

from uh-oh to 2.0:

a beginner's guide
to social media



part one of a two-part guide



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contents

1. your first steps	3
2. the basics	4
3. the community	6
4. the pros	8
5. the cons	9
6. why do you want to use social media?	10
7. who do you want to target?	12
8. what do you want to tell them?	14
9. how will you measure success?	15
10. off you go!	17



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your first steps



If you're aching to add social media to your communications mix but aren't sure exactly where to start - or whether to dip your toe into the water - this guide has been written with you in mind. It aims to help you:

- Understand what social media is, and how it works
- Explore some of the pros and cons
- Decide if you've got the time and capacity to make it work
- Develop a strategy for building contacts
- Learn from other people's mistakes
- Identify some useful resources for further reading.

On the other hand, if you're thinking about 'doing' social media just because everyone else seems to be, do not pass Go; do not collect £200; and do not go any further until you've really thought things through! Your brand is precious and deserves looking after.

the point of social media

So what is social media? Well, there's no single definition but we think of it as a combination of two things:

- A huge network of communities who connect and communicate online
- Web-based services and tools that people use to connect and communicate.

Armed with just a computer and internet connection, social media lets you:

- Start or join a conversation with people all across the world
- Find and interact with people who share similar business interests, hobbies or development goals
- Spot and contribute to breaking news and hot trends on a wide range of subjects
- Keep up-to-date
- Share thoughts, ideas and information to make the online world a better place.



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the basics



There are some consistent qualities that apply across all social media:

- You have a name, profile, ID or character ('avatar') that helps people recognise you
- You find people who you know, or want to link up with online
- You connect with people and share views, opinions and relevant content (such as links to websites, video, photographs or music).

There are different types of social media that you can use; the table on the next page shows some examples.



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Types of social media

Social media is all about connecting and sharing. Otherwise, it's like going to a party and not talking to anyone all evening!

The terminology varies - you have 'friends' on Facebook, 'followers' on Twitter and 'subscribers' on YouTube - but the principles are the same.

Type	Use	Example(s)
Microblogging	Web services that let you publish short messages, spot emerging trends and connect with people	Twitter Twitter.com
Social networks	Groups that share thoughts and chat online, based on relationships, business or general interests	Facebook, LinkedIn, Ning Facebook.com, LinkedIn.com Ning.com
Forums	Web-based discussion boards organised around particular topics (such as money advice, technology or pop culture)	Moneysavingexpert Moneysavingexpert.co.uk
Content-sharing	Websites where you can upload, share or review pictures, video, audio or information	Flickr, Youtube Flickr.com Youtube.com
Bookmarking	Places where you can highlight links to other sites or information, usually sorted into categories	Digg, Reddit Digg.com Reddit.com
Wikis	Online communities where users contribute content to build information and boost knowledge	Wikipedia Wikipedia.com
Blogs (short for 'web logs')	Web-based diaries where individuals or groups of people post their ideas and views, typically as a starting point for other people to comment or review their material	Mashable, Huffington Post (you can get free blogs at Blogger or WordPress) Mashable.com Huffingtonpost.com Blogger.com, WordPress.com



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the community



Once people get started in social media, they often build profiles on more than one site. Let's look at an example of how this works, using a fictional person called Evan Cashcutts.

In the chart on page 7, you can see that Evan is using four social media channels - Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and a blog that he set up himself.

Evan tends to use these channels for slightly different things:

- Facebook to chat with friends and people he knows from college
- Twitter to share information on art and design (he's a graphic designer)
- Flickr to upload photos of his work and interesting things he notices

- The blog as a space where he talks about inspiration for his work and asks for feedback.

As you can see, Evan has connections with people across all four channels. On Facebook he has got 200 friends; on Twitter, 80 followers; 125 Flickr contacts; and 15 people subscribe to his blog. The terms may vary but the meaning is the same - they're people that Evan is linked to online.

