

Social media guidance

for community rail partnerships and groups



Advice for community rail partnerships and groups

This guide is aimed at helping community rail partnerships looking to use social media as a marketing and communication tool to effectively promote community rail lines. It can be read in conjunction with the Community Rail Network guidance booklet on marketing and communications, available free online at <https://cutt.ly/BM1lupJ>. Further advice tailored to your needs is available to Community Rail Network members by contacting erin@communityrail.org.uk.

What is social media?

Social media is a way for people to communicate and interact online. Over the last ten years, its usage has taken off to a huge extent with almost every commercial business, organisation and individual having a social media outlet of some sort.

Groups and organisations are using social media to improve the frequency, quality, and reach of their marketing and communications. It's a quick and easy way to promote successes, events, volunteering and help more people to understand what you do and get involved.

With this in mind, the opportunities for community rail partnerships and station friends' groups to use social media as a marketing and communication tool are endless.

It's also a way to canvass views, engage people in dialogue, and encourage conversation and sharing about community.

Why is it important?

Raising your public profile: 90% of households in the UK have access to the internet. That's a huge amount of people you can potentially connect to and tell your story, at the click of a button.

Instant connection with your target audience, and bringing new people on board: When you post to your social media network, anyone who likes or follows your profile will see it. Whether you're posting a request for volunteers, promoting an event or attraction on your line or displaying images of activities you've been up to, you're getting in front of people and organisations who have an interest in your work. If your followers find it share-worthy and post it to their profiles, their friends and followers will see it as well. In this way, through sharing, you can achieve a snowball effect, reaching out to more people and partners than those who already know about you.

Immediacy: With traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines, tv and radio, organisations were always at the mercy of printing and broadcast schedules. Not anymore.

Looking for volunteers for an activity taking place in a couple of days? Create a post and it's out there straight away. Want to show off the activity your group has been participating in? Take a couple of photos and upload them onto your social media feeds for instant reportage.

Learning, listening and interacting: Social media is there 24 hours a day for you to tell your story. You can take advantage of this by posting at times when your followers are most likely to see your message, and let posts sit and do their thing throughout the day. You'll also be using it to learn more about your community, engaging with your audience through conversation and interaction, and extending your reach far beyond your existing volunteers and supporters.

The big five



Facebook: With over 1.86bn users worldwide, Facebook has become the ubiquitous social media platform that everyone from grandparents to grandchildren use. Mainly a family oriented audience, so great for event and activity signposting as well as keeping your supporters updated.

Twitter: 313m active users, and used extensively by community rail stakeholders, Twitter is a fast paced, 280-character micro-blogging platform that puts you in touch with your stakeholders instantly.

YouTube: Sometimes a picture isn't enough. With the improvement of video recording quality on our smart phones, you'll want a place to store footage. YouTube is the ideal platform for video storage and the first place people look for video clips.

Instagram: A social media platform that relies on the visual aspect of your marketing, Instagram is popular amongst teens and young adults for sharing images and short videos.

LinkedIn: The social networking website aimed at professionals, LinkedIn allows members to contact past and current colleagues, uncover new opportunities and network with experts within the rail industry and third sector.

A few common questions about social media

Do we have to be on every platform? No, you don't. Pick the ones that you think will be most useful to you and learn how to use them effectively. We recommend getting to know Facebook and Twitter initially.

What should we be posting? Use social media to show off your achievements, promote your events, ask questions and promote your partnerships. If there's a message you want to shout from the rooftops, social media will provide you with the ladder to get there.

Should our 'handles' be consistent across platforms? Ideally yes. When people are searching for you, they'll first use the title of your CRP or friends group. Make sure that at least some of your title is in there.

For example, on Twitter and Facebook, Community Rail Network is listed as [@CommunityRail](#)

Facebook

Facebook is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video posts, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues.



Promote your activities / events instantly: Need to get old and new volunteers mobilised for an activity? Post it on Facebook. Got an event happening and you'd like to invite people who like your page? Facebook can send out the invites for you and monitor the replies.

Upload dynamic content: Facebook allows you to upload multiple images and dynamic video content, to keep your audience engaged and entertained. As people can share content, it enables you to reach a wider audience.

Build a community within your page: Individual posts allow for user responses. Ask questions, engage in conversation. Give your followers a reason to return to your page, again and again.

Schedule your posts to suit your audience: You don't have to be sat at your computer, phone or tablet when you want a post to go live. Facebook has scheduling tools, allowing your posts to reach your audience when you want.

Be content with your content

Facebook gives you the opportunity to really promote yourself, with its functionality. With that in mind, what makes great and memorable content, that will grab your audience's attention?

