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Involving and inspiring the public using social media

Hans de Kretser is a consultant specialising in online and digital marketing for arts organisations. Over the last fifteen years, Hans has worked for English National Opera, Sadler's Wells and as Head of Digital Marketing at M+H Communications Ltd. Today he works for a diverse range of arts clients including BBC Worldwide, British Film Institute, arts marketing agencies, Cheek by Jowl, Dance Consortium, DV8, Newcastle Theatre Royal, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, English National Ballet and Opera North. He has also worked on Mamma Mia!, Never Forget, the 39 Steps and other West End shows.

In this session, Hans took delegates through the steps you need to take to build a relevant and effective social media campaign that reflects your organisation's vision, fulfils your marketing goals and reaches your target groups in the places they are likely to be online. It included case studies from organisations from across the arts sector and top tips on how to make the most of the latest advances in new media.

The Digital Landscape

It's interesting to see how the keynotes feed into the themes of this session. It's now time to talk about practical ways in which we can use social media to achieve our marketing aims.

Therefore, we will begin with an overview of why it has become important, look at what a variety of arts organisations are doing and then explore how we can make it work for us on a day to day level.

It's interesting that YouTube is only four years old. Other applications have been around for longer but are only now being used as parts of campaigns.

About 37 million adults in the UK are internet users (ComScore, May 2009), 16m households (65%) have broadband and socialising online is now part of everyday life. Young people have grown up with the internet as a way of life, whilst over 65s spend more time on the internet than they do gardening or doing DIY (AXA via E-consultancy blog, 2007).

This quotation from Rupert Murdoch, made when he took over MySpace, gives an idea of the way the landscape is changing:

'Young people don't want to rely on a Godlike figure from above to tell them what's important. They want control over their media, instead of being controlled by it.'

Another influential thinker, Charles Leadbeater (WeThinkTheBook.net) said:

'Innovation and creativity have been elite activities... Now innovation and creativity are becoming mass activities ... "If the 20th century marked the rise of mass consumerism, one feature of the 21st century will be the rise of the mass participation economy.'

What is Social Media?

The term social media describes online media with a participatory or interactive component. Wikipedia has a good table of the different element of social media, repeated here:

- Communications
 - Blogs
 - Micro Blogging
 - Social Networking
 - Events
 - Forums
- Collaboration
 - Wikis
 - Social bookmarking
 - Social News
- Multimedia
 - Photo sharing
 - Video Sharing
 - Audio and Music Sharing
- Reviews and Opinions
 - Product reviews
 - Q&A sites
- Entertainment
 - Virtual Worlds
 - Game sharing

We will look at some of these in more detail, but to begin with we will do an exercise.

[Delegates were asked to: 'Face someone you don't know, introduce and talk about yourself until you find out if you know someone in common, then sit down.'

About half the delegates found someone in common and half didn't]

This exercise shows how difficult it is to work out our networks in person. Online social networking allows us to do this easily as we sign up to sites. It focuses on building online communities who share interests and/or activities.

UK social networking is the highest in Europe. There are 24.9m unique visitors (78% of the UK's web users) to social networking sites. 66.8% of Internet users across the globe accessed 'member communities' last year, compared to 65.1% for email.

Delegates were asked how many people had a profile on social networking sites – which was almost everyone. This has especially changed/grown in the last 12 months. Many of the delegates were also managing Facebook groups for their organisations.

You can use social networking to:

- Allow users to interact, participate, feedback
- Share Multimedia and rich content
- Provide an experience
- Deliver relevant marketing campaigns
- Learn from/about your users

Focus on Facebook

Why is Facebook so good? It has everything in one place, videos, blogs, means of contacting friends, you can customise it and you can see what your 'friends' are doing.

The London Symphony Orchestra has an excellent Facebook profile (www.facebook.com/londonsymphonyorchestra). It has a dynamic feed of different types of information coming through, regular updates, plenty of interaction, music for sale, discography, video clips and events. It uses plug-ins well, with a music player for example.

Going back a few years, Dance City in Newcastle was one of the first arts organisations to use Facebook effectively. Many of the members are 'administrators' on the page so they can easily contribute and it has become a useful business tool.

A number of West End theatres are using Facebook well, building up big fan bases. 'Shout the Musical' has a little application that you can plug into your page.



Facebook has its own statistics and tracking systems.

It's possible to advertise easily with feedback on advertising effectiveness.

A colleague recently did a campaign for 'Orwell Celebration'. He spent £250 on advertising, receiving 1,312,505 impressions, 900 click-throughs, ending up with 730 friends. Even though the event has now finished it is still attracting friends. The question is what to do with them now.

A recent development is that it is now possible to have a shorter username associated with a fan page but you need to have at least 100 fans. Type 'username' into the Facebook user facility to find out.

There are other social networks: MySpace and Bebo are still popular, though Facebook is now the most popular.

You could also brand your own networks using applications such as Ning. The National Theatre of Wales has not launched yet but is already developing its own social network.

