

communicating with social media

Social media is the buzz phrase of the moment. ANNA CAIRO looks at what you need to consider before commencing any communications using the various social media options.

Social media is user-generated content created online using various new technologies allowing people to produce, share and read information. Individuals are now publishers as well as readers. Blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, podcasts, Twitter, Wikis and YouTube are now an extremely popular way of communicating. One of the benefits of these kinds of technologies is that it allows individuals to potentially communicate and interact simultaneously with countless people worldwide, rather inexpensively and at incredible speed.

The benefits can be enormous but does it work? The truth is no-one really knows regardless of what people are currently saying. Social media is a relatively new phenomenon with minimal research and data. Furthermore only 23.8% of the world population actually has access to the Internet. These points, however, shouldn't preclude you from using and experimenting with social media.

The convergence of media, communications and technology have fundamentally changed the way the world operates - communication, business interaction and engagement have all undergone massive transformations beyond anyone's real comprehension. Social media is part of this transformation and at times it can be overwhelming and may cause confusion.

Nevertheless, it is possible to make informed choices. The key question to ask yourself is: 'what are your expectations of using these technologies?'. Do you want to raise your profile, gain visibility for your business, market research or something else? Answering this question will allow you to know how to proceed.

Moving forward:

■ **Research your market:** Get to know what they want. Build a profile of them. Discover how they communicate, what their values and beliefs are. Doing this will allow you to ascertain whether they use new media technologies. There is no point using Twitter or blogging if the people you want to target don't utilise these networks.

■ **Have a structured approach:** Become an expert in a specific area and convey this information. Talk about the things you know on a regular basis so that there is a re-occurring theme that can be picked up by your followers. Solve issues of your niche market through your conversation. By doing this you are establishing a relationship of trust and knowledge.

■ **Produce content that is simple:** Generate information that is easy to understand. If it is complicated, people won't read it. With current information overload, people are more particular with their time and what they read. Keep it short and straightforward.

■ **Which new media to use:** This is a more challenging question to answer, however, by examining your niche you should be able to narrow it down. It might be that you need to experiment to see which one works best. Competition is fierce so investigate accordingly.

Social media does not have to be overwhelming. It is just another technique to build trust and confidence with a potential market. Even though the method may be different, the outcomes remain the same - communicating and engaging with people. Whether this approach is for you and your business is for you to research and experiment.

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