Set the scene and tell stories: Facebook offers an almost unlimited character counter for posting your content. You don't have to use all of them though. Be succinct but make sure you include key details. A handy guide is the three-paragraph rule.

Para one: Introduction. What is happening? Set the scene here in a couple of sentences.

Para two: The main body. Add colour here. Who's involved / who took part? What happened? What are the aims / outcomes?

Para three: Ask a question here, what do your followers think?

Add times / dates / locations / links for activities and events: You want people to turn up to your activities and events. Let them know where, when and how they can get there. If you have links to relevant websites for further information, make sure they're posted. This is a great way to drive traffic to your website where followers will be able to find out further information about you.

Add an image... or two: People's personal Facebook feeds can be quite busy. Stand out from the crowd with images in your posts. Let people know what's along your lines and at your stations.

Show work in progress, show work completed. Show your happy volunteers hard at work or enjoying themselves at the end of the day. Have an event on? Take some photos and post them directly to help people who are not there to still feel a part of it.

Ask a question, set a competition and get your followers engaged: Facebook posts provide such an easy way to engage and gain instant feedback. Ask questions whenever you can, draw on people's ideas and views, and reward with kind words and shares.

How often should we post?

Ideally, you should be adding posts to your Facebook page every couple of days. This may not be ideal, given your activity levels or schedule, so a weekly post may suffice.

The idea is to keep your page updated as much as possible. If a visitor to your page sees that the item posted was a few months ago, they may make the presumption that your group is inactive and not wish to revisit your page or get involved in your activities.

Conversely, don't over post. Posting multiple items per day doesn't necessarily increase your visibility on your followers' feeds.

What time of day should we post?

Your ideal time to post on Facebook is mid-morning and early evening. This gives posts time to linger on your followers' feeds.



Top tip

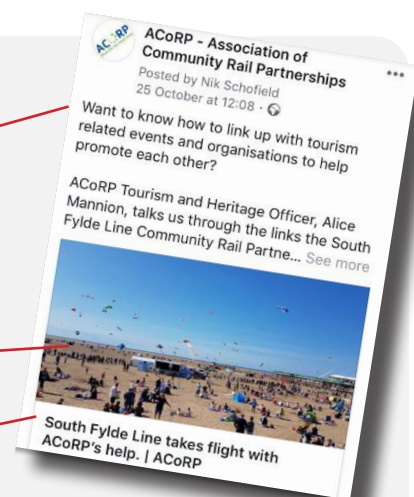
Engage with comments and questions. Your replies show up on your followers' feeds and keep your activity in their minds.

Summary | Facebook

Set the scene

Add and image: engage visually

Signpost: add a link to your website

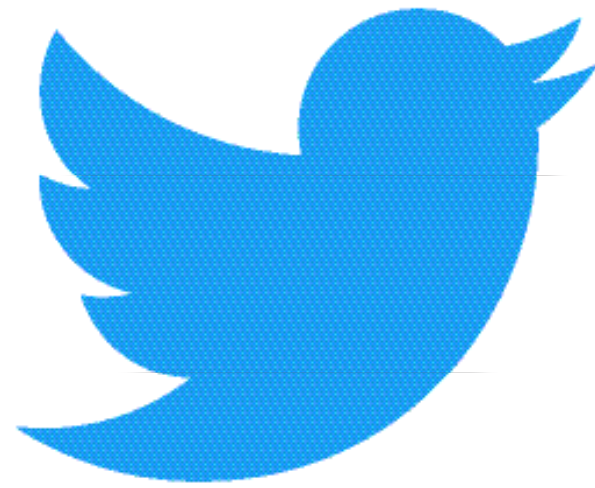


Twitter

Twitter can be seen as a dynamic message board service that allows users to post 280-character messages with images, video and gifs to other Twitter users, and interact and converse with one another.

Twitter users choose who they do and do not follow, having control of what tweets they see in their home feed.

Your Twitter handle and the handles of users you interact with, will be prefixed by the @ symbol, e.g. @CommunityRail



Why use it?

Promote your activities / events instantly: Twitter's feed updates constantly throughout the day

Great for networking with community rail stakeholders: Twitter is full of community rail stakeholders. Most bodies and organisations you'll be in contact with will have a Twitter account, enabling you to interact with them and show followers you're working together. These include:

- Community rail partnerships and station friends' groups
- Train operators
- Public bodies such as The Department for Transport (@transportgovuk), and Network Rail (@networkrail)
- Community and sustainable transport advocates such as the Community Transport Association (@CTAUK1) and Sustrans (@sustrans)
- