

How to guide:

Getting and keeping website and social media traffic

Introduction

This guide recommends best practice for using digital media. It suggests that the main challenges arise before you begin to implement – you need to be clear about your aim and your choice of technology. Using technology is not as difficult as deciding what to do with it. This is a summary of what you can do: there's much more to discover.

The summary of advice is:

- Be clear about what you want to achieve - and how you'll know you've done it
- Know what you are offering to whom (your target audience)
- Choose the right social platforms for your purpose
- Post content that works: highly visual, ideally interactive, and publicised
- Review your progress regularly, post content regularly but selectively: learn what works
- Learn from others – be a customer as well as a seller/promoter
- Set up a system for promotion of what you offer so that you can focus on content

Your experiences of using this guide are of vital importance. **Please send your suggestions for improvement to feedback@u3a.org.uk**

If you need help with some of the techniques discussed here, please email the same address.

Before you start, consider:

- **Why** do you want people to visit your site?
- **What people** do you want – a group, a type, a particular set of people?
- **Where**, on social media, might they be?
- **What** might interest them, and what is your unique offer? Can they get it elsewhere?
- What do we want them to **do** once they're there? Give them plenty of options, not just one. Why should they return to your site? E.g. if they don't book on an event this time, if you can show that you offer something in future, they may come back. So archive your events or post a list of them way into the future. Downloads of information are popular.
- What **content** do you have, to promote? You need plenty of visuals and items that you can share for free. Don't limit offers to members, unless member traffic is all you want.
- **Budget**: online, most things can be free, and there are many ways of doing the same thing. Most paid-for sites offer a free option, although it may be restricted. But can you

live with the restrictions? For example, if you use SurveyMonkey, you have to pay to add a logo. How much do you value that? How often do you conduct surveys?

Which social media should I choose?

Match the demographic you want to target. Figures below are 2020¹.

- **Facebook** is popular with over-50s, especially women.
- **YouTube: 55+** age group is one of the fastest-growing audiences.
- **Pinterest** gathers (pins) similar items – visuals, documents, videos - into “interest groups,” which could be a handy reference for u3a groups.
- **Twitter?** 38% users are 18-29, 26% aged 30-49 = 64%. 85% access via mobile; although Donald Trump is renowned for his use of Twitter, globally **only 12% of over-50s are users**. It can be handy for engaging with media and for protest.
- **Snapchat** = younger audience, **80% under 30**. Image-focused chat.
- **Instagram** – only **3%** of people aged over 60 use it; they *tend* to be the rich & famous.
- **TikTok** - aimed mainly at teenagers. This is changing.

Consider which demographic you both want to influence and learn from. Social media is about promoting social interaction with people you might want to have as real friends.

And your sites shouldn't be isolated, but collaborative. A social media site needs to be truly social, which it can't be if it puts up barriers such as restricting membership and so on. A **social** media site ideally should reach out beyond the site, bringing in and sharing ideas.

Setting up your social media accounts

The goal on social media is to connect with your audience and build a community.

NOTE: If you deliver your newsletter via Mailchimp, you can automatically link to your social media and if you like automatically publish your newsletter on social media sites at the same time as it's emailed to members. This is an option when you send it.

Consider

- **How many social media accounts can you manage?**
- **How public do you want them to be?** To attract and recruit non-members, your site needs to be public and easy to find, so that you gain more followers.
- **Who do I know?** Initially you need to reach an audience that you know is there – then there's the snowball effect as others become interested. Consider influencer marketing

¹ See Slideshare for a copy of *Digital 2020: Hootsuite's Digital 2020 global digital overview report*

and collaborations; if you can get others to retweet or repost, then you amplify your post – it might “go viral.”

- **Who will you follow?** You need to have a plan for who **you** want to follow. What online communities are you a part of – and why? You can learn a lot, copy all the good ideas.
- **What kind of content should I post?**
 - **Useful, with relevant hashtags.** Read about hashtags – they are often mis-used, but the principle is use them to identify and so collate content on a topic.
 - **Relevant, immediate,** so it’s part of a bigger conversation that’s news now.
 - **Images and video** - using images boosts any post; moving images even more so. Use animated GIFs and make video short – ideally up to 3 minutes long; anything over that is not ideal. Professional video is becoming a thing of the past. Things that go viral are ALWAYS images, never just text, usually video, often dances or songs. Humour is popular, but can be difficult! Pictures of cats are popular.
 - **Varied:** Blog posts, videos, podcasts, guides, e-zines, surveys, infographics, all downloadable/sharable/searchable. All brief, all with images.
 - **Survey?** can be a useful way of engaging an audience and creating content – offer to send them the results, and then invite them to a webinar to review the results.

