# **Starting out/things to consider**

According to Chritton (2014), more than 90% of recruiting and employment executives will Google you before they meet you: what will they see as their first impression of you? Even if you have not joined any social media sites, you may still have an online persona, and if you are not proactive about how you are seen online, you run the risk of letting others create your image for you.

Social media can be a great tool for showing off your work and achievements, sharing and learning, and networking with others in your field; and while there is no right or wrong way to have a professional presence on social media, there are several guidelines.

Decide what you want to achieve, make a plan, and decide who you want to attract or engage with. Hlinko (2012) notes the importance of having a concrete goal, and one that you can assign numbers to where possible, rather than having a tangible goal such as “greater awareness”. Goals could be linked to a number of followers, likes or engagement, or a practical goal of posting five updates a week, for example. Rossman & Young (2016) state that library social media accounts generally base their success on community growth, community engagement, and connectedness. Ramsey & Vacchione (2014) also suggest considering what barriers there might be to posting and design ways to circumvent those barriers.

Several authors highlight the importance of having a strategy before participating in social media (Petruca 2016; Young & Rossman 2015; Hlinko 2012). Young & Rossman (2015) suggest creating a positioning statement, which in marketing terms is a written expression of how you are filling a niche in the market. Chritton (2014) states that your market niche exists at the intersection of your purpose or mission; your identity (skills, talents, personality); your target market; and what you offer.

# **Personal branding**

Having a strong personal brand comes up consistently as being important on social media. As Dalla-Camina (2016) states:

*“The personal brand does not consist in only what we do, but more in how, for whom and why we do it… People with strong personal brands get noticed because they share their passion for what they do in a way that is relevant to the people they want to serve.”* (Dalla-Camina 2016)

Petruca (2016) advises that everything you share on social media contributes to your brand, and that everything you share contributes towards an idea of who you are and what you stand for. Lee (2015) highlights the benefits of building your personal brand, including leadership opportunities, association with a market niche, greater credibility, recognition and prestige, and higher perceived value.

In building your personal brand, Lee (2015) and Chritton (2014) both recommend establishing yourself as an expert. Lee suggests considering your unique skill-set and to choose between one and three areas of expertise that your social media messages will display. Chritton also states that: *“Personal brands are built on authenticity. You need to be real and offer real expertise”* (2014, p.206)

In showing your expertise, several authors suggest that setting up your profile and putting concerted effort into authoring your ‘about me’ section, also known as a headline, blurb or biography, depending on what platform you are working with (McFadden 2018; Lee 2015; Gratton & Gratton 2012). Northey states that this section might be *“your only chance to catch someone’s attention*” (in Gratton & Gratton 2012, p.186), and McFadden likens to *“your digital business card”* (2018, p.307). McFadden also suggests if the space given in the ‘about’ section is insufficient, create a separate page, such as an about.me profile or link to your LinkedIn page or website.

The importance of consistency is also emphasised by many (McFadden 2018; Ramsey & Vacchione 2014; Gratton & Gratton 2012). At a basic level, Lee (2015) suggests using the same username, profile picture, themes or motifs, and ‘about me’ information across your social profiles. In addition, it is suggested that users have separate accounts or profiles for professional and personal communications (McFadden 2018; Barker et al 2017).

Consistency in the information and messages you are sending out is also emphasised. As McFadden (2018) has it:

*“All the social media tips and tricks in the world won’t change the fact that building a brand takes consistency and time… Social media requires consistency, experimentation, and careful assessment, tailored to you and each of your accounts”* (McFadden 2018, p.313-314)

# **Crafting messages**

Despite McFadden’s assertion, much research has been done around the art of constructing the perfect social media post. Lee (2015) recommends posting every day, and states that the optimum number of times to post per day differs between platforms: for Facebook he recommends two times per day, for Twitter five times, LinkedIn just once, and between 1-2 times per day on Instagram.

