

Guide from

Clear House Accountants

Tel: [+44(0)2071172639] Email: [info@chacc.co.uk] [<https://chacc.co.uk>]
[Business Accountants and Advisors in London]

Using social media to market your business

Social media allows even the smallest business to interact with the wider world. Social media allows you to create a dynamic online presence and establish a dialogue with a wide audience - including existing customers, new prospects, your competitors and suppliers.

1. What you want to achieve

Strengthen communication with existing customers

- You can communicate with customers frequently for a minimal cost. Your customer also has an easy-to-use channel to get in touch with you.
- You can use social media to learn more about your customers, and they can get a greater understanding of you and your business.
- Your customers can tell you what they like and don't like about your business, products and services - and you can respond.
- A strong social media plan can stop complaints escalating and can publicly show that you are addressing them. However, a weak social media plan can inflame complaints in a very public manner.

Reach new customers

- Selecting social media channels used by potential customers can provide valuable exposure for your business at a lower cost than many traditional customer acquisition methods.
- Careful use of social media provides can generate word-of-mouth recommendations for your business.
- Social media can drive traffic to your website. Potential customers who may not otherwise have found it will be exposed to links from sources they trust.

Learn more about your market

- Being active on social media sites allows you to pick up on key trends in your sector and keep an eye on the competition.
- Analytics tools allow you to monitor the effectiveness of your social media activity.

Raise your profile

- You can raise your business profile or the profile of individuals within your business.
- If you are in a market where differentiating between competitors is difficult, using social media to add a personal element to your marketing messages can be very effective.
- Creating an outlet to offer customers your opinions and advice can set you apart from competitors who simply want to bill them.

Improve your reputation

- If you use social media to generate customer feedback - and you are seen to act on it - you can establish yourself as a service-led, customer-focused business.
- The easier it is for customers to communicate with you, the more highly they will regard you.
- Honesty and integrity in your use of social media are paramount. Break your customers' trust in these key areas and your reputation will be damaged.

Network with peers

- Social media networking opportunities allow you to more easily keep existing relationships warm without leaving your desk.
- You can keep in touch with all parts of your supply chain in a relatively informal environment.
- You can source new suppliers more effectively by using word-of-mouth recommendations through social media. Many businesses also use social media as a recruitment tool.

2. Social media platforms

Twitter

- [Twitter](#) allows instant, public communication. You can publish short comments and links to web pages, blogs and images. This allows people to publicly respond, encouraging conversation. By using links you can boost traffic to your website.
- Twitter allows you to build up a network of followers and in turn to follow people that you want to connect with. It's a place to show your best side - sharing knowledge, responding to comments and allowing you to retweet (RT) posts that grab your attention.

Facebook

- [Facebook](#) allows you to show the human face of your business by sharing news and content and being friendly and helpful. Encourage your audience to post content and provide feedback and deal with complaints promptly. Facebook offers analytics tools as well as advertising opportunities.

Instagram

- [Instagram](#), owned by Facebook, allows users to share images and short video clips. You can improve your clips and images with filters and other tools. Hashtags allow you to promote your content more widely. It's well worth encouraging customers to upload their own clips and images about your brand.

LinkedIn

- [LinkedIn](#) is the networking app for professionals, consultants and business-to-business firms. You can post a personal profile or one for your business, and invite colleagues, peers and even competitors to join your network.
- Be careful not to overtly sell; LinkedIn is a forum where you should share content and support others to raise your profile. Encourage contacts to endorse you and provide testimonials.

Pinterest

- [Pinterest](#) is an image-based social media site that's ideal for retail and lifestyle businesses that want to drive referrals and boost sales. You "pin" images to boards and encourage others to repin them.
- Rich Pins allow you to display product information, including price and delivery details, and provide links to your website. Encourage users to pin your images and repin other people's images to raise your profile.

Google+

- Most of the chat on [Google+](#) happens within Communities. These can be public or private; if there isn't a relevant Community for your business you can start one.
- You can use the What's Hot feature to find out which topics are trending. Google+'s Circles feature allows you to share content with specific groups.
- Because it's Google, Google+ can help you stand out in search results.

Snapchat

- [Snapchat](#) is a mobile messaging app that allows you to send videos and pictures. You can add a caption, doodle or filter and send the "snap" to friends. Snaps disappear from the site once they've been viewed, but by adding them to stories, they're displayed for 24 hours.