Why might we consider using Facebook?

- Of all internet users in the UK, 78% use Facebook².
- 40 million UK users A MONTH use Facebook. 52% female, 48% male.
- Every day, the average UK user spends 1 hour 50 minutes on social media

And with lockdown, this has increased.

Many people are prejudiced against Facebook. Some perceive it as risky – they fear that their data may be stolen - and some feel that it becomes clogged with trivia, such as people posting pictures of their meals or their dogs. All that can be avoided!

A Facebook group can enable people to exchange ideas in “real time.” It’s more interactive and less static than a website, and can make information-sharing faster and easier. You can quickly let people know what’s going on, and gather ideas and opinions fast. It might make your u3a more democratic, as you enable people to give their opinions.

There is a growing number of Facebook features which could save your u3a time and money – notably **Facebook Rooms**, a free, unlimited-time videoconference service open to all, even those who don’t use Facebook.

Many people use a Facebook site (which is free) rather than set up a website: ideally they should be complementary, the web for fixed information and Facebook for discussion and for highlighting ideas and opportunities.

² 2020 figures from Google, or see [Digital 2020:Global Digital Overview Report](#) (Hootsuite) on Slideshare.

Facebook has its own controls and offers controls to your Group (or Page) administrators – for example they can prevent people from posting in your Facebook group if their contributions are inappropriate.

Facebook itself polices content so that people are prevented from posting potentially offensive images or language. A colleague of mine on a Life Drawing group forgot this and was startled to have her Facebook account suspended for a week when she posted a frontal drawing of a nude figure. We have to be careful!

Helping people to find your web content: SEO

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) refers to everything you can do to make your **website** more visible on search engines like Google. The majority of web traffic comes from people clicking on the first few unpaid search results that come up in a search, so taking the time to improve your SEO is definitely worthwhile. We may produce a separate guide about SEO as it's an important topic yet easy to overlook.

Unless you make a positive effort to improve SEO, great content may not be seen.

As the poet Gray said, *“Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, And waste its sweetness on the desert air.”* Don't be one of them: ensure people can find your content.

Simple ways of improving SEO?

- Ask everyone you know to click on your site and so make it seem popular
- Set up reciprocal links with partner organisations
- Use appropriate **tags**, so that your content can be found easily.
- Write FOR THE WEB – short sentences, bullet points, white space
- IF you have a budget, use **Google Adwords**. Look it up! It takes time.

Tags are words that can be added to a website section after you've written it, but aren't seen by readers. They help information to be found by search engines.

Getting your Facebook group going

If you decide to set up a Facebook group or Page (and there's a “How to” guide on that), then you have the task of keeping it going. Many sites are set up with the idea “if you build it, they will come.” That doesn't work. Set yours up for success: before planting flowers you'd decide where to plant them, and you'd feed and water them. If you didn't, they might fail to thrive. Same principle applies to social media – it needs to be set up properly and nurtured until it can fend for itself. Even then, some watering always helps.

You need a reason for people to visit and contribute to the group. Once the group is established, and especially if it's large (over 1000 users), it can “run itself” but most groups need a plan to make them successful. Only about 10% of your group members may contribute – many people prefer to read what others say rather than give their views.

