



## **Social Media Tips from the Front Line**

A story of successful, tactical marketing in independent retail.

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When I opened my small greengrocer shop in 2010 after a long career in arts marketing I knew that social media would be a central element of our marketing and publicity mix. As with every campaign I'd worked on in the arts, there was a robust, evidence based strategic plan and it was all set out in our business plan:

- Our community is important to us so we want to connect with local people
- It's free to use – our marketing budget is close to zero
- We eat with our eyes and we want to use lots of images
- We can connect to other, like minded, businesses
- Its two way – we want to hear from our community
- We know it's not for everyone but there are enough people using it to make it worthwhile
- The results are instant and measureable

I started the shop's Facebook page ([facebook.com/ClementineofBroughtyFerry](https://facebook.com/ClementineofBroughtyFerry)) as soon as we had signed the lease on the premises. This gave us about five weeks before the shop opened. This was a similar timescale to some theatre productions I had worked on, so it felt like familiar territory. This is the same familiar territory we all inhabit – there aren't enough hours in the day so we have to prioritise. Our focus, to date has been Facebook which has been really successful in generating instant sales and building the community that's so important to us.

We had a rough idea of the tone we wanted to use – informative, conversational and fun. Always positive without being sickly. My business partner and I have different writing styles but we've come up with a voice that appears fairly consistent and even when we could see inconsistencies, we soon realised that our likers absolutely couldn't care less.

Our first post set the tone:

*We're busy meeting suppliers of gorgeous fruit, veg and other lovely things to eat. Let us know your favourite foodie treats and we'll see if we can get them in for you.*

## **The Who**

After that we steadily built up a following, starting with friends and friends of friends. Then our suppliers and other businesses spread the word too. About two weeks before opening we had some postcards printed distributed locally bearing our Facebook address. Luckily, the BBC broadcast a Mary Portas programme about a struggling greengrocer the week before we opened which also generated some interest.

When we put our 'follow us on Facebook' decal on our window, other businesses soon copied the idea and we also keep our Facebook page open on our laptop and visible to customers throughout the day. Customers enjoy seeing their social media connection in the real world.

## **The What**

We want to give people a reason to like us on Facebook so we give our likers an exclusive advance announcement of our weekly soup recipes. This has been a great way to generate new likers and conversations on our page. We regularly see comments about upcoming recipes and people post messages and photos on our wall about the unusual ingredients we're introducing them to and even tell stories of children tucking into veggies for the first time.

Some of our suppliers, including an especially enlightened farmer, have Facebook pages too which means that they can take a photo of some kale in the early morning that will be shared on our page and will be on a customer's plate later the same day. These small moments are sheer joy for us.

Decent photography is important but not a deal breaker. We go to great lengths to use professional photography whenever possible (it helps to have someone in the family) but it's just as important to be able to capture a moment. We take as much care as possible to control what's in the frame, and do what we can within the limitations of our camera phones because it's wonderful to be able to share a moment of sunlight on a beautiful display of fresh produce. These spontaneous moments really make our customers feel closer to us and are another opportunity to communicate what we're about.

We're also careful to keep it corporate and avoid personal detail in our posts. We want to make sure that people are connecting with the business and don't confuse Clementine with its owners. This isn't always the case with independent retailers and one of my favourites on Facebook is constantly referring to their hectic lifestyle but the writing is so eloquent and genuinely witty that it's a joy to read those posts. In that case the strength of the communication lies in the quality of the writing and the fact that they are the sole owners and star attraction of their business.

## **The When**

We know that the best time to post is early evening so that's when we announce our soup recipes. The downside is that it feels like we're never off duty. So we take turns at looking after Facebook and have made one of our Saturday girls an administrator of the page just in case something happens when we're not looking. We all have our own personal profiles on Facebook too, sharing some of the updates and photos so that we reach the widest possible audience.

We're restrained. We know from our own experience that if we fill people's timelines with irrelevant nonsense that people will block us. This means that we only post when we know that there's something that people will want to hear. Now and again there will be two posts within an hour but who could resist when Jamie Oliver has taken a photo of the tasty heritage tomatoes you have in stock?

## **The Impact**

A good post will have people running into the shop within seconds – this happened when we offered spare tickets for the local Flower and Food Festival. A tasty sounding soup recipe will get people talking and even when a post has only had seven likes we'll often hear several people mention it when they're buying our Soup in a Bag.

In the autumn of 2011 I noticed that a local fashion retailer had posted a link to the Daily Telegraph Best Small Shops in Britain competition. I posted it on Clementine's page and we all shared it on our personal pages. Long after it had been nominated I was delighted to hear that we'd been shortlisted and invited to the award ceremony in a very fancy bar in Mayfair. Announcing the shortlist on Facebook and issuing a press release resulted in a feature in the extremely well read local newspaper. Sales took a serious upturn.

On the night of the awards we kept our likers up to date with the cocktails and nibbles. And when we announced that we were runners up in the UK wide competition we got over a hundred likes and dozens of comments. If you've ever seen an admin panel then you'll know that Facebook is always telling you how many people have seen your posts so it's easy to see what's working and what's not.

Facebook has definitely been our friend. We keep a close eye on things and have, so far, avoided any horrors. When we get a negative comment on our wall we take it out of public view and make personal contact to resolve the issue. We use it to link to local businesses and it's been central to our work with other local businesses. Crucially, it keeps us close to our customers, maintains good relations with suppliers and generates lots of sales.

## **Other social media are available...**

OK. Hands up. We're not great on Twitter (@clementinegreen). And even though our website ([www.clementineofbroughtyferry.com](http://www.clementineofbroughtyferry.com)) is an adapted Tumblr blog we're not making any waves there either. We haven't even looked at Instagram, Vine or Four Square. You Tube is a maybe – as soon as the film maker in the family has a free week to make our 'from field to plate' film.

The Twitter penny has been very slow to drop and our tweets are simply feeds from our Facebook page. While I'm happy with my personal account and actual [rare] interactions with famous people, for Clementine its best use is business to business. It's much quicker than Facebook and offers scope for a different kind of discussion through hashtags such as #dundeehour #foodiehour and #ff.

We're going to get better at Twitter and the result, for us, will be a much stronger connection across food and retail networks. This will give us access to new products and suppliers and the opportunity to share and receive useful industry information.

After that, when we have the time, we'll eventually adopt whatever the internet throws at us once we've worked out what it can do for us and our customers. Because that's what's important. Before we say anything we've got to know why we're saying it and who we're saying it to. Obvious, isn't it?

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August 2013