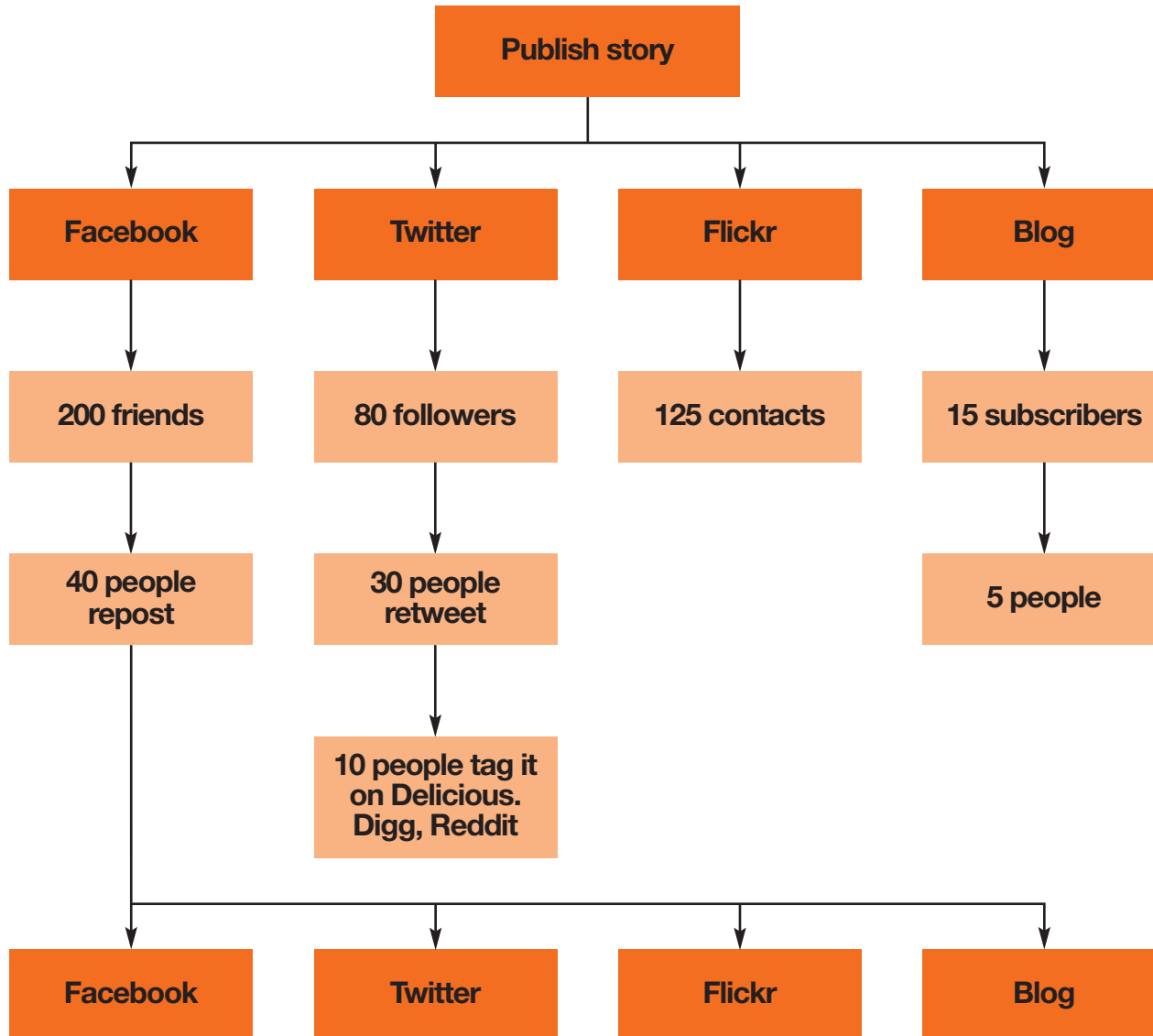
As you can see, it's easy to link up with hundreds or thousands of people online. At the same time, networks often overlap; so although it looks like Evan has 420 contacts across social media, some of those people might link with him on more than one network. Like his friend and graphic designer colleague, Guy Vaynerose.

Guy is on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter; he uploads videos to YouTube every week; and writes a blog of his own. Evan and Guy follow each other on Twitter - they post each other links to cool design work and talk about new things they've found online. And as mutual friends on Facebook, they post information about their social lives and playing games. Evan also subscribes to Guy's blog, but Guy doesn't read Evan's back.

So think of social media as a place without boundaries - you can use it in different ways and to link up with different people. So if you're a maintenance manager by day and have a secret passion for ballroom dancing at night, you can connect with like-minded people on both topics. It's up to you whether you use the same profile and networks to do this, or choose to keep them separate!



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the pros



What makes social media great? There are a few very compelling arguments for creating and maintaining a social media profile:

- **Free** - you can make connections and comments on most social channels without spending a bean, and in some cases cut offline costs too
- **Fast** - things move very quickly online, with topics changing hourly; so you shouldn't get bored
- **Fun** - and a great way of bringing people together for social activity, whether that's playing games, having banter, or uploading photos and video content; that's why it's so good for engaging the under-25s in particular
- **Friendly** - there are plenty of people online who will offer help, advice or a follow-back to help you get started and develop your knowledge
- **Fascinating** - the diverse range of people, backgrounds and expertise means that you can get lots of ideas and insights into different perspectives, whatever topics interest you
- **Feedback** - if you need ideas, reviews or comments, you've come to the right place; there is usually someone willing and able to say something about your latest widget, blog posting or customer service.