On what time or times of day it is best to post, there are differing ideas: Barker et al. (2017) state that research has shown posting at midday and midweek produces the best results on Twitter, while Gratton & Gratton (2012) suggest early morning and early evening are the highest use times of the day. Tweriod (tweriod.com) is a free Twitter tool that analyses your followers to see when they are online the most and therefore suggesting the best times to tweet in order to gain the highest number of impressions. Hopper has a similar free tool for Instagram (https://bit.ly/2Npc5No), however this will only work with a business profile.

Social media management platform Buffer has also conducted research analysing posts sent through their platform to find the best times of day to post. Their findings showed that most popular time to post and the best times for high engagement differed greatly across time zones and advocate experimenting to find the times when your audience is most engaged (Lee 2016). Analytics can help to hone approaches to social media (King 2015; Hlinko 2012), including providing information on where your audience is located and when they are most active (Barker et al 2017). Be aware that performing analytics on new accounts will probably not yield helpful results (McFadden 2018).

In terms of the content of posts, several authors suggest that displaying personality, expressing feelings or provoking emotion is the best way to impact and encourage sharing (Lahuerta-Otero & Cordero-Gutiérrez 2018; Lake 2015; Young & Rossman 2015; Hlinko 2012). In his ‘periodic table of content marketing’, Chris Lake (2015) includes a list of ‘sharing triggers’, or qualities that prompt viewers to share a social media post. These triggers are: funny, sexy, shocking, moving, unbelievable, controversial, cool, illuminating, random, zeitgeist, cute, uplifting, and disgusting. To this list, Hinko (2012) adds that love, romance and food sell, and Gratton & Gratton (2012) suggest striking a balance between information and entertainment.

Hlinko (2012) highly advocates the use of humour, and indeed has a whole chapter dedicated to humour in their book on social media:

*“Humor may be funny, but when it comes to your viral marketing strategy, it’s a very serious tool in your arsenal. There may be no type of content that is more spread-worthy than well-crafted humor… People like spreading humor. It’s fun, it breaks up the day, and it makes them look cool.” (p.99)*

An essential aspect is knowing what makes a message attractive and stand out, particularly on Twitter as it is possible for users to see your posts without them following you (Lahuerta-Otero & Cordero-Gutiérrez, 2018). Lahuerta-Otero & Cordero-Gutiérrez state that longer messages tend to be shared more than short ones because they contain more information; however, Gratton & Gratton (2012) stress that it is important to draw people in at the top of the post, and Hlinko (2012) suggests getting to the point quickly.

To elicit conversation and engagement, and gain attention, Hlinko also recommends asking questions or asking for feedback, not posting about yourself too much, post about current events to spark a conversation, solicit comments and comment back and forth with commenters, ask people to like or share a post, and to always attach a URL, picture or video as it makes the post stand out more by taking up more space on the screen. Keep pictures linked to your brand, and try to share photos that will encourage engagement, such as comments and sharing (Barker et al 2017). McFadden (2018) recommends Pablo (Pablo.buffer.com) and Canva (canva.com) for creating social media-ready images; or to create video content, YouTube Creator Studio (studio.youtube.com) has a library of free-to-use music, sound effects and editing capabilities. Use a URL shortener such as Bitly (Bitly.com) to avoid links taking up too much space on the screen, particularly on Twitter where there is a character limit to posts. Chritton (2014) also advocates sharing links to sites that offer useful information, thereby providing value to your followers.

Hashtags and mentions are also elements recommended to contain in posts. Lahuerta-Otero & Cordero-Gutiérrez (2018) suggest that hashtags help readers process information more easily and allow for effective sorting and processing of information. However, it is also noted that Twitter no longer requires a hashtag for keyword searching, and so the user may decide to exclude them to make extra characters available for more crucial information on this platform. These authors also advocate the use of mentions as this increases the chances of your post being shared, and moreover, Petruca (2016) states that associating with other strong brands strengthens your own identity.

