



COMMUNICATIONS
AND ADVOCACY

**ROYAL
AIR FORCE**
Sports Federation

THE **EASY GUIDE** TO **SOCIAL MEDIA** FOR **RAF SPORTS 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.





SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS EXPLAINED

Whilst there are thousands and thousands of social media platforms in existence, we recommend that associations focus 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?

Twitter

Twitter is a platform that allows a user to post short and snappy updates ('Tweets') to its followers, and to read updates from the users it chooses to follow. Tweets are collated into a 'newsfeed' that is updated each time the user logs in or refreshes the page.

Twitter is popular because it serves as a succinct, fast-moving and public communications platform, that also allows users to keep abreast of 'live' situations and events. It also allows users to quickly and easily share (amplify) content, known as 're-tweeting'.

Whilst Twitter restricts each update posted to 280 characters, it is still possible to communicate a vast amount of information in a single

update by using smart techniques, such as hyperlinks to external pages (eg a website), hashtags, and alternative media types such as videos and photos.

With more than 500 million Tweets published by users every day, Twitter moves fast. For this reason, it is important to post regularly on this channel (2-3 times a day) in order to be noticed.

Learn more:



What is Twitter?



How to use Twitter



Facebook

With 22% of the world's population on Facebook, it can be an important and useful platform for organisations.

Whilst Facebook is typically used by individuals to keep in touch with friends and family, organisations can create a 'page' that its 'fans' (supporters) can follow. The page can be populated with information about the organisation, as well as recent photos and videos. Essentially, the page serves as a mini website for the organisation.

Like Twitter, an organisation's Facebook updates appear in a newsfeed. Users can then share those updates with their followers, or 'like' or 'comment' on the update. However, unlike Twitter, Facebook does not limit the number of words that can be used in each update.

It is easier to gain new followers on Twitter than Facebook due to the very public nature of Twitter. However, Facebook moves slower than Twitter and therefore attracts deeper engagement from its users. As such, there is benefit in having a presence on both platforms.

Given its slower pace, it is not necessary to post updates as frequently on Facebook, but some regularity should be maintained (eg once a day).

Learn more:



What is Facebook?



How create a Facebook page





Instagram

Instagram is a photo-sharing platform that focuses on 'story-telling through pictures'.

Whilst it works in a similar way to Twitter and Facebook, eg there is a newsfeed and users can share/like/comment on updates, its focus on image-sharing is what makes it different.

Instagram tends to be used by a younger audience (<35s), and users like its in-built functions, such as photo-filters, which can turn average photos into very impressive/ eye-catching photos.

Due to its focus on images, organisations may not have as much content to share on Instagram as they would on the other platforms.

But that's ok – it can still be worth creating a profile and posting images from activities, such as sporting events/training.

Instagram does allow users to add text to accompany images (up to 2,200 characters) which helps give context to images. Like Twitter, Instagram is also largely public and benefits from the use of hashtags, making it possible to reach new audiences easily.

Learn more:



*What is Instagram
and how to use it*



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

NB. If you think you will only have time to maintain on one or two of these platforms, we would recommend starting with Twitter and/or Facebook.

GETTING STARTED

Step 1: Create your association's profile(s)

Go to the websites for the platforms you plan to use and create a profile for the association. This will involve adding some basic information about the association, including a profile picture.

PLEASE NOTE: Please ensure your profiles align with MOD and RAF social media requirements. For more information, contact the RAF Digital Team.

PLEASE NOTE: The RAF Sports Federation can set up an association email address for you prior to setting up your social media profile. This means you do not need to use a personal or work address.

Please email info@rafsportsfederation.uk for more information.

TIP

When creating a profile page on Facebook, be aware that unlike the other channels, you can only change the name of your page, eg. RAF XXXXX Association, twice in its lifetime. Hopefully you won't need to change it more than once, but it's useful to be aware of this rule.



Step 2: Build an audience

The next step is to build an audience, which means gaining 'followers'. Without followers, no-one will see your updates so it is important to be pro-active about this part of the process. Here are some practical ways that you can do this once your profiles are completed:

- 1. Send an email to your contact database** announcing your new social media profiles and ask your contacts to 'follow' or 'like' the pages. Add hyperlinks to your profiles to make it as quick and easy as possible for your contacts to follow you.
- 2. Make an announcement about your new profile(s) in your newsletter** (if applicable). Be sure to ask your newsletter audience to follow your profiles and once again, add hyperlinks to make it easy.
- 3. Use your personal social media profiles to 'share' your new association profiles** – this way your friends and family can follow your association's news too.
- 4. Add links to your social media profiles to your standard association email signature**
- 5. Use your association's social media profiles to follow/like relevant individuals or organisations** – eg. the RAF Sailing association would search for and follow the Twitter profiles of the British Sailing Team or the Royal Navy's equivalent association, or a prominent individual in sailing (eg Olympians). The more accounts you follow the more you are likely to be followed back.

It may take a little time, but if you follow these steps you will begin to see your followers grow.



Step 3: Feeding the beast

The next step is to start publishing content that your followers will want to read and share. Below are our tips on how to do this:

- ◆ First and foremost, ensure the updates that you post are interesting/engaging and/or invite interaction with your followers.
- ◆ Post regularly* – we recommend once a day on Facebook, up to three times a day on Twitter, and a few times a week on Instagram.