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the cons



If every silver lining has a cloud, the Is have it with social media:

- **Intensive** - whilst cheap to set up, there is a definite cost to tweeting, blogging and uploading; maintaining your profile and responding to people can take a lot of time and effort
- **Indiscriminate** - there's a lot of noise in social media, so choose your friends carefully. Otherwise you could be reading posts about the details of every meal someone eats, view football scores updated every five minutes and so on
- **Impersonal** - social media is all about building a network of acquaintances; don't expect to find your new best friend or partner online or achieve celebrity status with thousands of contacts overnight (unless you pay for it!)
- **Inappropriate** - some people post dubious or annoying content. If your profile links to them, what does that say about you? Ignorance is no justification...
- **Irresponsible** - unlike journalism, people can post almost anything on social media. So before you believe that amazing story, check the facts. And be prepared for the occasional rant, criticism or sarcastic comment
- **Irrevocable** - a post is for life, not just for Christmas; and once you've said something, it can't be undone. Someone out there in

cyberspace is bound to notice, tweet, blog or link to that minor rant or misdemeanour! So bear in mind that the world is watching and you should be OK.

You should also stay alert to phishers (who send links to fake sites) and spammers (who jam up your in-box with rubbish); these online nasties can wreak havoc with your website and wallet.

As a rule of thumb, never give out sensitive information such as user names, passwords and financial information; and be wary of links to external sites unless you know the person who sent the details through.



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why do you want to use social media?



Now you're getting a sense of what social media is about, it's useful to think about whether you want to use it or not.

If you do want to take the plunge, let's get started with a series of questions. Firstly:

- **What** do you want to do?
- **Why** do you want to do it?

If you don't know the answers to these questions, it's definitely worth thinking about them rather than jumping in at the deep end. Some examples are shown on the next page.

As the old saying goes, you get what you focus on. If you don't have any specific goals in mind, how can you go about achieving them, or measuring success later on? (We'll look at ways of measuring progress on page 16, in case you're wondering.)



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What you want to do

In other words...

Some ways to do it

Raise brand awareness

- Influence what people think about you
- Encourage people to do business with you
- Generate leads
- Increase sales or take-up of services

- Brand your social media content clearly
- Link lots of content back to your website/blog
- Make an effort to interact
- Highlight good deeds/corporate responsibility
- Publish interesting content
- Respond quickly to queries or complaints
- Offer sharing tools

Position yourself as an expert

- Show you know your stuff

- Be clear what others can learn from you
- Share information
- Give content away
- Chat with other experts

Highlight great customer service

- Build relationships with customers
- Manage your reputation
- Make more money

- Encourage pro-active customer feedback
- Make an effort to interact with people
- Respond quickly to queries or complaints

Streamline operations

- Cut spending
- Do things faster

- Encourage queries and basic replies through social media, rather than paying for calls



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who do you want to target?



Now you know roughly what to do, it's time to think about who you want to engage using social media - existing customers, future customers, or influencers in the areas where your business or service operates?

Once you're clear who you want to target, spend a little time thinking about where they go online, and what for. Do they use the internet for research? Engagement? Feedback? Are there sites that your target audiences visit, where you could talk to them, share ideas, or help them out in some way?

The other thing to consider with your audience is how clued up they are on social media, as that will affect your ability to engage people.



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Creators

Creators are the most active contributors to social media. They write blogs and upload content such as video, music or text.

Critics

Critics respond to other people online. They post reviews and comments, take part in forum discussions and contribute to wiki articles.

Collectors

Collectors organise content for themselves or other people. They use RSS feeds, tags and voting sites like Digg.com

Joiners

Joiners connect with other people through networks, like MySpace, Facebook and Ning.

