A guide to social media for RAF Sports Federation Associations

Social media is a great way to raise awareness about your Association. Best of all, it's free!

Using a combination of traditional communications principles, and basic technical know-how, you can begin to build an online awareness of your Association, as well as connect with new and existing supporters.

Which social media channels are worth pursuing?

Whilst there are thousands and thousands of social media platforms in existence, we recommend focusing on three of the most popular and widely-used channels: ***Twitter***, ***Facebook*** and ***Instagram***.

So what do these channels do, and how do they differ from each other?

Twitter	Facebook	Instagram
A platform that allows users to read short and snappy updates ('Tweets') from individuals or organisations they are interested in (following), as well as post their own updates to individuals or organisations who follow them. Updates, which can be text, photos or videos, are collated into a 'newsfeed' and can be quickly shared ('re-tweeted'). As Twitter is a largely public platform, in most cases anyone can read anyone's Tweets regardless of whether they follow that person or organisation. See more on page X.	Typically used by individuals to keep in touch with friends. However, organisations can also create a 'fan page' which serves as a mini website for the organisation. This allows fans/followers of the page to follow updates from that organisation. Like Twitter, Facebook updates are collated in a 'newsfeed' and fans/followers can share/'like' or comment on posts easily. Facebook also offers a number of in-built functions that can be useful to an organisation, such as the ability to create events, polls and livestreaming. See more on page X.	Instagram is a photo-sharing platform. Whilst it works in a similar way to Twitter and Facebook (profile, newsfeed etc), the idea of Instagram is to communicate primarily through images. Like the other channels, new posts are collated into a newsfeed, and users can share/ 'favourite' posts, they like. Instagram also allows users to add 'nostalgic' filters than can turn an average photo into an impressive photo. This platform tends to be used by a younger audience. See more on page X.

By creating a profile on each of these platforms you have immediately given your association a presence on social media, thereby creating new opportunities to engage with your existing, and potential supporters.

In the next section, we talk about the practicalities of creating your profiles and how to use them once you're up and running.

Nb. If you think you will only have time to update on one or two of these channels, we would recommend starting with Twitter and/or Facebook, for reasons we explain further in this document.

Getting started

Step 1: Create profile(s)

The first thing you need to do is to create your association's profile on your chosen platforms. This will involve opening an account in your association's name on each channel uploading a profile photo, and adding some basic information about your association.

TIP: When creating a profile page on Facebook it is particularly important to give thought to the name you give to the page because unlike other channels, you can only change it twice overall, should you need to. Example: If you create a Facebook page called Competitive Angling Association (RAF) and then decide to change it to RAF Competitive Angling Association, and then decide to change it again, you wouldn't be able to do so a third time, so try to get it right the first time.

Step 2: Build an audience

The next step is to start thinking about what you want to say, and how you're going to build your 'followers' (audience). Without followers, no one will see your updates so it is important to be pro-active at this stage. Here are some practical ways that you can do this:

1. Send an email to your contact database announcing that your association now has a presence on Twitter/Facebook/Instagram (whichever channels you decide to use). Ask your contacts to 'follow' the association to keep up-to-date with latest news. Be sure to add hyperlinks within your newsletter so your contacts can click through to your new social media profiles; the idea is to make it as simple as possible for your contacts to start following you.

2. Include an announcement about your new profile(s) in any newsletters you may send to your contacts – again, remember to add hyperlinks.

3. Share your new association social media profiles from your own (personal) social media profiles, and ask members/friends/family to do the same.

4. Add links to your social media profiles to your association email signatures.

5. Follow/like relevant individuals and organisations from your association's account, for example, the RAF Sailing Association could follow the Twitter profiles of the British Sailing Team or the Royal Navy's Sailing Association, or a prominent individual in sailing (eg Olympians). When you start to follow other accounts, many will follow you back, thereby increasing your followers/audience, so be bold and push hard on following as many relevant/influential accounts as possible. Note: Following new people should be done regularly to keep building your own audience.

Whilst it may take a little time, if you follow these steps you will begin to see your audience grow.

Step 3: Feeding the beast

Now that you have created your profiles, and started to build a follower-base, the ultimate goal from here is to a) keep your followers engaged (interested) and b) publish content that your followers will want to 'like', share/re-tweet, thereby increasing the number of people you reach.

To do this, you need to be posting interesting content, and regularly.

We recommend aiming to post once a day if you can, depending on which channel you are using – different platforms have different purposes. Twitter lends itself to more frequent updates due to the volume of tweets being published all the time – ie, you can afford to post more often if you have the time and content to do so. However, Facebook users may not appreciate seeing too many updates so we recommend posting less frequently, but still regularly*.

