedback from the community, finding cost-effective ways of telling your community about events, leisure services etc, positioning your organisation as an authority on something.
4. Develop a formal Social Media marketing plan that focuses on who your audience is, how they are currently using social media, and what you want to gain from their interaction with your channels.

5. Start to listen to the conversations that are going on in your Borough - on community blogs, on arts blogs, in the media etc - and start to post comments, ask questions, take part and interact. Add links back to your website.
6. If you set up a blog, who will be the main author? If it's you, do you have the time and resources to commit to writing posts? If it's sporadic, followers will lose interest.
7. Set up Google alerts on topics that are relevant to your work to start coming in automatically into your email inbox – a good way of keeping up with what's being 'said' in the community.

8. Start a library of images that can be uploaded to Flickr.
9. Try Twitter out first by registering under a Twitter pseudonym and follow people / organisations that will feed you with useful and interesting information.



10. Be patient. It takes time for conversations to start happening, followers to start commenting, fans to start appearing.



5

GLOSSARY

Alerts	A tool that asks a search engine, e.g. Google, to tell you whenever a new page is published on the web that includes your specific keyword
Blog	A web publishing tool, originally called a 'web log', where the most recent entries appear first e.g. WordPress, Blogger. Allows users to subscribe to updates and to leave comments
Bookmarks, Bookmarking	Saving an item, page or website for future reference on an online account such as del.icio.us. Pages can be shared
Communities	Online networks that exist around shared interests or shared content
Instant messaging (IM)	A form of real-time communication via the internet between two or more people based on typed text, e.g. MSN, Google Talk, Skype Chat
Mash-up	A web application combining content from two or more different data sources, e.g. data added to Google Maps
Micro-blogging	Instant publishing of bite-size amounts of content via a service such as Twitter



Podcasts	Audio files that are published on the internet and can be subscribed to / downloaded onto a computer or MP3 player
RSS (really simple syndication)	A method of subscribing to a site's content and being alerted to new updates without having to visit the site
Social media	Media that users can easily participate in, share and create content for, including blogs, social networks, wikis and forums
Social networks	Channels through which individuals can interact socially, e.g. Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn
Tag cloud	A visual representation of the popularity of the tags or descriptions that people are using on a blog or website. Popular tags are often shown in large type and less popular tags in smaller type

Tags, tagging	Keywords that label pieces of content, e.g. blog posts and bookmarks, and make them easy to organise and search
Threads	Strands of conversation on the same subject
Tweet	A post on Twitter
Twitter	A micro-blogging service that distributes bite-size chunks of text across multiple platforms, including mobile, instant messaging and email
Vodcasts	Video files that are published on the internet and can be subscribed to
Web feed	Such as RSS (see above) that allows you to read, listen or watch new content on a blog or a website without having to revisit that site
Webinar	A presentation or seminar that is transmitted over the web
Widget	Also referred to as a gadget, badge or applet - a small block of content, displayed as a small box, that is constantly updating itself (via RSS)

QUICK REFERENCE

- Lots of research and info about social media and local government www.lgeoresearch.com
- For helpful e-books such as 'How to Start Blogging' and 'What is Social Media?' www.icrossing.co.uk
- Simon Wakeman - public sector and communications marketing blog - www.simonwakeman.com
- 3 minute video on 'Social Media Made Easy' www.commoncraft.com
- Blog by Jim Richardson who is MD of a specialist design consultancy working in the arts and cultural sectors www.museummarketing.co.uk