Rossman & Young (2016) highlight the importance of creating and using hashtags for campaigns and events, while Lee (2015) advocates researching hashtags and keywords that are popular in your sector. Lee suggests using the RiteTag hashtag search (ritetag.com/hashtag-search) to see how hashtags are ranked and get a sense of the volume of conversation around any topic, and the BuzzSumo content analyser to see which articles, videos, and stories are popular in your niche. Gratton & Gratton (2012) suggest re-examining keywords and hashtags once every three months.

McFadden (2018) recommends some library specific hashtags: #shelfie, #bookface, and #saturdaylibrarian, and also recommends the use of widely popular hashtags such as #tbt (throwback Thursday) and #ff (follow Friday). Interestingly, McFadden says that using #ff to promote the social media accounts of other people in your sector that you find interesting will build *“digital goodwill”*.

# **Inspiration for posts**

An easy to contribute to social media is to share or ‘retweet’ others’ content, with proper attribution of the original creator. When sharing, always add a comment or opinion to add value or demonstrate the connection to your own work (Stranack 2012). Barker et al. (2017) call this ‘content curation’, and suggest that sharing relevant content created by others and reposting it with attribution is a good way to establish reputation and demonstrate expertise.

When considering what to post, Ramsey & Vacchione (2014) advocate considering which topics might *“stimulate interactivity”* as social media is about reciprocal communication, not broadcasting information (p.73).

Hlinko (2012) suggests checking which topics or hashtags are trending and jump on the bandwagon, which can be determined through sites such as Trends24 (trends24.in). Hlinko also suggests that making cultural references, parodies of memes, or to reference something that people can get, or already are mad about; also building an ongoing narrative that lasts over a few days or weeks, giving the example of a poll or contest.

Maintaining a calendar of events with popular holidays and commemorative days can also help to provide inspiration for posts. Ramsey & Vacchione (2014) recommend considering what library resources can be tied into the holiday as well as what is meaningful for followers when populating the calendar.

# **Making meaningful connections online/Social media as professional development**

Social media is not only a marketing tool, it is also an effective method of building an online community (Young & Rossman 2015). Many now consider social media participation as an important professional development opportunity, as social medias contain online communities of practice where it is possible to engage in professional discussions related to your career interests (Barker et al 2017; Stranack 2012), the effectiveness of which is supported by the theory of connectivism (Downes 2010; Siemens 2005). The theory of connectivism explains how online technologies have created new opportunities to learn and share information across the Internet and among themselves.

According to Harold Jarche (2012), who is a thought-leader in social learning and connected leadership, in order to get the most out of such a network, time must be allowed for seeking, sense-making and sharing, and to absorb and reflect on what you read and seen. In order to build an online community of practice and make meaningful connections through social media it is important to follow practitioners, authors, journalists, bloggers, and other people in your sector who you want to learn from (Gratton & Gratton 2012). To build your network further, look at who those people follow to add more people to your network (Stranack 2012).

Moreover, Stranack (2012) asserts that to fully engage in an online community of practice, one must also contribute. Rossman & Young (2016) highlight the importance of adding value to the conversations of your community, as community relevancy and content ‘shareability’ are tightly linked. While all of this can be time consuming, Stranack (2012) suggests this can be done during the morning commute, lunchtime, or at the end of the day, and states:

*“Once your network is established, you will find the benefits far outweigh the time commitment”* (p.2)

Interactivity is crucial in generating connections (Young & Rossman 2015), therefore it is important to always respond to questions and comments promptly, and engage with others by joining chats and groups, and share your work (Lee 2015). Arruda (2014) also highlights the importance of ‘liking’ posts, suggesting that this action shows you are paying attention and could lead others visiting your profile.

