Maximising audience engagement on social networks

(Written Aug 2014)

Summary

This resource gives you practical tips to maximise audience engagement on social networks. You will learn how to build a *narrative voice* that can be used to promote events, themes and initiatives; consider *curating content* for social networks rather than just producing your own content; create new *opportunities for audience participation* to reinforce your relationship with audiences and finally, manage the time you invest in social media by *scheduling planned and real time activity* separately.

Key learning outcomes

By consulting this resource you will be able to:

1. Create a unique narrative voice suitable for your organisation
2. Make a shift from content production to content aggregation
3. Consolidate your social media activity and manage your time effectively
4. Encourage greater audience participation to promote deeper engagement

Why is this important?

Arts organisations are continually looking for ways to build audience engagement and social networks offer this potential, but a systematic approach is essential to overcome potential challenges. This resource addresses 2 key issues when it comes to creating useful audience engagement on social networks.

The first is that the features of popular networks frequently change. As a result, you have to constantly revise the way you create and share content to continue to reach your existing audience. This resource will help you define a unique narrative voice that can be adapted for multiple social networks, including changes in their features.

The second issue is the growing choice of social media, networking and sharing websites and apps. Your organisation may have a widespread online presence but updating content on these websites and apps becomes a time-consuming process. It is important to remember that whilst social networks may appear to have no cost attached to their usage, they require significant investment in time. This resource will help you develop a content aggregation and co-production strategy. This approach will help you consolidate your presence, ensuring that you only use those websites and apps that are conducive to communicating your organisation's mission, whilst utilising your time meaningfully.

Who is this resource for?

In order to make best use of this guide it is assumed that you have used some popular social websites and apps such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr, and that use of social media may form part of your job responsibility.

Practical tips

There are 6 key areas that you should consider when seeking to maximise your audience engagement on social networks. These are:

1. **Make sense of the functions of social tools**
2. **Establish your narrative voice**
3. **Consider your content**
4. **Manage your time**
5. **Encourage audience participation**
6. **Connect your digital ecosystem**

Each are considered in turn within this resource.

1. **Make sense of the functions of 'social tools'**

Understand the difference between social networking, media and sharing

It is important to understand the functions of the 'social tools' that you use, as each category of 'social tool' can help you create a unique kind of engagement. In particular it is important to distinguish between social networking, social media and social sharing tools, as each can help you in different ways. Think of it this way, you can use *social networking* tools to meet people and build communities, you can use *social media* tools to get them to engage with your message/content and you can use *social sharing* tools to encourage them to share this message/content.

Social networking broadly refers to finding and engaging with individuals and groups of people online. For example, Twitter is a popular social networking tool that allows you to *follow* people and for people to follow you back. You can also have conversation with people on your timeline.

Social media refers to the creating and sharing of multimedia content in the form of words, images, audio or video. Popular websites include Wordpress, Flickr, Soundcloud and YouTube.

Social sharing is aggregating or sharing content that is generated by others. Websites like Pinterest and Storify allow to curate and share content created by others.

Some popular social networking, media and sharing websites:

Social Networking	*Social Media*	*Social Sharing*
Facebook LinkedIn Twitter Quora	Flickr Instagram Soundcloud Tumblr YouTube Vimeo	Last.Fm Pinterest Reddit Storify Stumble Upon

2. Establish your narrative voice

Do you have a simple, consistent offer?

In a desire to engage their audiences with the latest events, themes, opportunities or initiatives, arts organisations can often overload audiences with information. This information overload can confuse your visitor. A key aspect of your engagement strategy is to develop a consistent voice. Keep your offer simple and say it more than once, in different ways.

Example: Promoting a season of events

There are several ways in which you can promote an event such as an upcoming exhibition. You can talk about the principle theme, the key highlights or personalities (such as the curators). Don't say it all at once. If you are using only one social channel, create a weekly schedule and talk about different aspects across the week. If you are using multiple channels, you can talk about the different aspects across these channels simultaneously. For example, use Facebook to promote highlights by sharing bold images and use Twitter to organise a live Q&A with curators.

E.g. The Royal Society uses two social channels to promote the Summer Science Exhibition 2014. It is sharing visually rich content on its Facebook timeline, whilst using Twitter to organise real-time activity by hosting Q&A sessions using the hashtag #AskSummerScience.