It can be helpful to have 1-2 people in charge of managing your association's social media accounts to help 'share the load' of regular posting. You can do this by sharing the login details (Twitter, Instagram) or adding another person as an 'admin' (Facebook). However, it is not recommended that you have too many people with access to the accounts as this can create an inconsistent tone of voice, cross-posting/duplication, or possible security issues. It would be better to ask members to email updates or ideas for content to the nominated social media representatives.

What types of content should you share?

First and foremost, you need to *keep it interesting*! The art to effective use of social media effectively is to post things that keep your audience engaged with your association. This means thinking about your language, tone and also the type of content you share.

Language and tone:

Given the informal nature of social media, it is best to post updates that strike an informal yet professional tone. This means keeping your updates upbeat and fun, but 'on-topic', with correct grammar and spelling, hyperlinks that work etc.

You don't need to be a professional wordsmith to write interesting and creative updates, but try to give thought to what might appeal to your followers and make them want to like/share your news.

Remember that social media is about succinct, snappy communication. It is not the place for long blocks of text that take too long to make a point. If you have something lengthy to share, post some text 'teaser' on social media with a hyperlink to an external page (eg your website) where users can read more. This keeps the update short but also supplies a lot of information.

Lastly, people/organisations will follow you because they are interested in your association and what you do. Therefore, it is important to stay 'on message'. Eg, the RAF Sailing Association should focus on posting updates about everything to do with the association, and sailing as a general subject. Followers would find it strange and possibly un-follow the association if it were to stray from its core subject, eg other sports, politics etc.

Content formats:

Think about what types of content you have access to – or could create - to share on your profile to keep it interesting. For example, a simple text-based update about your association is fine, but if you add a photo or video that is relevant to your association, followers are more likely to notice it and like/share your content. This is because photos and videos are visually-engaging. (Read more about posting text vs images here).
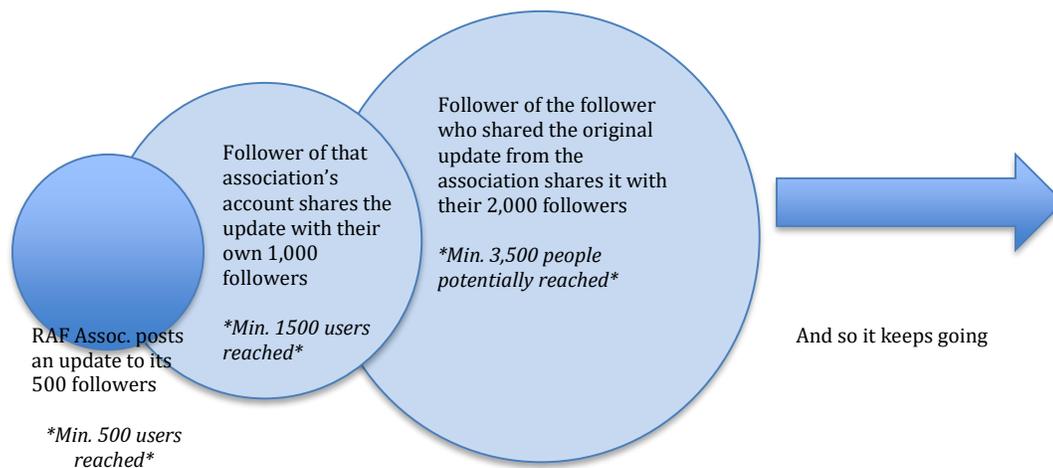
Ideas for content subjects:

You can use your page to tell followers about association news, upcoming events/activities, debriefs on past events/activities, including sharing videos/photos from the past events/activities, post a link to the sign up page for your newsletter (if applicable), share media articles on sector news, create a poll and invite your users to take part (a great way to interact with your followers). Do you have an association blog? If so, share your blog pieces on your social media accounts – again by posting a snappy, intriguing 'teaser' as your update, and then a hyperlink to the longer article.

If you don't have any videos, create some! You don't need a fully-spec'd video camera, expensive microphones and video editing skills to create a short video about your association, or footage from an event, or short interviews with key people. Most smart phones offer a hi-quality, built-in video option that lets you carry out minor edits to the footage from the handset.

Caution: Whilst this DIY approach to creating videos is very easy and offers an alternative way to engage, it's important to get a few basics right, eg footage the right way up, not lop-sided; sound reasonably good – not tinny; not too long (eg more than 2 mins) etc. Otherwise, your attempt to engage your audience may have the opposite effect.

