

A beginner's guide for community co-operatives

Social media is central to what we do here at Plunkett and is essential in helping us inspire community groups and celebrate the success of community co-operatives. Therefore we have created this guide to help you use social media as a community co-operative.

What is Social Media?

Social Media refers to the online platforms where people can communicate about anything and everything. Whether you are a business trying to promote your latest product line, or an individual who likes sharing holiday snaps. This is all possible through popular online sites such as:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)

There are indeed lots more social media platforms than the above, however we are going to focus on these two. They are among the most popular platforms and ones we feel, as a community co-operative, you should be taking advantage of to promote the services you provide.

The below image shows the sorts of things that you, as a community co-operative, can share and promote on social media ([click on one to find out more](#)):



First steps to joining social media

Before you start engaging with your local community via social media, it is important to create and build an engaging profile for which you will be sharing your message.

Facebook

Before you can create a Page, where you will be posting your information, you will need to set up a Facebook profile. We recommend that you use an email address linked to your enterprise, with the contact details of who will be looking after your social media accounts the most. Once you have set up your basic Facebook profile, you will want to set up a Page.

The easiest way to do this is to follow the link below which will guide you through the process:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php>

Below are some examples of other community co-operative Facebook Pages if you are looking for inspiration:

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Shop-North-Marston-273934689304651/>

<https://www.facebook.com/thekingsarmsshouldham/>

<https://www.facebook.com/RaasayCommunityStores/?fref=ts>

Once you have completed setting up your Facebook profile, the next step is to start posting! You may find it easier to just post on a weekly basis in the first place, whilst you are advertising your new page to customers and the community.

It may be a good idea to ask your target audience what they would like to see on your Facebook page. This could be advertising your events, promoting new products or just keeping customers up-to-date with your opening hours across bank holidays etc.

If you need any help with establishing your Facebook page, please join either the [Community Shops Network](#) or [Cooperative Pubs Network](#) where you can ask other community co-operatives the best way to move forwards. Plunkett staff will be contributing to these groups and answering any questions you have. Further information about the groups can be found [on our website](#).

Benefits of using social media

Twitter

Establishing an account on Twitter is a lot simpler than Facebook. For a complete guide to setting up your account, please follow the link below:

<https://twitter.com/signup/>

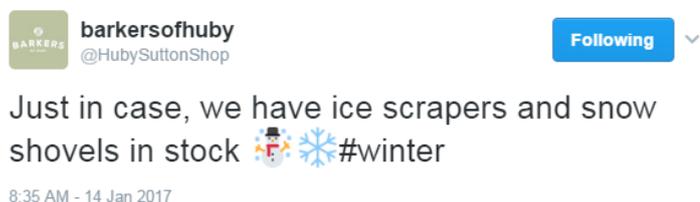
Below are some good examples of other community cooperative Twitter accounts for inspiration:

<https://twitter.com/ItteringhamShop>

<https://twitter.com/sioppwllglas>

<https://twitter.com/HubySuttonShop>

The key to success on Twitter is to post friendly, engaging messages which can be related to products, memories or events. Please see some positive posts below:



How will my community cooperative benefit using social media?

Once you have established your presence on social media, you will need to think about the sorts of things you want to get out of it. As highlighted earlier, there are lots of different areas of your community cooperative that you can promote, share and increase by using social media.

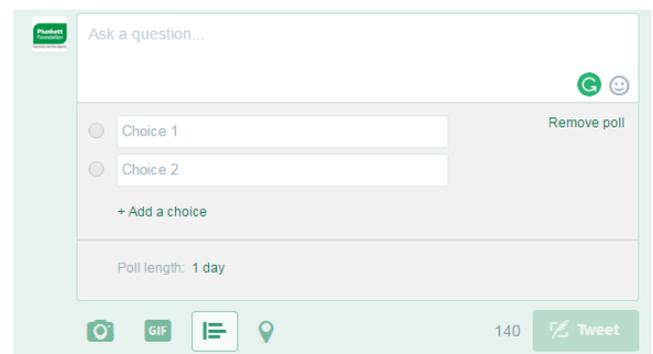
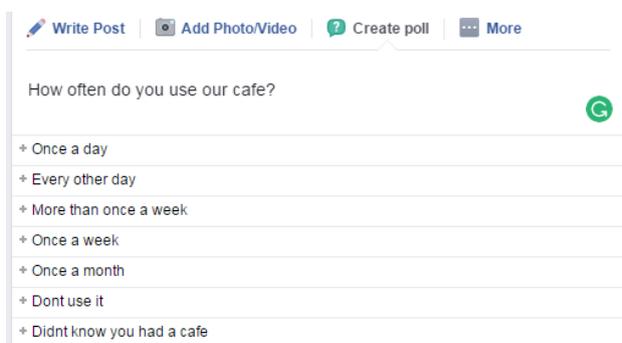
New products and services

Whether you have just started trading or are an established business, social media can be a great way to let your customers know of exciting new products or services, or even a way of gaging feedback about existing products or services you provide.

If you are looking to launch a new product line or service, it could be beneficial to get some feedback from your customers and local community to see if it would be of interest. Why not produce a social media post, ideally a few weeks or so before you are looking to launch, to see what people's opinions are of this change. Of course, please do not take comments or feedback to heart, as this is will not be a true reflection of your customer base. It also builds up your social media presence which is always useful.