Source 1 The Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition 2014

http://sse.royalsociety.org/2014/twitter-qa/

3. Consider your content

Are you producing new content when you should be aggregating content?

In addition to over-sharing of information, arts organisations can also fall into the trap of creating original content to promote their offer when they don't have time or resources to support this. A key strategy to address this is to shift from content production to content aggregation. There are 3 key approaches that you can consider to help you to do this.

Identify Themes	***Commission from Influencers***	***Ask Your Audience***

Identify themes: A good starting point is to identify different themes that relate directly (or indirectly) to the subject and find examples of good quality content created by other *influencers*. Aggregate this content and then share it on your social platforms.
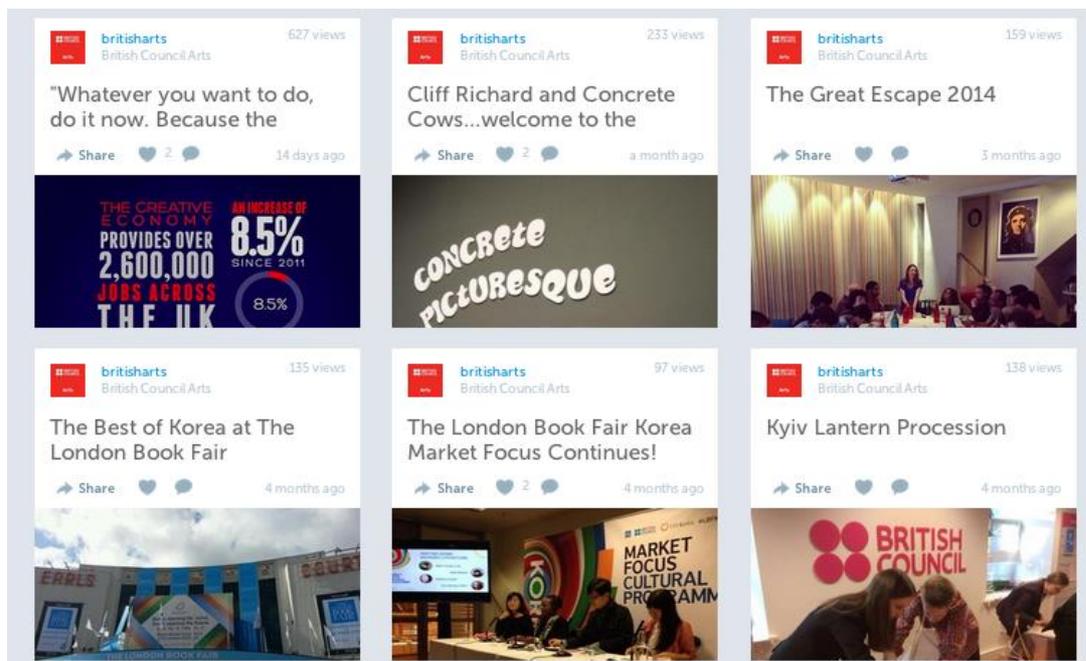
Example: Promoting a conference, exhibition or performance

If you are organising a conference, create a list on Twitter of all participants attending this conference and share it on your timeline. This is the simplest form of aggregation and is the equivalent of a pre-event networking exercise.

If you are promoting a performance or recital, create a playlist of previous performances by the artist or popular performances of the work by others on YouTube. Publish this playlist on your YouTube channel and share it on your social networks.

Another option is to use Storify to search for and aggregate content from multiple social networks and create a useful resource that you can embed on your website or share on your social networks.

E.g. British Council (Arts) makes effective use of Storify to create themed previews of its global events and exhibitions. Every Storify post has a strong theme and uses content created by the organisation, specialists and members of the public.

Source 2 The British Council (Arts) uses Storify to created themed previews of its global events

https://storify.com/britisharts/

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Commission content: Another approach is to commission content such as guest blog posts and curated Pinterest boards. This is a useful technique to build relationships with *influencers* and sector specialists who have a large and active following on different social networks. It can also increase your reach and visibility online.

 Make sure your terms of engagement with are clear to avoid any misunderstanding. For example, introduce the house style and any other guidelines to your authors. Agree the platform on which the content will be posted as well as the duration (if applicable). If you are offering payment, clarify the terms and conditions.