Amplification – reaching new audiences; raising awareness

Once you've started publishing regular updates to your existing followers, the next goal is to try to get as many re-tweets/shares as possible as this allows you to reach new audiences. This is called 'amplification' or 'increasing reach'. It works like this:

RAF Assoc. posts an update to its 500 followers

Min. 500 users reached

Follower of that association's account shares the update with their own 1,000 followers

Min. 1500 users reached

Follower of the follower who shared the original update from the association shares it with their 2,000 followers

Min. 3,500 people potentially reached

And so it keeps going

Nb: The above example focuses on what happens when your followers share your updates with their followers, and their followers with theirs – but you can reach even more followers through the effective use of hashtags. See page X for more about how to use hashtags.

Social media is a two-way conversation!

Social media is about more than simply posting updates and hoping your followers will share them. It's also about building a relationship with your audience. What does this mean practically?

- If someone follows you, follow them back!
- Re-tweet or share* your follower's content from time to time, especially if they share yours. If their content is not relevant to your audience, you can like or favourite their content instead (this is the digital equivalent of a 'nod' without commenting or publicising their content to your followers);
- Encourage your followers to comment on your updates (asking a question is a good way to do this), and respond to their comments. This creates a conversation, and conversations create relationships.

When sharing third-party content from your association profile(s) it is important to remember that this action can often be interpreted as an endorsement of the content, so do give thought to whether it is really something that you want to share from your association's account. As a general rule, steer clear of anything that may be seen as politically-aligned, sensitive/offensive, or has the potential to cause damage to the RAF brand.

Timing is everything!

The time of day that you post your updates can make a significant difference between whether they are noticed and shared. For example, if you post an update on Twitter at 2am, the chances are that by morning, when most people wake up and check their social media accounts, your post will have been buried down their newsfeed, superseded by newer tweets from other users.

To have more of a chance of your content being noticed, post at 'peak' social media times, such as:
- 6.30am-9am – wake up / commute time; internet browsing by phone typically high
- 12pm-2pm – lunch hours – desktop and phone browsing typically high
- 5pm-10pm – evening commute / wind down – internet browsing by phone typically high

TIP: There are free tools such as HootSuite and TweetDeck that allow you to schedule updates to go out at a specific time, meaning you do not need to make yourself available during peak times to send out your updates.

Essential social media terms

A full glossary of social media terms is enclosed on page X of this document, however, below are a couple of important terms explained in detail:

'Hashtags'

A hashtag is a phrase or keyword that is preceded by a hashtag symbol (#), that turns the said phrase or keyword into a searchable link. This means that users can click on that phrase or keyword to find volumes of content about that phrase. Anyone can search for a hashtag, and if you have also used the hashtag, there's a chance that your update will be seen regardless of whether that user follows you or not. This means you can reach more people and potentially attract new followers.

Whilst hashtags are not an essential part of using social media, for the reason mentioned above, they can be very helpful if you are trying to reach new audiences.

Note: Twitter and Instagram are very hashtag orientated. Facebook also has the hashtag function but it is used much less.

Below is an example of how to use hashtags correctly:

> The RAF Sailing Federation wants to announce a race it is hosting across the English Channel. Therefore, it might post an update like this:
>
> "Join us on 14th July for our 2019 #sailing race across the #EnglishChannel – find out more here: <insert hyperlink>"
>
> When a user clicks on any of the above hashtags, eg #sailing, they will be taken to all content about #sailing on Twitter, of which there will be a lot. Likewise for #EnglishChannel. [Example of #sailing](#).
>
> Note that we have only 'hashtagged' the most relevant words, ie words that people might be searching for on Twitter if they are interested in sailing or **sailing** races across the **English Channel**.

Below is an example of an incorrect use of hashtags:

> "#Join us on 14th #July for our #2019 #sailing #race across the #English #Channel – find out more here: <insert hyperlink>"
>
> If hashtags are used like this, there is no benefit as people are unlikely to be clicking on hashtags such as #join. It simply shows your followers that you do not understand how to use hashtags.

Find out more about hashtags [here](#).

<u>'Handles' and 'Tagging'</u>

When you create your Twitter and Instagram profile pages you will be asked to create a 'handle' or 'username'. This is a name, without spaces, that your organisation will use on that platform, and it will start with an '@' sign. Example: The RAF Competitive Angling Association may use that as its 'display name', but its handle might be @RAFAnglingAssoc.

Ideally you should keep your handle as short as possible, because when people use it (explained shortly), a long handle will use up the number of available characters in their update, limiting how much they can write. In fact, Twitter caps its handle length at 15 characters, so try to think of something that is both descriptive and succinct.

