

## Jim Richardson, Managing Director, Sumo Design

### *Making your brand social*

Jim Richardson is Managing Director of Sumo, a specialist design consultancy working in the arts and cultural sectors. Jim has worked on a broad range of marketing campaigns and social media projects for clients including The National Gallery, The Natural History Museum, The National Trust and BBC. As a speaker and author, Jim has shared his vision of evolving arts audiences; people who want to step beyond being treated as spectators and wish to engage actively with cultural organisations through their venue, website and brand. Jim lectures widely, addressing arts and cultural professionals at conferences across Europe and has contributed to publications including *Arts Professional*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Museums Journal* and *Heritage 365 Magazine*.

As social media advances, it is becoming increasingly important to know how to maximise our organisation's online efforts. In this presentation Jim outlined a straightforward, five-step process for establishing our social media presence – showing how the work can be brought into the homes and lives of our potential audience.

#### **Making your brand social**

AMA events are great for finding out about the great ways that people are growing their audiences or using new ways of thinking. I always go away feeling inspired, but then, what do you do next? How do you move from being inspired to introducing these ideas into your organisation?



There are two routes you can take, and I have tried both. Firstly, you can take an idea that you have seen working for someone else and steal it ...

... or you can start from scratch and put together a plan that fits with the aims of your organisation and your audiences and that is what I am going to take you through today; a five step social media plan for an arts organisation.

But before we start, let's examine why you should bother! Many of you will be facing budget cuts, staff cuts and probably have more on your plate now than ever before. So is it the best time to be expanding what you do online?

Technology has changed and the internet has moved from static pages to dynamic and sharable content and social networks. The internet is no longer just a place to find information; it is now a forum for collaboration, a place to create, curate and share content online. This has changed the way we work, influenced the way we think and adjusted our individual place in society forever.

The most popular places on the internet have changed to include mostly social media websites. As mobile technology gives us 'always-on' access to information, the internet is changing the way that we live.

This technological shift has placed power in the hands of the masses as never before; I can access countless books at the touch of a button, find pictures of The Parthenon, create web pages, publish books and connect with niche groups with the same interest as me.

The explosion in social media has created a socio-cultural shift; the way that people act is changing and expectations are also changing. If they go to Twitter or eBay and then visit your static website they won't be impressed. They want to engage with creative organisations to co-create content, to be critics and to cut up and remix the arts.

Taking an active role in this space makes it possible to connect and build relationships with online audiences and convert those with a passing interest in to passionate advocates for your museum, theatre, gallery or festival.

If you can become part of the conversation taking place in this social media space then it can expose your brand to these people in a far more effective way than advertising, because these conversations already have the attention of the individuals taking part in a way in which press, radio, outdoor and television advertising does not.

Some might say that this is because we have learned to tune out the noise of mass media, but I think it has a more to do with trust. If I write on Twitter that the new exhibition was great, then this will influence my friends in a far more powerful way than traditional advertising, because my friends trust my opinion.

This isn't new; it has been well documented that consumers need to trust a brand to be loyal to it and that the majority of our buying decisions have always been through word of mouth. Social media amplifies this: rather than having to take time to tell each individual that an exhibition was great, it only takes a few seconds to communicate this to countless people.

The people who are influenced by my own opinion are not necessarily 'friends' in the traditional sense. The vast majority of the people who follow me on Twitter have never met me, but they are interested in what I write and over time I have gained their trust.

I recently wrote on Twitter about the brilliant Robert Morris, BodySpaceMotionThings installation at Tate Modern. Firstly, when I noticed the exhibition in the paper, I linked to information about it on the Tate website. Secondly I wrote a note to a friend who works in museums who I thought would get a kick out of the exhibition and thirdly I made a link to some pictures posted on photo sharing website Flickr.

One of the really great things about Twitter is the 'Retweet', so if someone likes what I say, they can retweet it to their followers, rebroadcasting this information to their own network.

In the case of my comments about the Robert Morris exhibition, two people who follow my posts on Twitter chose to retweet something I said about the exhibition, and both picked up on the message I sent to my friend. Between matwater213 and GettyMuseum, my message to a friend about something she would think cool was rebroadcast to over 10,000 people.



The idea of sharing this personal correspondence in an open forum would have seemed very odd just a few years ago. In fact, looking at the wider social media landscape it could be seen as narcissistic.

I share my thoughts, post pictures of my family and tell people that I have never met what I am doing, but this isn't the preserve of the geeky few, this is now the norm. It is now socially acceptable to share information about your life; people do this because of what they get back in terms of building relationships with like minded people.