Source 3 A start up online gallery from San Francisco invites guests to curate its boards

http://uk.pinterest.com/ugallery/guest-curator-blue-locket/

Source 4 An example of a guest blog post on a topical subject

http://www.ayoungertheatre.com/guest-blog-ill-show-you-mine-amelia-bird-bryony-kimmings-arts-funding

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<u>Ask your audience</u>: Have you created ample opportunities for your audience to create content for a time-bound live event or in cases when they are in a physical location?

For example, does your event have a hashtag and is that displayed clearly in the physical site and has that been shared online? You can also take a more deliberate approach and arrange for a *behind the scenes* style tour where a select group of visitors are encouraged to create and share content on their own channels. You can even ask an audience member to update your official channel. For example, a visitor could update Instagram with images from the behind the scenes tour. In all cases when you ask your audience to create content, aggregate that content using Storify. The Storify shouldn't be a jumble of tweets and images. Structure the content and share it as a useful resource on your blog and social channels.

Source 5: Blogger Daenel participated in an Instagram takeover for a convention and visitors bureau for Cape Girardeau

http://livingoutsidethestacks.com/how-to-do-an-instagram-takeover/

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4. **Manage your time**

Have you separated real-time activity from scheduled activity?

A key issue in using social channels effectively and maximising your time is to separate real-time activity from scheduled activity.

Real-time activity occurs when you have to engage and respond to your online audience in a short space of time. An example of real-time activity is running a Twitter give-away, such as free tickets in response to a re-tweet. In this case, you should allocate a fixed period for the give-away and announce the beginning and conclusion of the real-time activity. For example, the give-away happens at noon on a Thursday for one hour.

Scheduled activity would be when you are sharing essential announcements multiple times across a fixed period (a day, a week or longer).

Example: A 5-day schedule for a free give away

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning 8.30 – 11am	*Social Sharing Activity.*	*Social Sharing Activity.*	*Social Sharing Activity.*	Repeat announcement of date and time of giveaway	*Social Sharing Activity.*
Afternoon 12-2pm	Announce date and time of giveaway	Blog-post explaining what you are giving away and why	Repeat announcement of date and time of giveaway	**Real-time**: Give Away	Summary of the afternoon as a Storify
Evening 5-7pm		Repeat announcement of date and time of giveaway		Thank audience for participation.	

This example shows you how to separate scheduled and real-time activity for a give-away competition on Twitter. In the table, the only real-time activity is on Thursday afternoon. The rest of the time involves scheduled activity incorporating social sharing (as described earlier in this resource), communications relating to the giveaway, summaries of the activity and thanking the audience for their participation. Such an approach will also allow you to schedule several campaigns via one Twitter account and avoid clashes. This approach also lets different team members manage different activities on one channel.

For effective scheduling, you should focus on 4 areas:

- Identify themes: As explained previously, identifying themes that relate directly or (indirectly) to the subject will help you create a focussed offer. It will also help you find *influencers* and examples of good quality and topical content created by others. This approach helps you talk *around the theme* which can generate interest, increase your reach and build your reputation for expertise around key subjects.

- Create and manage expectations: Scheduling announcements can be a really useful way to create and manage expectations. For example, if you are running a give-away or a Q&A on Twitter, make sure you put the announcements out on relevant channels (Facebook, your website or blog) to clearly define what is expected of your audience and what is the offer. Don't just turn up on the day and run a live event. Your audience will be busy, distracted or engaged elsewhere.

- <u>Use the right social tools:</u> There are a variety of tools that allow you to schedule posts for Facebook and Twitter. This includes *BufferApp.com* that is free to use to schedule up to 10 items a day. *Sprout Social* offers a suite of analysis tools and allows you to schedule content as well. For other channels such as your blog, it is good practice to have a document that has a list of upcoming posts with details of themes and author details if your blog is maintained by multiple authors. This will ensure you can send out timely reminders and stick to your schedule of posts.

- <u>Use a conversational tone</u>: Even if you are scheduling content, make sure you use a conversational tone. For example, if you schedule content, make sure you explain why you are sharing it and why it might be useful for your readers. Try and schedule 2-3 tweets that go out at the same time. This approach is called *burstiness* and it makes your content more noticeable simply because it will occupy more space on a screen.

5. Encourage audience participation

What are your opportunities for increased participation?

An effective approach to promote deeper engagement is to create opportunities for participation. This approach is also useful to create new and memorable experiences for your online audience. Every time you create an opportunity for participation you are reinforcing the relationship with your audience.

