

Let's get visual, visual: Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube

Digital marketing needs to be part of a business's coherent marketing strategy to ensure return on investment, encompassing: owned media (such as your website, email campaigns, and social media accounts); earned (including referrals or reviews from other websites and blogs where your business may be mentioned); and paid-for space (PPC, remarketing, YouTube advertising, and so on).

There are so many digital marketing methods and businesses large and small are not able to invest fully in every option – and nor should you. It is important to assess the various digital platforms and methods that are available, and determine which will be most beneficial, and well suited, to you in delivering your business goals. Think of your activities in terms of how they will help you achieve your primary, secondary, and tertiary goals; for instance gaining followers and likes should be seen as tertiary goals (and are fairly meaningless alone), but if you are able to use these platforms to drive sales, boost visits to your website, and improve your brand image (primary and secondary goals), then you will achieve more return on investment from your digital activities.

Most businesses should invest in the basics of a user-friendly and up to date website, and profiles on relevant social media platforms. But which platforms are relevant for your business? Generally, businesses selling products and services to other businesses (B2B) will benefit more from a presence on Twitter and LinkedIn, primarily; whilst businesses selling to consumers (B2C) will have greater success on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest, and YouTube as well as Twitter, which suit most customer segments.

Consumers increasingly choose social media as the preferred method of engaging with brands, so there are great benefits to having a presence on Facebook if your business is looking to build its consumer customer base.

As long as your audience consists of individuals rather than businesses; your product, service, organisation or campaign appeals to and interests individuals who are browsing in their own time; and there is capacity in your team to dedicate two hours per week (minimum) to creating content and monitoring and responding to interactions in a timely fashion, then you should consider the three platforms we discuss below – Pinterest, Instagram and YouTube – for your business.

Whilst the popularity of these platforms continues to surge, the business applications (including more recent additions of paid-for promotional opportunities) are not as widely understood – but they are worth investigating.

Common content features

So what do these platforms have in common? They are all visually based platforms. Whilst posts on Facebook and Twitter, for example, rely on high quality written comments (as well as benefitting from accompanying visual media), Pinterest, Instagram and YouTube posts rely almost entirely on high quality media – images and videos – being used. So, use a range of media, whether professionally developed, created in house, licence-free, or user-generated by your audience. Avoid grainy images or video with poor lighting, as these will receive far less engagement on these platforms. An easy way to create good video content is by using apps like Hyperlapse (from Instagram). Alternatively, if you are already on a platform like Periscope (from Twitter), you can host live broadcasts and then share these videos on your other platforms. *Top tip: invest in a mobile phone tripod.*

In choosing what content to create, or curate, for, or with, your audience, the same principles apply across all platforms:

Be consistent – it's important to ensure that marketing activity is applied in a coherent way across all channels you have a presence on. Strong, consistent branding reinforces your business' identity and drives positive sentiment and trust. Remain consistent in your frequency of posting too. Make sure to post at least once each week, and up to a maximum of twice per day. Always avoid posting unless you have some great content to share – if you haven't posted for a while, make sure to create some high quality videos, images, or GIFs, or share a #TBT (throwback Thursday) post of some of your best content from years gone by.

Deliver great content – your content needs to be: relevant, interesting, and inspiring. Earn followers by providing content which serves at least one of these purposes: relevant, interesting and inspiring. Clearly, you will need to know your audience in order to do this – as you develop your presence on these platforms, regularly review what has worked well and what has not worked so well – either through engagement, or positive or negative feedback. Keep your posts sincere, not spam or salesy. People expect a level of honesty and sincerity. Make your audience feel special, through exclusive announcements and special offers. Remain polite and professional at all times, and remember whatever you post online will be seen by people you may not expect to see it and cannot always be erased from history even when deleted (people can take screen shots).

Be present – social media users expect brands to be not only active, but reactive, so make sure you have a system in place that allows you to engage with your audience in real time, by being alerted to engagement on the go.

Degrees of distinction

Although much of the same advice applies to Pinterest, Instagram and YouTube alike, each platform has distinct features which differentiate it from the rest.

