Brief Guide to Social Media

Social media is a huge and disparate beast that can be used in many ways — and it can be daunting to the first-time user. This guide is by no means comprehensive, but it should hopefully give you enough info to dip your toes in. If you need any more information or advice, email the Digital Communications Team on digicomms@nottingham.ac.uk.

What is ‘social media’
Very generally, social media are primarily internet-based tools that allow us to share and discuss information. Tools like press releases and printed newsletters and magazines only allow information to flow one way. But if we post this information on platforms like Twitter or Facebook, audiences can respond to and comment on that information. They can also share it with their wider social network.

Why should I use social media?
Put simply — because everyone else is. Facebook, Flickr, Twitter et al have millions of users all over the world. Stories are no longer broken by newspapers, they trend on Twitter. Used correctly, these platforms can help you get information out to a huge audience. And remember, though these networks might be unfamiliar to you, a whole generation of students, researchers and journalists has grown up using them.

How many different platforms are there? Which ones should I use?
Pick a number… Most of us will be familiar with the biggest brand names in social media —Flickr, Facebook, blogs, Twitter, and YouTube for example. There are a huge number of platforms out there, some of which will develop into internationally-used resources, others which will disappear through lack of users.

The majority work on the same basis though — sharing information. Whether you’re sharing text, video or images; social media flourishes through the uploading of information, which users share and comment on. What do you want to achieve through your use of social media? Do you want to reach as many people as possible? Then go for one of the big names that will allow you to access the biggest audiences. Or do you want to make contact with other experts in your field? Then talk to colleagues in your school or department about the platforms that work for them.
How do I get started?
Most social media sites ask you to register. You’ll be asked to provide a user name and a password. You can add in biographical information and profile pictures at this stage too. Your profile isn’t set in stone — you can usually update or amend this at any time.

Once you’re set up you can start sharing your information. The way you do this will depend on which platform you’re using. Twitter allows you to share images and info — with a limit of 140 characters per message or ‘tweet’. Facebook allows you to share more info through the creation of a detailed profile. You can join and interact with specific interest groups here, as well as sharing photos, videos and links. Flickr and YouTube allow you to share pictures and video respectively with public or private audiences. Information is usually shared through a basic upload process.

What happens next?
Social media platforms give you as much as you put into them. If you set up a profile and then never update it, or don’t comment on other’s profiles, you’re not likely to see much interaction. But if you regularly share information and comment on other peoples links, blogs, tweets, podcasts and social networks, you’ll start to see the benefits.

You can also use your different platforms to complement each other. Use Twitter to update your followers to a new blog post or a newly-uploaded video on YouTube — some platforms have an automatic process for this, have a look in your profile settings. Or use YouTube to embed video in your blogs or on your Facebook page. This can generally be done by cutting and pasting the YouTube embed code into your site.

How do I control what people say about me?
Therein lies one of the perceived pitfalls of social media — you don’t. The system is based on the free sharing of information, which means anyone can comment on your posts, whether they love it or hate it. Some platforms allow you to moderate comments before they’re posted — like YouTube and Flickr — if you specify this in your profile settings. Others allow you to delete comments on your profile that you don’t like — including Facebook.

However, you have little control over comments made in other forums. Other people’s Facebook pages for example, or discussion groups within web forums.
If you have a genuine problem with the way you’re being portrayed through social media — for example, if someone has set up a Twitter account claiming to be you, or if someone is posting defamatory messages on Facebook pages about you, e-mail digicomms@nottingham.ac.uk within the University AND the platform concerned. Most social media sites will have a process through which these can be flagged up and dealt with.

However, if someone has tweeted questioning your methodology on a research project, or has posted a response to a YouTube video questioning the transparency of your funding, think about responding in a constructive way. Post more information in response, or start a debate on the subject. Or ask for suggestions on how to do things in future. You might find you make a valuable new contact.

Some social media dos and don’ts:

• Think about your audience and communicate accordingly
  This isn’t an academic paper, you’re potentially communicating with the whole world here. Keep your info clear and to the point. And don’t be afraid of showing a bit of your personality. These networks tend to be more informal than traditional methods of communication — using jargon or technical language could work against you.

• But remember who/what you’re representing
  Bearing in mind everything we’ve said above, if you’re posting in a professional capacity always keep that in mind. Keep the ‘lol!!!’ comments and emoticons to a minimum. At best they’ll make you look unhinged, at worst it could damage your professional reputation. Nothing on the internet ever goes away. Future employers, funders, peer reviewers or even your mum might find you postings. If you wouldn’t want any of the above to read them, don’t post it in the first place.

• Keep a civil tongue in your head
  Posting on message boards, blog comments, Facebook walls and Twitter can be done via fairly anonymous profiles. This has led to a culture of fairly acerbic posting — see any newspaper website that allows comments on its stories and blogs for examples. Don’t be offensive or defamatory when posting information, responses or comments. At the very least you’ll hurt someone’s feelings, and if they’re really offended they could make a professional complaint. A good test is, would you make this comment to someone’s face? In not, why would you post it for the whole world to see?

• Find out the rules of the platform to widen the dissemination of your info
Twitter uses hashtags and retweets to speed up the flow of information. Flickr allows the creation of groups which allow photos of specified subjects to be shared. Once you've chosen your tool, work out how to best make it work for you.

**Choose your friends and followers carefully**
When you first sign up, the impulse will be to sign up every potential friend or follower who comes your way, and to follow them in turn. Try to resist this, you could save yourself a lot of useless information clogging up your inbox and the onerous task of ‘defriending’ your contact list in future. You can usually tell from a person's profile whether you'll be interested in what they have to say.

**Think before you post**
Does the information belong to you? If you're posting images, videos or other content which belongs to someone else, you could fall foul of copyright law. And you need to be aware that by posting your own content to the web, you could be signing away certain rights to it. Check with the site if you have any concerns. Most will have a ‘terms’ link at the bottom of the page. Read through this before signing up. You'll find info on rights, privacy, advertising, disputes etc here.

**Useful sites**
- [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)
  Ubiquitous social networking site with millions of users across the globe. Setting up groups around specific research interests or projects is a good way of generating networks on this platforms. You can also arrange events and invite attendees.
- [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)
  The original microblogging site. You must communicate in 140 characters or less.
- [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)
  Video-sharing website. Get past videos of cats fighting printers and you'll find a wealth of research and education content. Lectures and conference talks can be posted here, with channels streaming related content. It's also a great way to share research, particularly that of a visual nature.
- [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)
  Photo-sharing website.
- [www.prezi.com](http://www.prezi.com)
  Online presentation tool for those who want an alternative to Powerpoint.
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Some ways the University already uses social media

The social media section of the University website at www.nottingham.ac.uk/connect gives an overview of the University's social media channels and School & Department sub-channels.

For more information on social media contact the Digital Communications Team via digicomms@nottingham.ac.uk or visit www.nottingham.ac.uk/communicationsmarketing/digital to find out more about what the team do.

You can also download guidelines for Facebook, Twitter and other specific social media channels via the Digital and Video Guides section of this page on the MCR workspace: https://workspace.nottingham.ac.uk/display/CandM/How+to+guides.