Blogging

- Blogs allow you to write in more depth on subjects that support your marketing effort and which will appeal to your audience.
- The best blogs use a direct and chatty tone of voice and offer interesting opinions. In most cases, readers can respond and leave comments.
- A blog allows you to provide more depth than social media micro-blogging, but you should try to keep anything you write short and interesting to your target reader.
- Blogging provides another route for potential customers to find you.

Bookmarking and information-sharing tools

- Social bookmarking and information-sharing tools can help you create a buzz about your business - particularly new product or service launches.
- There are several sites that enable users to flag up interesting web pages, including [StumbleUpon](#) and [Reddit](#). These let users see what their peers believe to be the most interesting online content at any given time.

Mix and match to meet your objectives

- Your best choice of social media may be obvious but the chances are you'll need to combine a number of different channels.
- Cross-promote your social media where you can.

3. Time and resources

Bear in mind the time commitment

- Managing an effective social media presence for your business will require time and dedication. Regular updates and timely responses are essential whichever form of social media you use - otherwise visitors won't come back.
- For example, if someone makes a complaint on a social media site and you don't address it for a week, your reputation will be hurt. If you acknowledge it the same day, your stock will be raised, both in their eyes and among other readers.
- Make sure you have the time and resources to make your social media presence lively, vibrant and up-to-date.

Give staff responsibility, but manage it

- If you have staff, consider how they can help your social media marketing. They may be able to add character to your social media activities. For example, your production manager could blog about how projects are progressing.
- Make the boundaries between business and personal communication clear.

Keep it in perspective

- Remember social media is just one part of your marketing plan and allocate resources accordingly.
- Set aside dedicated times each day to monitor and manage your social media. If staff are active on your social media accounts, make sure they don't spend more time on it than necessary.

4. Social media in your marketing plan

Use social media as an additional channel to existing activities

- Using social media is most effective as an integral part of your marketing plan. It can turbo-charge your other online and offline marketing - alerting a wide audience to new products, services, offers and events.
- Always promote your recent activity on your social media sites - such as blogs, success stories and case studies.
- Make sure your social media supports all your other marketing activities including advertising, PR, exhibiting, email marketing and website content.

Understand where your customers are

- Like any successful form of marketing, you must target your efforts towards the channels that your customers or potential customers are using.
- Thinking laterally is useful. For example, if you sell specialist foods it may be worth looking at social media that covers local food groups or cookery courses.
- Go where your customers go, rather than expect them to come to you. If your customers are already using one particular type of social media, such as Twitter or Facebook, that is where you should create your own presence.

- If you are trying to connect with a younger audience, make sure you know which social network is the flavour of the month. This can change rapidly, so you will need to keep a close eye on trends.

Be realistic about control

- Many forms of social media positively encourage feedback, and not all of it will be good. You need to accept this will happen. It is best if you have a clear idea how you are going to handle problems that crop up.
- Timely and honest response is essential. Simply ignoring any negative or controversial comments will damage your reputation.

5. Measure, review, revise

Set targets - but be patient

- Like other online tools, social media benefits from being highly measurable. Set targets such as increasing traffic to your website or generating hits on your blog.
- You will need to give social media time. It is rarely an overnight transformation.
- Keep track of the time and effort you are investing in your social media.

Watch for trends

- Use the measurability provided by social media to consistently refine your approach. For example, identifying which kinds of social media activity drive the most traffic to your website and doing more of the same.

6. Making social media work for you

Don't sell persistently or aggressively

- Blunt sales messages will at best turn off your followers and at worst actively turn them against you.
- Running competitions and offering special deals and discounts to your social media followers can be a successful strategy, however.

Social media is about conversation and connection

- Social media provides two-way communication. It is just as much about hearing what your customers want to tell you as it is about you marketing to them.

Be patient

- It will take time for your social media presence to become established. Keep a close eye on how it is working for you, but don't lose heart if it doesn't transform your marketing strategy overnight.

Consistency pays off

- Use a tone of voice for your social media that's consistent with the messages you send customers through other channels.
- Regularly review and frequently update your social media. A frequently updated blog or social media presence will encourage customers to come back.

Signpost

- Social media sites: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Google+](#), [Pinterest](#), [Instagram](#).
- Blog platforms: [Wordpress](#), [MovableType](#), [Blogger](#), [Typepad](#).
- Bookmarking and information sharing: [StumbleUpon](#), [Reddit](#), [Digg](#), [Del.icio.us](#).

August 2018

ACCA LEGAL NOTICE

This is a basic guide prepared by ACCA UK's Technical Advisory Service for members and their clients. It should not be used as a definitive guide, since individual circumstances may vary. Specific advice should be obtained, where necessary.