Tagging is when you use a person or organisation's name in your update, in an instance where you would like them to know you have mentioned them.

To do this, you would write your update and then use the @ sign, and start typing their handle which will then show options for choosing which account you want to tag. You select the account and then continue typing the rest of your update.

For example, if the RAF Sailing Association wanted to post a supportive update about the RAF Competitive Angling Association on Twitter, and they want RAF Competitive Angling to know they've' done this, they would post something like this:

'Congratulations to @RAFAngling on their latest XYZ event'

By using the Competitive Angling Association's handle, it would trigger a notification to the RAF Angling Association to say the RAF Sailing Association has 'tagged' them in an update. RAF Angling could then like or reply to the update.

For this to work, the @ must be used and the correct/specific handle (no typos, no spaces) of that person or organisation must also be used.

If you don't know what the user's handle is, try searching for them by name on that platform, or check their website.

Note: Handles are not relevant on Facebook, however, you can still tag people or organisations by typing the @ symbol and the first few letters of their name. Their name will appear, and you simply click on it to complete the tagging.

'Newsjacking'

Newsjacking is the process of capitalising on the popularity of external activities/events to draw attention to your own organisation. For example, the RAF Sailing Association would be wise to post updates during the America Cup sailing event because the topic of sailing will be very popular on social media at that time. Therefore, the association should most definitely use the hashtag #sailing wherever possible, as many other users will be using and searching for that same term during the America Cup. As a result of the number of users communicating on that subject at the same time, the association will gain more exposure, and therefore potentially more followers and shares.

Tip: Using the America Cup example, the association could also use the hashtag #AmericaCup but it would need to find a way to specifically relate its update to the America Cup. It is bad social media etiquette to simply 'hijack' popular hashtags without any relevance to that subject. See examples of correct and incorrect newsjacking here.

'Analytics'

It is possible to measure your success on each of these three channels by using the in-built analytics systems, within the platform. You can find out things like how many followers you've gained over a certain period, which websites they are coming from, what time of day people are clicking on your posts etc. All of this information can help inform your social media approach, eg what's working and what's not, so you can focus on the things that are going well. However, it is easy to get caught up with trying to understand analytics. The first step is to familiarise yourself with using the platforms, and then experiment!

Social media platform deep dive: pros and cons

Twitter

Pros:
- Allows you to post snappy updates from your association;
- Public – anyone can see your updates, thereby increasing the number of people you will potentially reach;
- You can reach a huge audience (not just your followers) through the correct use of hashtags (keywords);
- Platform supports the use of photos and videos, offering a visual element.

Cons:

- Limited number of words per update (280 characters* per update, including spaces), however, this also promotes succinct updates;
- Moves fast – with 500 million Tweets per day, you need to post more regularly than Facebook and Instagram to have a higher chance of your updates being noticed.

Note: If including a hyperlink in your update, Twitter will automatically shrink it to 23 characters (much less than the average hyperlink), allowing you more space for your update. We recommend adding the hyperlink to your update before writing the update, so you know how many characters you have to play with.

Learn more about Twitter [here](#).

Facebook

Pros:
- No limit on the number of words per update, although, we recommend keeping updates to 3-4 sentences, and adding a hyperlink to an external website if you'd like the follower to read more
- Has some very useful features that the other two platforms don't, such as:
  - Ability to create photo albums (eg for a specific event) rather than posting one photo per update, as required for Twitter;
  - Create polls (voting on topics as defined by you); good for audience engagement;
  - Create a page for physical event or activities you may host, where you want followers to RSVP;
  - Livestream events – for example, if an association was hosting a sporting event it the manager of the Facebook page could film and transmit that event via the page in real time.
- Profile (page) allows you to post much more information about your association in general than Twitter or Instagram. Some organisations use their Facebook profile as their 'website' because it is so flexible and comprehensive in terms of what information can be included.

Cons:
- Most Facebook users use the platform to follow updates from family and friends rather than organisations they are interested in. For this reason, it can be harder to gain followers on Facebook but with the right approach, is worth pursuing.
- Facebook supports the use of hashtags but the number of people using them is much, much less than Twitter and Instagram, thereby limiting your potential to reach *new* audiences.

Learn more about Facebook [here](#).

Instagram

Pros:
- Very popular, great way to 'showcase' your association through images/photos instead of text updates;
- Like Twitter, supports hashtags and tagging, meaning you can reach an audience beyond your followers;
- Instagram allows users to add a text commentary to photos (up to 2,200 characters). Therefore, whilst the platform is predominantly designed as a photo-sharing channel, you still have the option to provide additional, text-based information.

