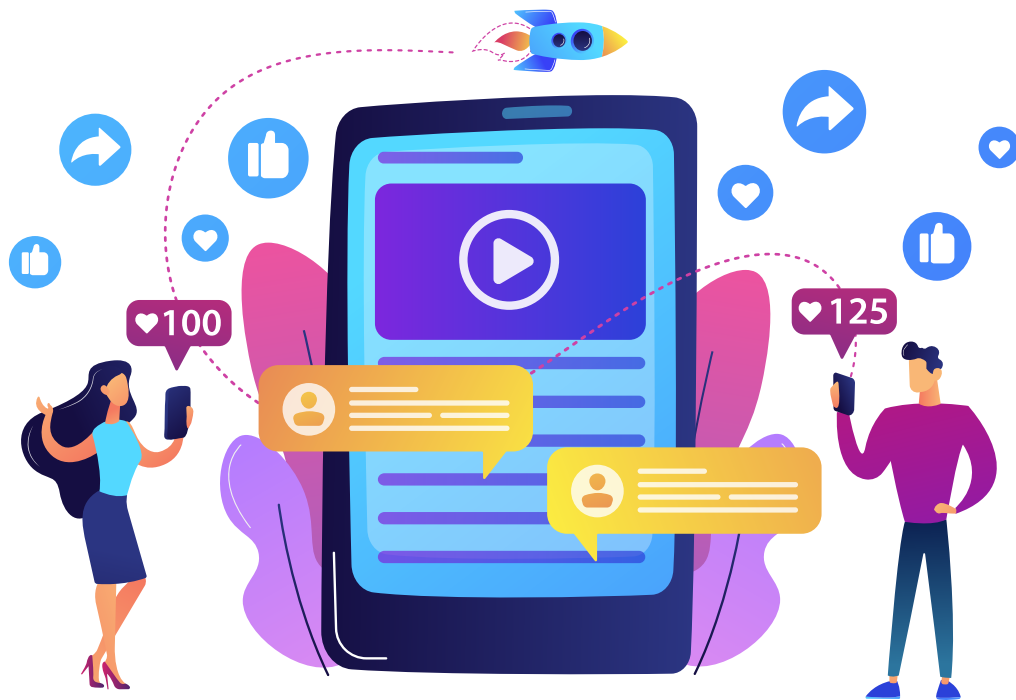




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The importance of social media during a crisis



In a time like this, with a global crisis on our hands, social media proves an incredibly valuable tool to leaders. The speed at which information can be shared via social media is unrivalled by any other channel. The ability to snap, film or write, then post instantly to a waiting audience is incredibly powerful, turning anyone into a content creator. However, the flipside of this ability to share information so easily is the struggle to be viewed as authentic, particularly when we have all been subjected to so much ‘fake news’

There has been something of a clampdown on ‘fake news’; people are much more aware and likely to question the sources of information they see on a daily basis. This collective wariness combined with more work from the social media platforms themselves means social media channels are now seen as a much more viable and effective news outlet – which is great news for your communications.

The beauty of social media is that it’s a two-way conversation. Unlike, say, a televised news broadcast, where a person in a suit tells everyone what’s going on, you can build up a real two-way relationship. The audience can ask questions, give their opinions (good and bad) and, most importantly, tell the organisations they interact with what their experiences have been. This allows companies to learn how to improve things for their customers.



Why invest in learning about social media trends?

Social media is an excellent way to test something. For pretty much instant reactions about the way people are thinking or feeling, to the sentiments they attach to things, it's a very quick way to judge how a wider audience will react to what you wish to share.

Before you apply your messaging to internal colleagues and teams, or external stakeholders, you can gain valuable insights from social media listening and analysis that could tell you if your messaging is likely to succeed.

This testing can be quite detailed, too. From A/B testing for a new tone of voice, image or look and feel, to direct questions about the public's feelings about a topic, item or service, social media gives us instant access to in-depth information that would be expensive to gain otherwise.

One of the most valuable advantages of social media is access to hard data. Whether this is physical movements, reactions, habits, behaviours or interests, the data available from social media can be much more in-depth (and cheaper to get hold of) than mainstream research data.

Using social media to keep audiences engaged during a crisis

Aside from the commercial and research benefits, social media is also an excellent communication tool. Leaders can use social media as a more informal channel to keep in touch with their teams, with the added benefit of personality and things like imagery and video helping to break down not just the boundaries put in place by social distancing, but also the barriers that can be present between leaders and their teams generally.

Tools like Yammer or Facebook Workplace are great to combat isolation or enforced working from home. As well as the informal stuff, like virtual coffee breaks and shared stories from those who are cooped up, the tone can also be changed to share more serious information, allowing a line to be drawn between the fun stuff and the updates that people need to pay attention to.

The challenge during these difficult times is getting the tone right. Although it's important to make sure everyone is aware of the gravity of certain decisions, keeping the tone light can help to combat any impending doom that anyone is experiencing and offer some reassurance – a critical tool. Resharing broadcast news at the moment isn't the right approach, as lots of coverage is currently quite negative, so focusing on the positives is more conducive to driving engagement.

How to thrive, not just survive

If offices or stores are closed and it's becoming more difficult to offer your products or services, then this time could be used to make big wins in other areas. With most of the population stuck at home, there's quite literally a massive captive audience, during the working day, who may suddenly have more time to spend on social media.

Thinking like an entrepreneur and considering ways of winning new customers or selling to audiences that have changed their way of living is a great outlook to have. In bleak times like these, a warm tone of voice works best. It's likely that families will be spending a lot of time together, so this warmer tone will create something accessible and human, helping to build those important relationships.

The best advice, however, is to aim for optimism with social posts. Things will eventually change, as we're seeing in other parts of the world, so think about your strategy for the end of social distancing and how you'll be ready to thrive when life gets 'back to normal!'