** 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. However, it is not recommended to 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 share to the nominated social media representatives.*

What types of content should you share?

The art to effective use of social media effectively is to post things that keep your audience engaged with your association. Basic text updates are functional but less interesting than sharing visual content, such as photos or videos.

TIP

Most smartphones have in-built cameras that are suitable for high-quality photos and videos.

You do not need expensive equipment to create interesting and diverse content!



What content could you post?

- ◆ Information about forthcoming association activities / events;
- ◆ Debriefs of past activities/events, including photos and video clips – try to post debriefs within a week of the activity to maintain interest;
- ◆ Create short video interviews (2 mins max) with members of your association;
- ◆ Hyperlinks to interesting blogs or media articles that are relevant to your sport – and/or write your own blog and share the articles.

As with all communications, the some basic protocols apply with social media too. You should:

- ◆ **Stay on-topic**, eg only post updates that are relevant to the association and its activities;
- ◆ **Be succinct and clear** in your communications, and prioritise the most interesting point first in your update – social media moves fast so you may only have seconds to capture someone's interest;
- ◆ **Strike a tone** – social media is informal and fun, so it's fine to keep an informal tone in your updates. However, basic professional standards still apply, eg. use of correct grammar and spelling, check hyperlinks work before posting.

TIP

Take a look at the social media profiles for a Premier League Football Club to get ideas for the different types of content you could create/share, and tone of voice etc.



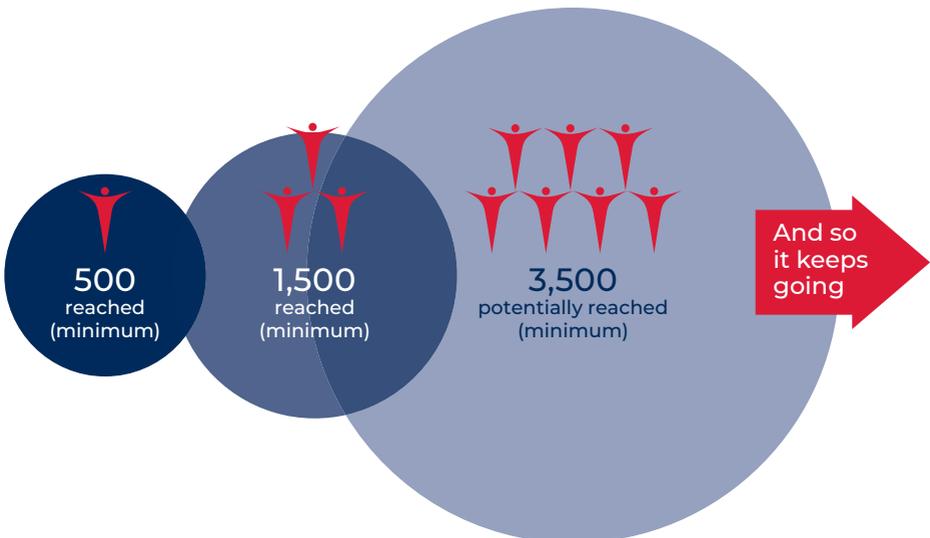
AMPLIFICATION – REACHING NEW AUDIENCES; RAISING AWARENESS

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 Sports association posts an update to its 500 followers

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

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





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 phones, 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.



SOCIAL MEDIA TOP DO'S AND DON'TS

DO

- ◆ Post regular updates to keep your audience engaged;
- ◆ Keep it interesting and experiment with different content types (photos, videos);
- ◆ Encourage and participate in audience interaction – asking questions, responding to comments etc;
- ◆ Support relevant stakeholders and fellow associations by following them, and liking/sharing their content where appropriate (avoid things that are politically-aligned, sensitive or has the potential to offend/harm the RAF brand);
- ◆ Learn from others organisations who are doing social media well, e.g. professional sports clubs or relevant media outlets;
- ◆ Plug your social media accounts wherever you can, e.g. include links to your social channels on your website, email signatures etc.

DON'T

- ◆ Set up profiles on platforms and then never update them – this can look worse than not having a presence at all;
- ◆ Post too often or repeat the same content over and over – followers will un-follow you;
- ◆ Over-use hashtags – learn how to use them properly and reap the benefits;
- ◆ Forget that social media and alcohol don't mix!



FINANCIAL
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CHARITABLE
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LEGAL



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GENERATION



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Further resources

You can learn more about using social media, including technical help, as follows:

- ◆ **RAF sports association in-depth social media guide** – available on our website and includes specific, in-depth examples of how associations can use social media;
- ◆ **In-built help guides and forums** – all of the platforms mentioned in this document have their own help/how-to guides, offering technical assistance and useful tips;
- ◆ **Online articles and forums** – if a platform’s in-built guides cannot help, use a search engine to ask your question and you will most likely find the answer via a third-party website or forum.
- ◆ **Glossary of common social media terms** – what is hashtag and how should it be used? What does it mean to ‘tag’ someone?
🔗 See this guide for understanding common social media terms.