Blogging

14.5m people visited blogs as at August 08. The BBC and The Guardian have the biggest market share.

Main elements include:

- Postings in chronological order
- Viewer responses to posts
- Text, pictures, video, sound clips

The benefits include the improvement of your web presence. They're good for 'thought leadership' when there is someone who can really lead a debate on some area.



The Tate Modern blog is good. It has typical elements but they've pushed it out a bit further – eg with 'see it, snap it send it' in which you can send your photos to the site and see them put up on the Mood Board.

When you click on that you can see a collage of all the photos that have been sent in.

Key tips for good blogging include:

- Keep it genuine – find a passion: one of the reasons blogs are popular reading is that they stand out from the language of corporate marketing and PR materials. Like sitting next to an expert on a plane, the best blogs provide highly useful information in a brief and informal setting.
- Make it regular: many if not most corporate blogs start strongly but fade after the initial rush of ideas. A few have been successful using social networking to attract amateurs interested in the topic. Your blog needs to be active to be successful.
- Focus: In many industries, blogging is common. Technology and marketing have been early adopters, and the field is crowded. To be successful, new blogs need to provide an innovative lens on their content by being focused on an under-reported aspect of their industry.
- Promote it: many organisations don't think about how they are going to encourage people to look at their blog.

There are plenty of free applications which can be used to make a blog: blogadot.com and wordpress for example. They're well constructed but you can also customise it in the way you want to.

The Birmingham Hippodrome use Blogadot for their pantomime blog. This is started up in the late summer each year with the interest building up to and through their season, before it is closed down afterwards.

Talawa share the work between different people in the organisation to ensure that the frequency is kept up.



Dance Consortium tour international companies. They have access to the dancers from these companies who they then persuade to write a blog while they are on tour. Some will talk about the art, others have an informal approach about the after show parties. The result is a range of perspectives on dancing on tour.

Plymouth Theatre Royal has a good approach to promoting their blog. Every page on their website, for example, refers people to different parts of their blog.

Micro-blogging

Most famously this is exemplified by Twitter.

[Delegates were asked if they had a Twitter profile and about half of delegates said they had]



Twitter is a free service that enables its users to send and read each others' updates, known as *tweets*. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters, displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to other users - known as followers - who have subscribed to them. Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or, by default, allow open access. Users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website, Short Message Service (SMS) or external applications.

It's not at all difficult to set up a profile on Twitter. At its core, it's very simple, but its power comes in its application and connections and its re-invention through open source. There are Twitter Clients which you can download and use to read your tweets in different ways.

One of the key ideas is that you can follow anyone; you don't have to know them. It works especially well for celebrities.

You could promote your Twitter profile online and encourage people to follow you. If people follow you, you don't have to follow them, but as arts organisations we are probably interested in what people are talking about. It also shows we are interested and value them.

There are several expressions associated with Twitter such as retweeting, in which you forward on an interesting tweet to your profile. It's possible to track how your message gets forwarded on.

Although you are limited to only 140 characters, it can be used to engage people in fun ways (as mentioned in the Innocent presentation) through links to video clips and your website.

Twitter Search is very powerful – it's right up to the minute, indeed the second, so you can find out what is being talked about at any point in time. Hashtags enable you to follow certain trends (such as the AMA Conference tag #AMA2009). You can use your own client such as Tweetdeck to help you manage Twitter as you develop more complex involvement.

It is also possible to tailor/brand your profile in the way you would like, such as with the Wicked musical (right).

The LSO Twitter profile is not just about concerts but includes behind the scenes information and retweets from students involved in LSO workshops.



Tools for analyzing trends:

- TweetStats (tweetstats.com)
- Twist (twist.flaptor.com)
- TweepDiff (tweepdiff.com)
- CoTweet (cotweet.com)

If you are using Twitter, you could have different feeds such as education, backstage or whatever. Remember how you will promote them all in one place though so that people can find the one they want.

Audience Reviews

Audience reviews can be difficult to get but they are worth the effort. The vast majority of reviews seem to be positive and it is useful to have the occasional negative review because it gives it more credibility.

These can be delivered on different platforms – on your website, blogs, Facebook, Twitter or YouTube.



Twitter seems to be working well for this because it is so immediate – people can post something on the way home from the performance.

Multi-media – Photo and Video Sharing

As well as YouTube there are other applications such as Brightcove or BlipTV. YouTube is the most popular and has a familiar easy-to-use interface which encourages interaction. One of the good services it has is the Record your Video response which enables you to post a video in response to someone else's video. It could be used to get people to post audience reviews.

It's incredibly powerful as demonstrated by the 'United Breaks Guitars' story in which the airline smashed the guitar of country singer Dave Carroll by throwing it on to the plane. They wouldn't take his complaint seriously until he posted a song about it on YouTube with several million views.

Sadler's Wells have used YouTube to invite people to send their videos of dance performances for a competition called Global Dance Contest. Sadlers Wells have been collating them and putting them on the site. The winner, will have their idea performed on stage.