Pinterest

If you are hoping to connect with an educated, female audience, there's a high chance that Pinterest will allow your brand to do so. Pinterest users will pin aspirational images of what they hope and plan to create, or purchase, and during the quest to find solutions, Pinners will seek information within the platform. The introduction of Buyable Pins in the US has made it all the more easy for business users to facilitate the jump from visitors seeing your product on Pinterest, to being able to easily locate and order your product; we are looking forward to Buyable Pins being rolled out in the UK. In order to create content for your audience that fulfils their needs, you will need to provide tips and inspiration for how to use your products etc. so that your brand becomes the go-to resource – whether in home décor, children's education, baking, or beyond.

Even if you don't decide to set up your own Pinterest channel, you can still harness the power of Pinterest by ensuring the aesthetic, problem-solving or inspirational content on your website offers visitors the function of 'pinning'. You will then find that users will share your products with like-minded individuals on Pinterest without you having to participate.

Top Pinterest tips:

- *Promoted pins are, for now, Pinterest's only advertising opportunity – if your ideal customer is an affluent female, it's worth investigating.*

Instagram

Instagram has 16 million users in the UK alone and has overtaken Twitter. In addition to ensuring your photos and videos meet your own high standards, based on the principles for creating and curating content above, you should also add hashtags to your posts! You can use up to 30 in one post and, unlike some other platforms where it would look unprofessional to 'stuff' hashtags in to your post, on Instagram it can be a case of the more the merrier. As ever, it's important to make sure they are relevant to the media you're sharing, and also that you don't make typos or post anything you would regret. Research hashtags around the topic of your post, to see how many posts currently feature your suggested hashtags. Bear in mind that if you select a hashtag that has between 100,000 and 500,000 posts, it is likely to achieve more views and more engagement than if you use a hashtag that has 1,000,000 posts.

Top Instagram tips:

- *Use Instagram's own editing tools to crop and apply filters*
- *Use the Instagrid app to create multiple posts that sit on your profile in a grid, painting a larger picture when nine or so posts are viewed on your profile*
- *Use the Layout app to easily create image collages*
- *The Repost app will allow you to share other users' content, giving them credit where credit is due – and sharing other users' relevant content is an important part of building your network*
- *The Later (previously Latergramme) and Iconosquare apps are useful tools to assist with scheduling*
- *To reach more potential customers through Instagram, invest in Instagram advertising (accessed via Facebook Adverts Manager): whether you use images or video, ads will have a 'Sponsored' icon in the top right corner of your post – and can include a call-to-action button (which regular posts do not allow).*

YouTube

YouTube is not immediately thought of as a social media platform. But, as the boundaries of online platforms become less clear, for instance as Facebook continues to be the primary source of news for many, and apps based on self-deleting content become ever more popular among millennials, it's interesting to note that although Facebook has more members, and active users, [YouTube has the highest overall visitor rate](#). The platform is increasingly becoming the go-to resource for any 'How to?' queries, is the second largest search engine (after Google), and users are encouraged to create profiles, to post regularly on their 'channels', to follow key individuals and companies. This is all very similar to other social media platforms, and businesses should approach the use of YouTube in the same way: ensure your profile is in order, on brand, and provides a call-to-action; engage with others – customers and influential YouTubers who are relevant to your audience; and post great content, in a consistent way.

Top YouTube tips:

- *Although the quality of your video is your key concern, it's important to provide a description of what takes place in your video in the description box, using keywords and a comprehensive summary, in order to help the platform to serve your video to users searching for your content – as it's still not possible for machines to 'read' what is in a video, this information should be provided to ensure visitors find your video*
- *Most viewed YouTube content is between 31-120 seconds in length: videos that are 15 seconds or shorter are shared 37% more often than those that last between 30 seconds and one minute; 20% of viewers will click away from a video in 10 seconds or fewer, about 1/3 of viewers by 30 seconds, 45% by one minute and almost 60% by two minutes. No matter how*

long the video is, though, your audience is much more likely to watch the video in its entirety if the content adheres to the purposes listed above

- *More than 50% of YouTube views come from mobile devices – so make sure your videos are suitable to view on mobile*
- *There are many different types of YouTube advertising through which your business can gain followers, boost the number of views, and in turn, lead to increased conversions via your website.*

Above all, make sure that your approach to building a presence on social media platforms is flexible; be prepared to adjust your plan to suit your changing market and the new online behaviours of your customers. Have a go at creating content that tells stories, that inspires, that shows off – but always remember to sincerely engage with other brands and your users. Do your research and don't be afraid to test out different approaches before committing to a long-term plan.

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