Spectators

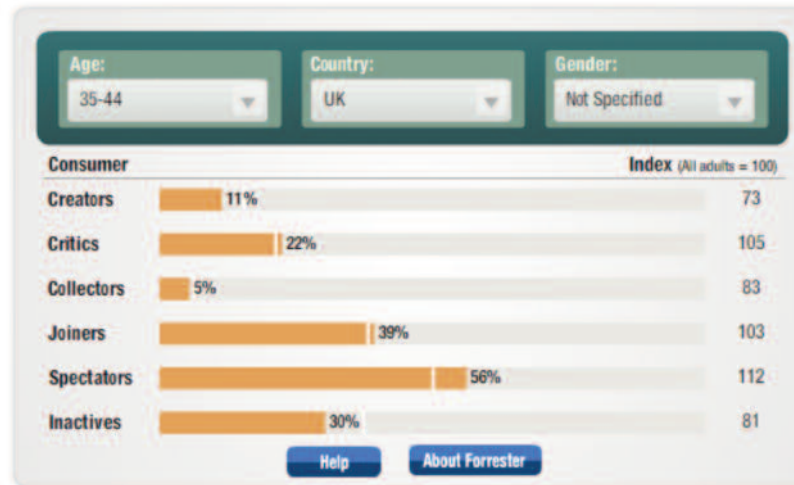
Spectators read blogs, watch video and listen to podcasts but they don't engage other people much.

Inactives

Inactives don't create or take part in any kind of social media.

Forrester's Social Technographics ladder, shown left, classifies people by how they use social media technologies.

Forrester's Consumer Profile tool, shown below, gives some baseline data on UK social media usage for each type of user category; this is sortable by age and gender. By overlaying the data with business-specific customer insights, you can start to think about ways of targeting your key audiences.



Source: Forrester Research's Consumer Technographics data.
Part of Forrester's [Groundswell](#) content.
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what do you want to say?



In our business, we believe only two things matter about communications - everything you say, and everything you do.

The same principle applies within social media. So it's pretty important that your online words and deeds are:

- **Authentic** - true to you and your brand, so your personality comes across
- **Considered** - posting the first thing that comes into your head is difficult to undo later. Over time it gets easier to condense your thoughts, promise!

If your mission is about delivering the fastest food in the West Midlands, you need to 'live' that online. So if someone comments about your brand on social media, replying two weeks later isn't going to impress people.

Similarly if you want to show the world how customer-friendly your organisation is, it's good to point enquiries in the right direction, contribute ideas or send people links that will help them with projects or enquiries. Little things can make a big difference, and it all helps to make your corner of the online world a nicer place.

As you get used to posting, keep your goals in mind - are you trying to increase product sales, impress people with your expertise, or make things more efficient? How does that reflect in the things you're posting, and what difference will your contribution make to help you engage people? (If it doesn't make any difference, why would people want to help you achieve your goals?)



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how will you measure success?



When you head off on your social media journey, do be clear about your destination, and take a compass just in case. Or to put it another way, be clear what you want to get out of the extra work, and measure the things that will make a difference.

A great article by Econsultancy suggests **35 social media key performance indicators** to track how well you're engaging people. We're not suggesting for one minute that you have the time, money and effort to handle all of these - but there should be two or three key things that will either make you celebrate or sound alarm bells...



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To see this in action, let's review the goals listed on page 11 and see how that could translate into your social media monitoring.

Hopefully this will get you thinking about your own business goals and how you can use social media to make headway.

What you want to do	Ways you could do this	Ideas to measure it
Raise brand awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brand your social media content clearly Link lots of content back to your website/blog Make an effort to interact Publish interesting content Reply to queries quickly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extra traffic to your website or blog (new/repeat visitors) Time spent on site Number of direct links to key/referred pages 'Buzz' monitoring through alerts/mentions Extra followers/friends
Position yourself as an expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be clear what others can learn from you Share information Give content away Chat with other experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New visitors to your site Number of replies Number of downloads Comments on your blog Reviews of content on other blogs 'Buzz' monitoring Extra followers/friends
Highlight great customer service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage pro-active customer feedback Make an effort to interact with people Respond quickly to queries or complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extra followers/friends Number of replies 'Buzz' monitoring Comments, ratings and service endorsements
Streamline operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage queries and respond through social media, rather than callbacks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of queries Number of replies Number of mentions Extra followers/ friends Offline reductions in call numbers/costs



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off you go!

We hope you've found part one of this starter social media guide useful.

Your feedback could help us improve future versions. Did we include what you needed? Have we missed anything important?

If you've got any ideas or thoughts, do let us know. Please contact Kerry James, our marketing director, on +44 024 7656 0440, tweet [@tbgkerry](https://twitter.com/tbgkerry) or email k.james@bridge-group.co.uk

Part two of the guide will focus on the most popular social media - so we'll Digg deep, look at Facebook fundamentals and so on. Want to sign-up for this or other 'how to' guides? Just visit The Bridge Group's subscription page and add yourself to the list. www.bridge-group.co.uk



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If you want to boost your marketing or communications, we can help. The Bridge Group offers the following services:

- Website development
- Email marketing

- New media presentations
- Social media strategy.

For more information on these services, please contact Kerry James on 024 7656 0440. Or you can e-mail us at marketing@bridge-group.co.uk

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