The Power of Social Media

Introduction

Social media has become a key tool for students' unions to engage with their members. These tools provide an opportunity to highlight key issues, gather support for campaigns and demonstrate the positive impacts that their work has on their members. This briefing will support you in making the most of social media to engage your learners.

Top tips for using social media:

1. Understand your audience

Your student body will be a wide and diverse community and as such your use of social media, the platforms you use and the content you upload will need to reflect their varying interests to ensure you engage with as many members as possible. With this in mind, try to use a variety of platforms to bring in more 'followers' and through talking to learners, try to understand which platforms are the most popular.

NUS did this when planning its #GenerationVote campaign around the 2015 General Election. Our understanding of the users of the most popular platforms allowed us to target our messages accordingly and generate greater interest and support.

2. Build an online community

Building a space or a community where people can share ideas, problems and opinions is a useful way of getting communicating with your members. By creating these communities, learner reps are able to better understand the issues they need to be aware of, and work with their peers to find solutions.

There are a number of ways of doing this; Facebook is an obvious space to do this. NUS and many member students' unions have their own pages on the site so that they can share their work and discuss key issues. As a learner rep, it's impossible to talk to all of your students, all of the time, but platforms such as these do make it easier. You'll also be able to build up an activist base to support your campaigns too.

3. Interact with online influencers

When discussing your campaign activity, ensure that you include key influencers in your posts so that they and their 'followers' also see the message. NUS used this tactic with its 'Daddy Loves Santa' campaign in support of the Equal Marriage Bill in 2012. When discussing the campaign on social media, certain celebrities were targeted to increase campaign engagement.

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This can be a useful tactic when trying to open up a dialogue with key stakeholders regarding an issue too. Respectfully posing a question online can be a useful way of getting your initial question heard and adding weight to a campaign.

4. Integrate your digital platforms

When using a number of different social media platforms as well as potentially running your own website, it is key that each message is posted to each of your platforms. Certain sites allow you to link accounts together so you Tweets may can appear on your Facebook, but make sure this is set correctly and don't forget about your other accounts elsewhere.

5. Original content is everything

Whilst sharing resources and articles is useful, to keep your audience engaged it is important to produce original content about what you are up to. Whilst short posts to promote activities, events and reminders are useful, it may be better to blog about your key pieces of work and campaigns. This will allow you to discuss issues in more detail and is a useful a way of keeping people updated on work that you are doing. Celebrating successes in this way is important too.

6. Tone and accessibility of writing is important

The way in which something is written and the language that is used is key in ensuring that people are able to engage with the material you publish. Make sure that everything you write is written in plain English and try not to use too many acronyms so that your posts are as accessible as possible.

If you are challenging a policy, a decision or an activity that you don't agree with, then it is ok to say so, but you should do so in a respectful way without targeting individuals. Use the idea that you can 'attack the policy, but not the person.'

7. Think about the structure of your post

Structures of posts are also important for generating interest. You don't want your posts to be so short that you can't get your message across in a meaningful way but you also don't want your message to be a long block of text that people lose interest in reading.

Twitter is useful in helping you keep posts short due to 140 character limit and along with Facebook and YouTube, there are a number of platforms that allow you to share pictures and videos to not only promote your work, but to demonstrate impacts too.

8. Be prepared

When using social media and posting updates on your activities and opinions, be prepared. Your posts will reach a diverse range of people from inside and outside of your college. Hopefully, you'll get a lot of support for the work that you do but you should be prepared for the criticism that you will also get.

9. Respond

If you are using social media to interact with your members then this needs to be a two-way line of communication. Ensuring that you respond to comments, queries and criticisms quickly, clearly and honestly will help you to build and sustain positive relationships with your 'followers' and generate more support and interest in the work that you do.

10. Evaluate

Evaluating your use of social media on a regular basis, especially in relation to campaign work will allow you to understand how to best improve you digital interactions with your members to enhance the support and interest that you generate.