For an arts organisation, social media offers opportunities to engage with your audiences on a deeper level. It is more personal, one-to-one and less one-size-fits-all.

So how do you become part of that conversation and how can you control your brand? Whether you like it or not, nobody needs to ask your permission to talk about your museum on a blog or tell a friend about an exhibition on Facebook, so your brand is already in this social media space. You can't control the conversation but you can participate in it.

This sounds scary; your brand is in a space where you have limited control, but think about what your brand really is. Is it your logo? Your advertising campaign? Your website? Your programme? Your building? Your staff?

It is none of these things. Your brand is the perception that people have of your organisation, and you have never had total control over it. You have only ever been able to use these touch points to shape this perception and in the social media space that is no different. So how do you do it...?

I am going to take you through the five stages of entering the social media space, these are roughly based on five stages proposed by Aaron Uhrmacher on the website Mashable in 2008 and have been taken on board by many people in both the commercial and non-profit sector.

The five steps are:

1. Stop, look and listen
2. Goals
3. Prepare
4. Launch
5. Monitor

### **Stop, look and listen**

There are countless websites which you might be considering, especially as the websites that are hitting the headlines now, like Facebook and Twitter, may not be as popular in a year's time.

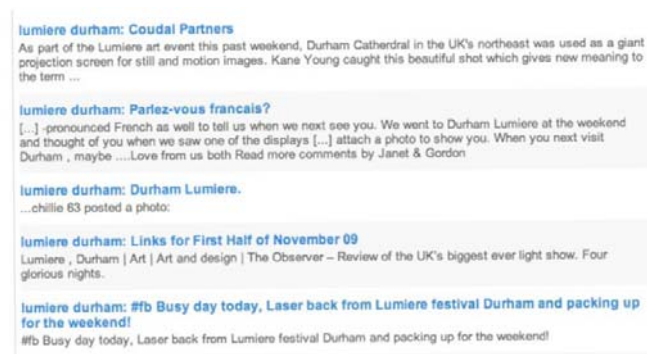
It's important to take time to understand the social media websites that your audiences use before you do anything else. Each is different and users interact with each other in different ways. It would be easy for your organisation to look like it 'didn't get it' if you stumble into websites without knowing the unwritten rules of these spaces.

The online and social media landscape can be seen as existing in a hierarchy or on a continuum in which you have the things you can control easily like your website at the top, more interactive elements such as blogs, photos and video networks further down and then social networks with much more free-flowing elements at the bottom.

So, your first step in taking your organisation into social media is to stop! Don't start setting up fan pages on every social network you can find, don't rush out and set up a Twitter account for your organisation. Instead, take the time to learn about these websites and how your audiences are using them.

Or to put it another way, before your organisation can be a part of these conversations, you need to determine how best you can contribute.

To find these conversations we use *Social Media Firehose* which brings together search results from across the social media landscape. Here is a search for mentions of the 'Lumiere Durham' (using Social Media Firehose), a festival which took place in the North East in November 2009.



From this search it is possible to map the social media footprint of the festival; for example, it has received much coverage in blogs in a number of languages.

It has also proved popular in Twitter and Facebook with many positive comments from visitors and, as you'd expect for such a visual event, a large number of videos and pictures have been posted on YouTube and Flickr.

This isn't a PR company generating this coverage, it is people who have experienced the event and are inspired to write and post.

By learning which social media spaces your audiences have taken your brand into, you can prioritise which websites you need to understand.

The social media landscape is constantly changing, but by checking where your audiences are, you can stay ahead of the curve or the next wave you need to catch.



From kane...



From THEGHOST1



From kane...



From kane...



From kane...



From "Mark...

As well as looking at where people are talking about your organisation, you may also want to see where they are talking about the competition; are they the same spaces or are they attracting a demographic that you would like to explore?

Once you know which websites you are interested in learning about, sign-up for an account. It's better to do this as an individual rather than as an organisation until you have familiarised yourself with the way that things work.

In many ways, this is the most important stage, because too often arts organisations jump in without understanding the way these networks work. Right now, Twitter is full of cultural venues putting out events listings and press releases and in doing so they make themselves seem distant and uninviting.

This can be damaging to your brand, because it projects the image of an organisation which can't be bothered to learn how a space works.

For me, the organisations who have succeeded most across a diverse range of social media platforms are the ones who have taken time to understand how things work. These are the organisations that are adding value to their brands. They are the ones that, for example, are writing as individuals rather than as an institution.

Social networks can aid research into the perception of your brand. Having a fan page on a website like Facebook shows who your audiences really are, including the kind of people who wouldn't take part in a survey, providing rich information on what matters to them and how they relate to brands including your own.