Cons:

- Relies on a regular supply of images as you cannot post on Instagram without an image to attach; if you don't have enough regular content it may be worth focusing on Facebook and Twitter until you have a more regular flow of content for Instagram;
- May take more time to gain followers due to facts such as a) it is generally used by younger audience so immediately narrows the number of users reached and b) does not have the same kind of 'share' function that Twitter and Facebook do, thereby limiting the ability to reach new audiences.

Learn more about Instagram here.

Key dos and don't to remember for general use of social media

Do
- Post regular updates – recommend 4-6 times a week, or a few times a day on Twitter if you have enough interesting content to share;
- Keep it interesting! Think about your tone and type of content - text, video, photo etc.
- Engage with your audience by inviting two-way communication, eg asking a question or sharing a poll, and responding to comments and messages;
- Support relevant stakeholders and fellow associations by following them, and liking/sharing their content where appropriate;
- Learn from others organisations who are doing it well, eg. If an organisation you follow is gaining followers, getting re-tweets etc, look at why. Are they experimenting with different types of content? Do they post engaging updates that make you want to click/share?;
- Include links to your social channels on your website, email signatures etc;
- Check you are signed into the right account before posting (eg personal Twitter account versus Association Twitter account)

Don't
- Bombard your followers with updates or your followers could get annoyed and may un-follow you; don't repeat content over and over again – instead, be creative about ways to create new content;
- Overuse hashtags – only use them where appropriate/useful to do so
- Forget that in this day and age, everything is public. Even if you have privacy settings on your accounts (eg limiting who can see your profile), or you delete something you wish you hadn't posted, people can take screenshots and re-publish. Social media is forever so use it smartly.
- Forget that social media and alcohol don't mix!

Glossary of common social media terms:
See extended guide here

Term (A-Z)	Definition
Advertising / sponsored updates	It is possible to pay for an advert or promoted updated on social media platforms as a form of advertising. However, this feature is generally used by commercial organisations or for high-profile awareness-raising campaigns. We don't foresee a need for associations to take out any paid advertising on social media and would recommend against it, without further training.
Analytics	The process of gathering data about your social media activity, (eg. number of followers/users reached/clicks on links/shares etc). This data can be analysed and used to indicate what is working and what isn't with regards to your social media strategy. See page X for more information.
DM / PM	If someone has DM'd pr PM'd you, they have sent you a 'direct/private message' via the platform.
Follower / fan	A follower or fan is a user that has subscribed to receiving updates from you on their social media platforms. They do this by 'following' your profile page. You can also 'follow' other organisations or individuals to see their updates.
Hashtag	A hashtag is a phrase or keyword that is preceded by a hashtag symbol (#), that turns the phrase or keyword into a searchable link. If used correctly, hashtags allow you to tap into conversations about specific subjects, meaning you reach many more users, not just those who follow you. See page X for more information.
Handle / username	Whilst Facebook uses a person's name to identify users, Twitter and Instagram use handles / usernames. Handles / usernames start with an @ sign and should be kept as short as possible (Twitter limits its handles to 15 characters). Users can still have a 'display name', which can be longer.
Liking / favourite	Liking (Facebook) or favourting (Twitter/Instagram) is a quick way to indicate that they like, support or acknowledge an update, without leaving a comment.
Newsfeed / timeline	A newsfeed is a stream of the most recent updates from the people or organisations you follow. The Twitter newsfeed also includes a selection of updates from users that you may not follow, but whose updates have been favourited or replied to by someone you do follow.
Newsjacking	Capitalising on popular (trending) topics by posting relevant updates during the period of peak interest, using essential keywords and hashtags. See page X for more information.
Reach	Refers to the number of users that have seen or potentially seen your update. Your reach increases each time an update is shared.
Tag / tagging / mention	If you tag or mention someone in an update, it means you have specifically mentioned their name or handle/username in your update. This triggers a notification alerting them to the fact you have tagged them. See page X for more information.
Trending	Trending is another term for 'popular'. If a topic is 'trending on Twitter', it means multiple users are all discussing the same topic at the same time.

Unfollow	When a user stops following another user, eg they no longer receive that user's updates in their newsfeed. A user can be re-followed at any time.
Viral	When an update is shared over and over and over again, reaching hundreds or thousands of people, this is referred to as 'going viral'.

Help and resources

All of the platforms mentioned in this document have their in-built help functions and how-to guides, offering hints and tricks.

Alternatively, there are many online articles, blogs, videos and forums that can offer very useful tips and guidance on how to use social media at the very basic level, through to more strategic campaigns.