# **Growing a following**

Rossman & Young (2016) have the five basic principles of social media optimisation as: creating sharable content, making sharing easy, rewarding engagement, proactively sharing content, and to measure and encourage reuse. In fact, Lee (2015) states that taking an active role and posting consistently is the key to gaining followers and influence, citing a research that found a correlation between the amount Twitter users were posting and the number of followers they have, with those posting more often gaining more followers.

Of course, the more users that follow you, the higher chance that your posts will be seen, shared, and engaged with, therefore working strategically grow a following has its advantages; something that several authors advocate for. Barker et al. (2017) set out two strategies for increasing a social media following. The ‘equal strategy ratio’ involves keeping your profile’s following and follower counts as close to equal as possible: follow users who seem likely to follow back, and also follow back all followers.

The second strategy laid out is the ‘targeted follow strategy’, whereby one would follow users with similar interests, which allows the advantage of ‘suggested people’ features. With this strategy, the authors suggest following 20 new people daily in order to generate more followers. In this strategy you will be more selective about who you follow back, however, the authors state:

*“Early on, with less than 500 to 1,000 followers, it is worthwhile to follow back nearly everyone. Twitter accounts with few followers tend to lack credibility and draw in followers more slowly. After the account has grown, one can afford to be more selective in choosing who to follow back.”* (p.106)

The basis of theis strategy is that if you follow someone on social media, they will often follow you back. The authors suggest that to increase the likelihood of being followed back you could mention the person in a post. Lahuerta-Otero & Cordero-Gutiérrez (2018) also note that mentions lead to followers, likes and shares due to Gouldner’s rule of reciprocity. In social psychology, the rule of reciprocity is a social norm where a positive action is rewarded with another positive action: essentially ‘paying it forward’ (Gouldner 1960).

Rossman & Young (2016) lay out a similar strategy, advising users to be more liberal in following accounts when initially launching a social network in order to get a better sense of which users fit into your identified community, and advocate unfollowing accounts that are inactive or not useful once the account has matured. Stranack (2012) urges not to feel bad about unfollowing someone: librarians can think of it as weeding your network!

To build a network of followers with similar interests, Hlinko (2012) suggests performing a keyword or hashtag search related to your interests and follow people whose posts contain those terms.

Hlinko also highlights the benefits of following influencers in your sector; an influencer being an account which posts frequently, has a large social network, and has a high level of personal persuasiveness. Lee (2015) recommends using the social media analytics tools BuzzSumo (buzzsumo.com) or Followerwonk (followerwonk.com) to identify industry influencers. Followerwonk also allows Twitter users to compare follower lists with another user in order to identify Twitter users interested in your industry that aren't already following you.

Hlinko (2012) suggests keeping an eye out for people sharing your posts on a regular basis, paying special attention to people who have a lot of followers. Determine which messages worked best for those followers and begin to skew your posts accordingly, and also keep track of which types messages are causing people to like and share, and start moving more in that direction. Evaluate the effectiveness of posts regularly (Ramsey & Vacchione 2014). On a similar note, Barker et al (2017) propose performing a benchmarking exercise against others in your sector to examine how they are successfully using social media platforms.

In terms of promoting your social media accounts, Barker et al (2017) propose including a link to your social sites on all outbound communications, such as on email signatures, websites and blogs. Hlinko (2012) highlights the importance of cross-promotion, stating that social media accounts should contain links to each other; for example, a link to your Instagram account should be included on your LinkedIn bio. If you have a website, Tonyan (2016) demonstrate how Google Analytics with Google Tag Manager will show how much traffic social media platforms drive to your website and what those users do on your website using campaign URLs, and Rossman & Young (2016) explain how to add a Twitter card HTML to a website in order to create an embedded stream of recent posts.

Artist and social media influencer, Lori McNee (in Gratton & Gratton 2012) suggests making sure your last post is valuable as potential followers will decide whether or not to follow you by your last post. On Twitter, it is possible to ‘pin’ a tweet to the top of your feed for this purpose.