It doesn't have to be a flashy multi-media operation. Some community and arts groups have been inventive in their use of social media and collaborative in their outreach. It was the thousands of photos posted on Flickr of The Sultan's Elephant that gave the project much greater reach and impact than it would otherwise have done. What Lift were able to do was bring them all in on to their website.

Mobile Internet

The mobile internet will surely be one of the next big things. The National Gallery has produced an iPhone application but it's one of the few at the moment.

Fox Theatre in the USA has done some interesting work – with screening times, how to get there + the ability to take photos and send them straight to the website.

However, this area of work seems to be at an early stage.

Resources

One of the troubles with all these developments in social media is the amount of time it takes to manage everything. They are important and useful tools but need to be carefully integrated into our other activities. We need to prioritise what is most important for our marketing operations and find ways of bringing the whole organisation behind your ideas.

Make sure you use it to ask questions of your audience and bring people back to your website and reviews, external links

We often make a checklist of the sort of things we'll use in our Twitter Feeds to keep it going – identifying easy and engaging things.

There are various shortcuts which can help. When you update a YouTube video you can have a message sent to your Twitter and Facebook accounts. You could also use TubeMogul which will let you upload your video to various platforms. Tweet Deck will help you manage several channels at once – especially useful if you are looking after several feeds at once.



Integrate Campaigns

Integration of the different elements of your campaign is key to success. For example, Dance Consortium has the YouTube video embedded on to the homepage, with the clips changed regularly. The blog is on the home page. I've always recommended that people encourage people to join the email list on every page of the website – now we are saying get people to join Twitter, Facebook etc too.

They will be promoted in the programmes – persuading people to send in their reviews.

Dance Consortium has a Twitter Feed which shows the last five Twitter stories – which is an easy and cheap way of keeping news up to date on the website.

Evaluation

Having spent time doing this work we need to consider the value of these things for us. What should we look at?

- Traffic, reputation and engagement are all important, but they're difficult to measure.
 - Click-throughs are limited in what they can tell us and how far they lead to booking, especially now people are going through several sites – your website, facebook, ticket office.
 - Followers/subscribers can be counted in Twitter and Facebook, but are they the right customers for us.
 - Search Engine Ranking – are our social media techniques affecting our ranking?
 - Savings made versus other channels – what is the return on investment?
- No industry standard – more research required

These may help us

- <http://measurementcamp.wikidot.com>
- Twitter and Google alerts/trends – how is your organisation being perceived?
- Online Reputation and Buzz Monitoring services

Top 10 Tips

1. Have a strategy – whilst advising you to have a go on Twitter and try out new ideas, it is important that they are part of your long-term strategy. Avoid losing interest half-way through.
2. Resource – consider how you are going to resource this activity, especially in terms of staff time. Is there an enthusiast on the staff or a friend of the organisation that could help you?
3. Target – social media makes you relevant for your audience and opens up communication with new people.
4. Be transparent – people are savvy of how these things work so be careful doing things like inventing pretend fans
5. Observe the rules – these are being used for social reasons as part of their free time so don't go in and do hard marketing without permission
6. Commit to it – don't give up after your initial enthusiasm has waned

7. Be open – this shouldn't be used as closed corporate media, use social media to open up the brand and personality of your organisation.
8. Measure – so much of digital media can be measured so use what you can
9. Reward – how are you going to reward the people who sign up to your networks
10. Keep it fun – this is a fun tool to play with and there are lots of possibilities

Questions

Jim Brewster, Audiences South West: Some people are more inclined to using social media than others. What are your thoughts about how it seems to work for some people and not others – what are their motivations? Why does the 'United Breaks Guitars' campaign suddenly take off?

HK: I wish I knew why these things take off but it's not an exact science. With the United song, it was original, captured a moment in time and it was little bit playful.

It is possible to encourage people to become engaged by showing them the benefits of being part of it. Or something will suddenly influence them – like they get an iPhone – or they find something on the web that is especially useful to their work or lifestyle.

Trish Thomas, South Bank Centre: I want to ask about iPhone applications. The market share of iPhone is small, people don't want to pay for the apps and the app store is crowded. On the other hand they look nice and they're great tools for making you look innovative. But do they provide good value.

HK: It's probably too early to say. There is an ego thing about having an iPhone app now, but it may only be further down the line that we can tell how useful they are going to be.

Roger Tomlinson, Consultant: In the US, arts organisations are analysing their users and they are finding that iPhone users make up a larger proportion than they do in the population as a whole. A group of not-for-profits are producing an iPhone app that can be converted and tailored easily for a number of organisations. I look forward to the time when they make it easy to buy tickets online.

Abbigail Wright, York Theatre Royal: What do you think is the relationship between social media and traditional press? I've heard examples of people changing their media strategy so that they put out social media releases rather than traditional press releases.

HK: We tend to put the audience reviews and press releases on the sites together. It's really clear what they are and who they are from.