## Goals

It is important to start with goals rather than technology because the social media space is full of cool tools, the next big thing and that site you must be on. It would be easy to waste time jumping in without asking why.

This is also a great time to think about how social media can fit with the brand values and aims of your organisation. For example, the remit of The Tate is to *'Increase understanding and knowledge of art'* and it is possible to see how this translates into their work online, where their activities mirror these goals.

*How We Are Now* was the first major exhibition of photography to be held at Tate Britain and took place in 2007. It looked at the journey of British photography, from the pioneers of the early medium to today's photographers who use new technology to make and display their imagery.

They wanted to encourage more people aged 16 – 24 to attend. So, they invited a number of groups such as The Klaxons and Basement Jaxx to produce a piece of music based on a work of art they had selected. This music was then available to listen to alongside the picture in the gallery as well as online. This was a cool marketing campaign, but they took it further. They then opened a competition through MySpace, inviting young musicians aged 16-24 to contribute a '13<sup>th</sup> track' - in the same way as the original musicians – inspired by a work of art. They also encouraged people to vote for their favourite tracks, with the top 20 being put

through to a panel. It was estimated that this project exposed approximately 2 million people to the Tate brand.

It was an exciting way to engage people and I'd say that it met its aim of increasing understanding and knowledge of art, as well as matching my perception of the Tate brand.

So whether your goal is to build awareness, sell tickets, increase visitors, educate, grow a target demographic or whatever, your social media activities should reflect your brand and organisational goals.

Being aware of the bigger picture is also important for encouraging other people in your organisation to be involved.

### **Prepare: Determine your strategy**

Now that you have a goal in mind, you need to determine the right strategy and social media platform. I'd recommend that you start small, concentrating on just one website or social media platform, until you find your feet.

The 'listening' exercise that you will have done should have identified the best place to start; it will be somewhere that your audiences or potential audiences spend time online, and a space that you now understand.

It's worth taking time to think about how your audience will want to be involved. A 16 year old and a 60 year old will both participate in social media, but in different ways. A useful tool when considering this is the 'ladder of participation' developed by Forrester research as part of their excellent book *'Groundswell'*.

This shows the different way people engage in social media. A mistake that is commonly made is concentrating on giving audiences the opportunity to indulge their inner 'creator' ignoring other ways in which people are driven to engage in social media.

**Creators** publish blogs, upload videos that they have created, upload audio or music they have created, write articles or stories and publish websites.

**Critics** review or rate products or services, contribute to blogs, comment on online forums and edit articles in wiki.

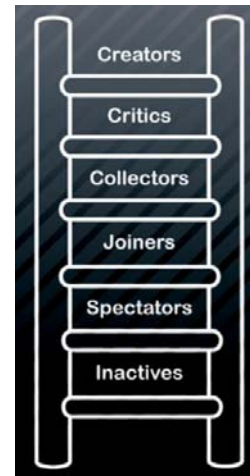
**Collectors** use RSS feeds, add tags to web pages or photos and vote for websites online.

**Joiners** maintain profiles on social networking sites and visit social networking sites.

**Spectators** read customer reviews, blogs, watch videos and read forums.

**Inactives** do none of these things.

On the Forrester site ([www.forrester.com/Groundswell/profile\\_tool.html](http://www.forrester.com/Groundswell/profile_tool.html)), there is a profiling tool which makes it possible to look at the percentage break-down of these different groupings by age group and country.



### Social media strategy example

This is a project that I did for the Laing Art Gallery in the North of England. Our goals were to spread the word amongst 'twenty-somethings' that the gallery had a diverse and interesting collection, to increase awareness within that age group and to change perception of the brand from something for older people to something for them.

We decided that Facebook would be the best social media space to spread the word about the gallery, because at the time, the age range of the target audience fitted with its demographic. Our strategy was to create a Facebook application that could be added to friends' profiles which would show a different piece from the gallery's collection every day.

The *Laing Art Gallery 'Picture of the day'* application was launched virally, with museum staff adding it to their own profiles and over the next month usage grew slowly. With every new user signing up for the application, we spread the word about the gallery to their friends, and with the average member on Facebook having about 120 friends at the time, its reach extended to thousands of people very quickly.

The Laing Art Gallery Facebook application was automated so needed no management, but time and resources are a major consideration that need to be considered at this stage.

So we chose a goal, picked a social media platform based on the audience we were trying to reach, and developed a strategy based on this.