# **Managing & maintaining your accounts**

There are several social media management (SMM) tools which can be helpful in managing and maintaining social media accounts. This paper is making the assumption that individuals will not want to pay subscription fees for any SMM tools, so we have not included details of these tools and services.

An effective content management strategy can streamline your work, saving time and ensuring you don’t miss engagement opportunities (Watson 2017). Both Watson, and also McFadden (2018) recommend using a scheduling tool to ensure that content is still pushed out on days you are not able to post. McFadden (2018) recommends Buffer (buffer.com/), which is a scheduling tool with an accompanying blog and podcast, while Watson (2017) recommends Hootsuite (hootsuite.com), Tweetdeck (tweetdeck.twitter.com) or Sprout Social (sproutsocial.com) to schedule content in advance. However, Watson asserts that social media is at its best when the content is fresh, and suggests limiting scheduled content.

Some social media users find keeping up-to-date with their networks overwhelming as they begin to grow. Clay Shirky, a specialist on the social effects of Internet technologies, calls this type of occurrence ‘filter failure’ rather than information overload, the implication being that a lack of filters will lead to the user being bombarded with posts they have no interest in (Shirky 2008). On Twitter, Hlinko (2012) advocates adding the users whose posts you value the most to a list, thereby filtering the network.

In addition, Chritton (2014) suggests not posting when you are emotional, and Gratton & Gratton (2012) warn not to ignore negative comments.

# **‘The social employee’**

The notion of ‘the social employee’ is something that has gained traction over the past few years, the idea being that employees are encouraged to engage in social media on behalf, or in association with their employer. According to marketing consultants Cheryl Burgess and Mark Burgess, who coined the term, social employees *“can be a brand’s greatest asset if properly utilized”* (Burgess & Burgess 2014, p.38).

Burgess & Burgess argue that social employees add credibility and esteem to their employer’s brand by displaying their skills through blog posts, content sharing on social media, sharing others’ content on social media, and through professional public profiles on platforms such as LinkedIn. They say that social employees provide a *“window into a brand’s soul”* (p.6), and state:

*“By demonstrating their own personal worth through personal branding, these employees become external reflections of their thriving corporate cultures.”* (Burgess & Burgess 2014, p.42-43)

According to the authors, there are seven characteristics of the social employee: they are engaged; expect integration of the personal and professional; buy into their employer’s brand; a born collaborator; listen well; customer-centric; and empowered change agents. The concept of authenticity is also raised, with the suggestion that employees provide a more authentic representation and voice:

*“They [social employees] are brand ambassadors to the public, building human relationships that are beneficial not just for the business outcomes produced, but for the emotional outcomes that are encouraged as well. Social employees give a brand it’s ‘why’, a reason for existence that extends far beyond the simple notion of profitability.”* (Burgess & Burgess 2014, xiv)

The authors reason that employees are engaged in social media whether or not the organisations they work for recognise or sanction these activities or not, and state that providing employees with tools and training to build valuable collaborative networks and relationships online is in companies’ best interests. They suggest measuring which contributors are generating the greatest impact and using them as models of success for other engaged employees.

While Burgess & Burgess are the pioneers of this concept, several other authors have also written on this topic (Pitt et al 2018; Rossman & Young 2016; Kilgour, Sasser & Larke 2015). Kilgour, Sasser & Larke state that followers are more likely to engage with social media posts that provide an individualised message. Pitt et al. (2018) go so far to suggest that employees may be the most important stakeholder of any brand, and state that well-managed and positively engaged employees on social media are beneficial to *“an organisation’s customers, its employees, and to the organization itself”* (p.636). In terms of employee management, they have published a table of key drivers of employee brand management on social media accompanied by managerial focus for the various segments (Figure 1).

***Figure 1: Key drivers of employee brand engagement on social media* (Pitt et al. 2018, p.639)**



Rossman & Young (2016) warn that a social employee will only provide benefits if they reflect the values of the organisation they are representing, and suggest tagging or geotagging an employer in relevant social media posts.

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