Some ideas for getting a new Facebook group going:

- Have some content ready, so that there's something for people to engage with or react to right away. This will set the **tone** of the group. What kind of things will you discuss and include?
- All the committee members and as many other members as possible join asap. Ask your Admins to invite as many people as possible. Consider an upload*. The more people you can actively involve, the more chance there is that your group will establish itself, be used and be regarded as useful, entertaining and informative. It needs to be all 3!
- Set up REGULAR events or updates, at least weekly to start with – these could be interviews with guests, conversation-starters, advertisements for events etc.
- Invite people's opinions: your Chair could ask for people's ideas or opinions; each week a member of the committee could start a debate or ask for ideas. That'll get you going...
- An easy way to set up a regular event is to feature a different u3a interest group each week. You might even ask them to run a, say, hour-long session online, to show others what their group does. That wouldn't work for every group, so perhaps someone could interview a group leader – say, ask the Walking Group leader about themselves, why they lead the group, where they go, what people like, etc.
- If you have 20 groups, and only half join in, you have 10 weeks' events. The "event" doesn't have to last long; its purpose is to "train" people to go to your page/group, encourage them to follow it, and join in.
- People prefer live events, although you can offer a replay: your monthly meeting might be run via Facebook or a replay of it could be posted there. Run a Facebook Live event, or just use Zoom. Neither requires special equipment, just a PC with a basic webcam.
- For Facebook Live, go to your group page, select **Create Live** at the top above where you post updates. Or go to Facebook's Live Producer at facebook.com/live/producer. Technical considerations? Think about Zoom calls you may have attended. You know people look better if they face the light, if their wifi is stable, if their microphone is at the right level, if they have a calm background and they have set their PC up at the right height so that you see their face, not the top of their head. The same applies to video.
- You can broadcast from Zoom: Zoom can stream your online meeting live on Facebook to your personal timeline, a group, or a page that you are an admin for. This allows your community to join via Zoom or watch and comment on Facebook Live. The downside of this is that it excludes people who aren't on Facebook – but it could encourage them to join, and you could post a replay on your website – with a link to Facebook.

Facebook features

Facebook has many features, mostly free. Look at **Facebook Adverts** (there's a **How to** guide on those) because they'll tell you (free) how many prospective u3a members there may be in your area. It's interesting – and you could contact them via Facebook adverts.

2 recent **free** features are **360 degree photos** (google it!) and **Facebook Rooms**. Rooms gives UNLIMITED-TIME video call access to up to 50 people, and only the organiser needs a Facebook account. In 2021, the number of people who can be online concurrently via Rooms will increase. Just like Zoom (only easier and allegedly more secure) Rooms generates a link which can be sent to anyone. The organiser opens the door to their Room and can close it at any time. Meetings can be scheduled.

The FREE Rooms video meetings and Facebook audio calls might be a way of interesting people in going online, perhaps to see and speak to their relatives at this time? These work on PC, iPad and mobile – and might be a way of saving them money.

I hope this has roused your interest in Facebook as offering a useful set of free tools to help you engage with u3a members and prospective members online. It's not all about showing people where you've been or what you had for breakfast – and when you set up a profile, you can give minimal information so that you don't worry about hackers.

See the *“How to Guide: Setting up Facebook”*

Other social media: YouTube and Twitter

YouTube

You can use YouTube to host videos that you have made or that you think may be of interest to your group. You can collate videos from other sources put them in your own u3a channel. Hosting video recordings on YouTube saves space on your website, because you can link to YouTube rather than hosting video on your website. Video can take up a lot of space and eventually may slow down the loading speed of your website. Setting up a YouTube channel is free – and easy - and keeps all your video together. Do it IF you have plenty of good video. Creating bad video is easy: good needs some thought.

How to set up a YouTube channel

Login to YouTube with a gmail (googlemail) account, go to the Channels page and sign up.

How to promote your channel

Your audience drives your content. Think about their interests and what will attract them to your videos. They'll want both information and entertainment. Make your videos short and make sure they're captioned – it will make them both much more attractive and accessible.

It is very bad practice not to caption a video: 70% of viewers don't turn sound on when they watch, and captioning is free, so why wouldn't you? Use the auto-captions feature and then modify manually: YouTube uses speech recognition software to generate captions from the videos you upload, but you need to check captions afterwards.

To create and edit auto-captions:

Click on the down arrow next to the 'Upload' button at the top of the screen, select 'Video Manager', then select the down arrow next to the 'Edit' button of the video you want to caption. Select 'Subtitles and CC' from the menu.

On the right-hand side of your video, select 'Active tracks'.

To the right of the video under 'Caption text', the captions are listed with their timecodes. Select a line by clicking it, then correct/edit it. Click "Done" to save when you've finished.

To find out how to assess the success of your channel, see the "*How to Guide, measuring the effectiveness of your website and social media.*"