Social media is also a good way to see how established products / services you provide, such as a community café or homemade cakes, are faring with your customers. Once you have agreed which area to focus on, it is then time to ask the question to your followers.

This can be achieved on both Facebook and Twitter via the 'Polls' function. See below an example of a Facebook poll and also where to find the same option in Twitter:



Polls are a simple way of gauging feedback on your services and you can tailor the question however you wish. Again, these will not produce an exact 'show of support' from your entire customer base, but they are a good start.

You can choose to run the poll for as long as you want, until you are satisfied with the results you have gained. It is always good to follow this up, thanking everyone who took part.

In addition to polls, you can also add some photos of new stock to your profile, advertising to your customers that the stock has arrived and they are welcome to pop in and sample produce. Social media is an excellent marketing tool, so use it to your advantage!

Photos and Videos

As mentioned above, social media allows you to show off your excellent produce and location to the general public and potential customers. You can choose to focus on one aspect for photos, for example, if you have an excellent member of your team who works hard on shop displays. Below is an example of a good quality photo of a community shop display ([Ewelme Village Store](#)):



This is something you can easily replicate and will give the local community something to think about, and perhaps tempt them to popping in.

Benefits of using social media

Social media is an easy way to get the word out there about the wonderful work you are doing and, potentially, a way to gain new customers and visitors to your community-owned business.

Videos are also an ingenious way of letting your customer base know about new products and also a great way to engage your audience. Social media is a platform for sharing, but also for interacting with each other and keeping a constant dialogue with your followers.

We are once again using the wonderful [Itteringham Shop](#) as an example below:



This is an ingenious way of both promoting their products and also linking into the current climate. Therefore, customers are much more likely to pop in and purchase the produce.

However, as mentioned earlier videos do not have to always be about promoting products but they can also be about engaging with your audience.

One of the new and clever features of Facebook is the ability to do a 'Live Video' from your Facebook page. It is very simple to do and if you would like to find out how to do this please visit the [Facebook Live information page](#).

When you decide to go ahead with a Facebook Live video, you next need to decide what you are going to do as this is going to be something everyone is watching 'in-time' so you want to make sure it is going to go well.

Benefits of using social media

There are lots of different things you could do on Facebook Live, but we have selected a few different topics/areas you could cover below:

- Cover a Live Event – [Kings Arms Shouldham](#) covered a live band which was already happening but is a great way to show what's currently happening at the pub.
- One-to-one chat with your followers – this could be just an update from someone with the produce you have on offer, volunteering opportunities, upcoming events etc. If you write down some key areas you want to cover you can do this relatively quickly and will make your Facebook page feel friendlier and engaging.
- Introduce the team – If you have recently opened your community co-operative and wish to introduce the members of your team to the wider public, what better way than to share a quick video with them and show off your premises?
- Tour of premises – Following on from introducing your team, you could use Facebook Live to show off your wonderful community business. It is up to you when you wish to do this, but it may be easier to pick a 'quieter' time.

There are lots more ways to use this feature to your advantage but these are just a few!

(P.S. Once you have broadcasted live the photo will be saved to your Facebook page for people to view and for you to share later.)

Events and Public Relations (PR)

We are aware that many community co-operatives we work with host a range of wonderful and exciting events for their communities and customers. Social media can be a great way of not only promoting these events but also to publicise these post-event.

When you plan an event you can include your social media channels as a platform to promote invitations, rather than looking at it as something to just use post-event. An easy way to do this is to create an Event on your Facebook page. A guide on how to do this can be found at the [Facebook Events website](#). You could combine this with promotion on Twitter linking to either a booking platform or your Facebook page.

You could also combine this with doing a live video on the day of the event, to further strengthen the visibility of your Facebook page and also show diversity in your posts.

After your event has finished, you could post some photos and videos in a photo album on your page. To create an album, please see this [Facebook guide](#). You may also want to do a write up on your website, which you can then link to on a Facebook / Twitter post. Integration between different social media platforms and your website is an excellent way to promote your cooperative.

Social media can also be a great way to build your Public Relations (PR) coverage. Public Relations refer to the image of your company in the eyes of the public. This could be your current customers, the local community or other organisations.

One idea could be to send a Tweet to local media contacts about an upcoming event you are holding and invite them along. The media are generally positive about the work community co-operatives are doing. There are a number of different ways you could build up your PR through social media.

Volunteering

We are aware that community co-operatives sometimes struggle to recruit new volunteers or even reinvigorate your volunteering programme. Social Media can be an effective and easy way to show how positive being a volunteer can be. Below are a number of things you could try to boost interest:

- Case study – Ask one of your volunteers to prepare a case study detailing why they decided to join the team, what they get out of it, why would they recommend it and anything else they would like to include. This is an excellent way of promoting your volunteering setup. You can then use this as an ongoing piece of marketing and promotion material.
- Video – Create a short video interviewing one of your volunteers. This could be just asking them a few questions (similar to the ones above) which will show what it is like to be a volunteer and that anyone can join!
- Website – Create a page which details the sorts of things your volunteers get up to and how to register your interest.

All of the above can then be shared onto your social media platforms.

We hope you have enjoyed reading this 'Beginners guide to using social media for community co-operatives' and if you have any further questions or queries please join either the [Community Shops Network](#) or [Co-operative Pubs Network](#) where you can ask other community co-operatives the best way to move forwards. Further information about the groups can be found on [our website](#).