

How can social media enhance the University's reputation?

"The public is the only critic whose opinion is worth anything at all."

Mark Twain

Social media cannot be directly managed. Everyone who participates in a social network has an equal voice, and the opinions and views expressed reflect real world experiences. Making a real and lasting impact across social media involves making real and actual improvements in our everyday business.

The most effective way of having a positive impact on student recruitment, utilising social media, is to enhance the actual student experience. 98% of our students use Facebook. Their experiences are there to be shared with the world.

Create positive experiences

Every interaction in our working lives has the potential to be reflected across the social networks, with positive or negative experiences being echoed back and forth from contact to contact. Increasing the positive experiences of those who come into contact with the University is the best way of ensuring our reputation grows in the manner that we would like.

Encourage participation

Confident that the overall experience of the University is a positive one, the more we encourage people to talk about the University, the more our reputation grows. We should see our staff, students and alumni as ambassadors for the University, and actively encourage their participation across all social networks.

Enable discovery

The University should aim to maintain its corporate presence on the major social networking platforms as points of discovery, where individuals with shared interests can come together. Cross promotion, both between networks and through traditional media, will help direct people to these initial points of contact.

Best practice

"A brand is a living entity - and it is enriched or undermined cumulatively over time, the product of a thousand small gestures"

Michael Eisner, CEO Disney

External services guidelines

Information Services publish a set of guidelines for using external web 2 services. These guidelines cover areas relating to service reliability, data ownership, legislative issues and risk management. These should be studied before using any external service.

<https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/Web2wiki/Web+2.0+Guidelines>

Have a purpose

Before embarking on a social media campaign ask a few basic questions: Who do you want to connect with? What do you have to talk about? What benefits do you hope to gain?

Explore first

Failure to meet the expectations of other users of a service can have a serious detrimental impact. Probably the biggest single issue is the ability to respond to questions in a timely manner. If someone expects a response, and you don't have time to reply, you may find negative comments flooding across your contacts.

Start by exploring a service. Get to understand how others use it and what their expectations are. Exactly how you do this will depend on the specific service you are looking at. Try to listen to the conversations that are happening before you participate in them. If you're not sure that you can answer questions or comments that may be posted to you, see if you can turn off this feature, until you are more confident in how you will use the service.

Brand Values

The University has a set of brand values, developed through talking to staff and students across the organisation. These values represent the aggregate of how the University would wish to be portrayed. Consulting these will help anyone using social media marketing to maintain the University's core messages throughout their interactions. A copy of our brand values can be obtained from Communications and Marketing.

Your identity

Do try to identify yourself by name and give your role within the University. However, try to write in the first person, and be clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the University. If you can, include a disclaimer such as the following:

“These comments are my own and any views or opinions expressed do not necessarily represent The University of Edinburgh.”

Where you have identified yourself as a member of the University, ensure that any personal profile, images or comments are consistent with how you would wish to present yourself to colleagues and associates.

The University crest should not be used unless you are expressly representing the University in an official capacity. Any intended use of the crest should be approved by Communications and Marketing.

What services to use

Try to discover what social media services the audience you want to reach are using. There are many subject specific services that may provide you with the best possible means of reaching your targets. Use of many of the common services can vary across ages and geographic location. However, Facebook and Twitter dominate the general services across most age ranges and locations.

Resources for Facebook and Twitter

- Newbies guide to Facebook: <http://news.cnet.com/newbies-guide-to-facebook/>
- Facebook Marketing Hub: <http://www.hubspot.com/facebook-for-business-marketing-hub>
- The Complete Guide to Twitter: <http://makeuseof.org/twitter>
- Twitter Marketing Hub: <http://www.hubspot.com/twitter-marketing-hub>

The future

“Yesterday’s weirdness is tomorrow’s reason why.”

Hunter S. Thompson

Social media is a constantly evolving area. The services that dominate today, and the way they are used, can change almost instantly. The sharing of best practice, maintenance of corporate points of discovery, and development of service specific guides and case studies will help ensure we keep up-to-date. Investment in these areas should be maintained on an ongoing basis. However, individuals with a positive view of the University, actively participating in social media as a normal part of their work, studies and social lives will provide the best possible insurance that the University’s online reputation continues to be enhanced through current and future systems.