Depending on the resources and funding available, your options could include arranging a *behind the scenes* tour of an exhibition, offering *tweet seats* for an upcoming production or a *new kind of event* such as IGNITE or PECHA KUCHA (see glossary for further information) to promote a theme or opportunity.

These opportunities for participation are most effective when accompanied by a give-away or when participants are actively recruited from social networks. For example, run a competition on Twitter to distribute free passes, recruit people via Facebook for a tour or find speakers for the IGNITE or PECHA KUCHA.

Example:

In 2014, The AHRC Science in Culture theme organised an IGNITE event to promote the theme to researchers and higher education institutions across the UK. The event was hosted at the Natural History Museum in London. A combination of social networking and social media websites were heavily used in organising, promoting and running of the event. For example, the calls for submissions as well as bookings were promoted on the Theme's Twitter account. Attendees were asked to book tickets via the online booking website Eventbrite. After the event, the videos were uploaded on the AHRC YouTube channel and shared as a playlist.

http://www.sciculture.ac.uk/ignite2014/

6. __Connect your digital ecosystem__

Is your visitor journey joined up?

The final point to consider is whether all your social spaces, your blog and the website are part of your organisations digital ecosystem. It is good practice to ensure that these are joined up, or in other words, your visitor is able to move across platforms and access information and different formats and contexts with each. Some points to keep in mind:

- Have you included a link to your website in the 'bio' section on the different social websites?

Most social websites have a section where you are required to add your website or blog URL. Make sure these links are up to date. If the social channel is dedicated to a particular project or initiative then make sure the link points to the right section or page on your website.

- Have you clearly defined why visitors need to follow you on different social networks?

Very often websites have logos of social websites without any explanations. Add context to create and manage expectations. For example: "*Follow us on Twitter for latest updates and behind the scenes access*" OR "*Have you seen our Pinterest board to see the themes that inspired our set designer*?"

- Have you included a clear call to action on your content aggregation channels?

If you are using content aggregation and social sharing websites like Storify and Pinterest make sure there is a clear call to action. In case of Storify, conclude each Storify with a link to your website, your email address or another social platform where they can engage with you. If you are pinning images on a Pinterest board, try and include material that takes visitors back to your website or blog. Pinning images from external sources will take the visitor out of your digital ecosystem.

Glossary of terms

Burstiness: Posting multiple updates in quick succession on your social networking newsfeed.

Hashtag: Any word preceded by a # is a hashtag. These are primarily used on Twitter to highlight a theme, join an existing trend or create real-time activity such as a Q&A. Clicking on a hash-tag in a tweet will create a search result page which includes tweets by other users who have used the hashtag.

Influencer: An influencer on social media may be a person or organisation who has a large number of followers on their social accounts. For example Stephen Fry is an influencer on Twitter as he has 7 million followers! Similarly, the Facebook page I F**ng Love Science is an influencer with over 17 million likes. Another kind of influencer could be a person or organisation that is followed by a large number of specialists from a sector.

IGNITE: This is an event format where speakers are given 5 minutes to talk about a topic of their choice. Each talk has to be accompanied by 20 slides that run in the background. The slide show is automated and each slide is on screen for 15 seconds. IGNITE is a global phenomena and unlike TEDx you do not require a license to run this event.

http://igniteshow.com/

Live Q&A on Twitter: This is an example of real-time activity on Twitter. The Q&A is usually organised by an organisation on a particular topic/subject area. Any Twitter user can ask questions using the hashtag, these are answered by an individual or group of experts. Take care in selecting a unique and memorable hashtag.

PECHA KUCHA: This is another global event format that has become popular as a result of social media. The style is similar to that of IGNITE – 20 slides, 20 seconds per slide.

http://www.pechakucha.org/

Further Reading

BufferApp FAQ
https://bufferapp.com/faq

10 Drop Dead Easy Ways You Can Use Storify to Create Compelling Content
http://www.searchenginejournal.com/10-drop-dead-easy-ways-you-can-use-storify-to-create-compelling-content/46969/

Top 10 Museums on Pinterest
http://www.complex.com/style/2012/04/the-top-10-museums-on-pinterest/3

Top 10 Tools for Managing Your Social Media Accounts
http://www.searchenginejournal.com/top-10-tools-managing-social-media-accounts/87843/

Instagram Takeovers
http://blog.instagram.com/post/20124409616/instagram-takeovers