Social Media for Business and Community Engagement (BCE)

This is a brief overview of Social Media in the context of Higher and Further Education institutions engaging with Business and Community partners. BCE is being used by Jisc, HEFCE and others to describe, more holistically, the relationships academic institutions create with external organisations and individuals. This encompasses areas such as Employer Engagement, Lifelong Learning, Knowledge Exchange and Public Engagement.

What is Social Media?

Social media refers to interaction among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. What makes social media different is its ability to use the Internet, allowing for fast and effective *two-way* interaction to take place

Take-up of social media across education generally is high - for example in HE 98% of institutions have a Facebook account, 100% a Twitter profile and 97% a YouTube account. For business engagement however, usage is less common (3% Facebook, 22% Twitter). Audience sizes are large - the average number of Facebook fans on a HE institution's page is 27,000.

Why use Social Media?

Professionally, it can assist in keeping up with trends in your sector, networking with colleagues and sharing your experiences and activities with others. It can help you manage your relationships by keeping in contact with colleagues and partners at a frequency which would not be possible using other communication methods or face to face contact. It's also a great listening tool and can really help you to understand your audiences needs. It is also low cost, with many of the currently used tools being available free of charge.

Types of Social Media

There are many tools available, and social media moves at such a fast pace tools can come and go - we'll look at the types of social media here rather than specific tools.

Types of social media used include blogs/microblogs, social/business networks, image/video Sharing, content curation, slidecasts, webinars, social gaming, mobile apps, collaborative spaces and location-based Forums.

Social Media Strategy

Rather than creating a separate strategy for social media, it can be more beneficial to ensure the effective and appropriate use of social media is reflected in your existing strategies such as marketing and communications. Having a separate social media strategy can create an additional burden not only in terms of having to produce it in the first instance, but also in keeping it up to date, and ensuring its use within the institution.

When defining your strategy you may wish to consider **defining your audience, roles and responsibilities, style and tone and measurement** of the effectiveness of your social media presence.

Social Media Guidance

The following are some things to consider when engaging using social media, and some pitfalls to avoid:

- **consider your content** - make sure it's interesting, keep it brief and relevant, consider the use of multimedia and provide opportunities for audience interaction.
- **frequency** - there are no hard-and-fast rules over this so some experimentation is needed to work out what works best for you, but make sure you're engaging enough to maintain interest, but not too much that people become annoyed by it and you potentially lose people. Also remember repetition over time can he useful.
- **timing** - scheduling when you post content can prove beneficial. Certain times of the day see more audience engagement than others. When scheduling content make sure it's still relevant when it actually posts, and that other events haven't affected the relevance/appropriateness of the content.
- **accounts** - you need to make sure your social media accounts are secure, but also consider what would happen if the person responsible is not available for example through illness. Consider ensuring others have access as a contingency.
- **manage expectations** - use profiles on social media accounts to clarify what your audience can expect, including the type of content they can find and what times of the day people are available to respond.
- **know your tools** - make sure you're familiar with the tool you are using before using it in a professional context. Perhaps try a tool out personally first to become familiar and establish if it should be used professionally. Also if a tool is not proving effective, discontinue using it rather than channeling wasted effort.

Use of Social Media in BCE

This section highlights some specific examples of the use of social media for external engagement:

Alumni Engagement: The Jisc AGENT project at Brunel University used social media for mentoring with the focus being on employability. Using Facebook, Linkedin and Twitter subject specific groups were set up for current students and alumni to join. Alumni sign up as a mentor, with current students as mentees, bringing in the past experience of Alumni at the institution together with their current experiences as working graduates for the benefit of students.
http://www.brunel.ac.uk/siscm/disc/research/pandi/user-centred-design/agent

Aside from Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, a growing number of institutions have set up Alumni Blogs - here's a few examples from Lincoln, Oxford and City University London:
Lincoln Blog http://lsm.alumni.lincoln.ac.uk/
Oxford Blog https://www.alumni.ox.ac.uk/page.aspx?pid=1372
City Blog http://blogs.city.ac.uk/city-alumni/

Open Educational Resources: The Open University has been making educational resources available for some time now, and in fact has a policy to do so. It currently commits to making at least 5% of its content available to the public and aims to make more than that available. To do this, they have been using a tool called OpenLearn for a number of years which has been very successful. What OpenLearn lacked, though, is the social features which could be used to personalise and tailor an individual's learning experience. To overcome this, SocialLearn was launched. SocialLearn is designed to complement OpenLearn rather than replace it.
http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/sociallearn/

Digital Storytelling: Digital Storytelling refers to a combination of approaches and technologies that help people with little or no professional experience of digital media to produce short, narrative-based videos.

Digital stories are typically short (around 2-3 minutes in length), with a recorded voiceover accompanying a series of still images and text. You could also use music, sound effects and video in your story, although the use of video should be minimal.
Dave White from the University of Oxford has produced this digital story about his experiences of running a major online public engagement event - Pi Day Live.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=emvVToYIOhQ

Want to find out more?

This document is a summary of the Jisc Social Media for Business and Community Engagement webinar. You can listen to the full webinar (1 hour) at https://ca-sas.bbcollab.com/mr.jnlp?suid=M.0428DC00DE968C4CE0F8B26CE7C789&sid=2009077

You can also access links and resources from the webinar at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eJ2Df6LqRTRdZok5Edb9jbrVgMJlk_2-00wBDUysgpQ/