Top social media analytics tools:

- **Visually's Google analytics report**

Visually's Google analytics report, is an app that creates a custom infographic of your website's activity and performance. It's a free report that you have delivered straight to your inbox every week.

- **TweetDeck**

A free Twitter-management tool allows you to oversee all aspects of your Twitter account(s) in one interface. TweetDeck gives a lot of control over your Twitter profile.

- **Sprout Social**

Sprout Social is similar to Hootsuite. It is another social-media dashboard that allows you to monitor and manage several social networks. Although probably not as powerful as Hootsuite, many people prefer its interface and ease-of use.

- **HootSuite**

HootSuite is a very powerful social media management platform. You can manage several social media accounts all at once- Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and Foursquare and others. You can delegate activities to team members and set up keyword monitoring and analytics reports. It's free for up to 5 social profiles.

- **Crowdbooster**

Crowdbooster gives you the ability to posts to both Twitter and Facebook and keep track of new fans and followers.

- **Twitter Showdown**

Twitter Showdown allows you to compare any two Twitter accounts head-to-head. The app gives you some useful insights when comparing yourself to your competitors.

- **Edgerank Checker**

Edgerank Checker gives Facebook Page admins the added ability to see how their followers interact with each post by assigning it an Edgerank score. The tools also gives recommendations how to improve your future success rates on Facebook.

- **SocialBro**

SocialBro is a Twitter management tool. In a similar way to Tweetdeck, it gives you insights to your Twitter stats and provides suggestions for improvement. SocialBro can also help you keep tabs on your target influencers and competitors. Works well in conjunction with Buffer and Hootsuite.

- **Buffer**

Buffer is a great tool for SMEs with limited time and resources to do Social Media. Using Buffer, you can schedule tweets and posts ahead of time. Although you can't monitor

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discussions and reactions very well with Buffer, it does give you the ability to post material across the web very easily.

- **Postling**

Postling helps you keep track of responses, brands and people, across Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, Yelp and Flickr. Every time your business or brand is mentioned on the web you can instantly see the tweet or mention.

- **Tailwind**

Tailwind tracks activity across Pinterest. The tool provides information about your company, products and competitors. Connect your Google Analytics account in order to track conversions and see which Pinterest activity is most profitable for you.

- **Shoutlet**

Shoutlet is social-marketing software that helps larger companies to better understand their market and grow their reach. As an enterprise version of Hootsuite, the community-management platform makes it easy to create custom workflows for various team members.

- **Social Mention**

Social Mention is a real-time social-media search engine that collates user generated content across the Web. The tool will give you the most recent relevant results, metrics on unique authors, reach, and frequency of mentions, sentiment and top keywords.

- **Argyle Social**

Argyle Social is similar to Shoutlet and helps you build stronger relationships with your social networks. Argyle Social focuses on B2B social marketing and helps you monitoring prospects and track conversions. The tool also integrates with B2B Automation platforms such as Marketo and Silver Pop.

- **Pocket**

Pocket (formerly Read It Later) allows you to consume and save a wide variety of content and share it on Facebook or Twitter. You can also schedule it via Buffer to be posted out or review it later. Pocket has several options for integrating with your existing systems and a useful mobile app (all mobile operating systems).

- **ShareRoot**

Shareroot is an all-in-one solution for Pinterest. The tool allows you to manage your content on Pinterest and drive engagement, leads and sales.

- **Smqueue**

If you have a lot of social media posts or content that you want to share several times a day, Smqueue automates your posts to Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook.

- **BuzzFork**

BuzzFork is a Twitter marketing tool that gets your Twitter profile in front of users based on shared interests. It uses software to review a user's tweets (based on criteria you choose) to favourite those tweets for you to view later.

- **Newsle**

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Newsle helps you gather relevant and important stories to share. Newsle is a free tool that finds real published news about real people (it doesn't find tweets or publish updates for you).

- **Piktochart**

Piktochart is an infographic and graphic design app. This means you don't need any design experience to create infographics for your social media posts. The site also has lots of video tutorials and blog posts to help you along.

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