### Prepare: people

Generally speaking, social media platforms help facilitate conversations between individuals, so once you have a sense of what people are talking about, you need to figure out who will talk on behalf of the organisation.

One of our clients is currently looking for staff to contribute to a new blog they want to launch in the summer. They want people from across the organisation to contribute, with the goal of posting two new blog posts a week. They have decided to find ten members of staff who will each write one post per month.

With this in mind they have included a call for bloggers in their internal newsletter, asking anyone interested to write a sample blog post. To give these would-be bloggers a clear idea of what the blog should be about they have been given a brief with broad guidelines to would-be participants about the kind of stories the organisation is looking for.

This approach of including people from across the organisation has several advantages. Firstly, it spreads the responsibility for writing the blog, so it is not just down to the marketing department.

Secondly, the result is more likely to be authentic if it comes from outside the PR department. Social media is about people speaking to people. While the organisation has suggested the types of stories they are looking for, they have not set a brand writing style or an approved list of stories, preferring instead to let enthusiastic members of staff communicate what they are about in an open and honest way.

Of course, social media covers a broad range of websites and applications and it might be more appropriate to have guidelines in some circumstances.

Whether your social media activity is something one person does, or a number of people do, you need to be aware of the time it will take and consider how your social media plan will be delivered in the long term. A quick search will find many Facebook pages from arts organisations which are out of date, because no-one has the time to update it. This is more detrimental to the brand than not having a presence at all.

The time that a social media project can demand of you is another reason why it is important to start small and not do too much too soon.

#### Prepare: rules of engagement

The final thing to consider when preparing your social media plan is how you will respond to comments by readers.

A colleague gave me this quote attributing it to someone at the Science Museum:

*'When a blogger asks for comments but never replies back, it's like beginning a conversation and then leaving the room when somebody else starts talking!'*

Comments about your organisation could take place on numerous websites, and it is worth figuring out who has the authority to reply to these and how you should engage with people, and more importantly discuss the tone of voice of those replies.

Responding to comments about your organisation, whether those comments are positive or not, will show that you're listening, that you want their opinion and that this will build trust and social capital in your brand with your audiences.

It is a difficult line for an arts organisation to walk – you want to be active in social media spaces and to do that you must reconcile the human-to-human informal conversational style of these networks with the fact that you are large organisations which can't let everyone say what they want.

Arts organisations are not alone in this. Many large corporations are active in this space and have rules of engagement to try to minimise the chance of going off-message. Have a look at Innocent Drinks. They are exemplary in creating a friendly tone of voice and have successfully extended this to their blog and social media pages, even including difficult messages from the Chairman when they joined up with McDonalds.

While these guidelines differ from organisation to organisation, one constant is that people should try and 'sound human' and engage people on an emotional level.

This issue goes beyond commenting, it could be the tone of voice of your tweets on Twitter, or it could be the way you write a fan page on Facebook; social media has magnified the importance of the voice of your brand.

Much has been written about brand personality and how you can determine what yours is, but I would urge caution. It would be much better to be a human being rather than try and be



the organisation. Being a real person is more authentic and if you make a mistake, you're only human.

### **Launch**

With your planning complete, you'll be ready to launch in to the world of social media. This could be on any number of websites and could be as small or ambitious as you wish and the issues for each will be different.

While this may be a new space, some old rules apply; you wouldn't open an exhibition or stage a concert without marketing it and your social media plan should include how you will make audiences inside and outside your organisation aware of what you're doing.

### **Monitor**

With your launch complete you should monitor your progress against the goals that you set at the start of your project and consider changing course if things don't seem to be going as planned.

Don't operate in isolation from the rest of your organisation. Make sure everyone is aware of what you're doing and keep them up-to-date with small wins. Social media is often misunderstood and communication is essential to validate the effort that you're putting in. When people understand what you're trying to do, they will come to you with suggestions of how your social media activity can work with other areas of the organisation.

### **Conclusion**

The potential pay-off from social media participation is enormous. Arts organisations that enter this space will have a better sense of how they are perceived by their target audiences, they will establish a two-way dialogue with stakeholders and they will empower their customers to speak *with* them, not *at* them.

Entering this space is not without its problems. How you translate your brand into human-to-human conversation without it sounding like PR is something the best institutions struggle with.

But social media is here to stay, it isn't a fad and while Facebook or Twitter may fade, people expecting to be part of the conversation rather than just talked at will not go away and we need to adapt our brands to exist in this world.

*Beth Aplin concluded the session by inviting people to view the stream of Jim Richardson's presentation on the AmbITion website. Questions submitted online would be taken alongside real life ones in the Keynotes in Conversation session [see below].*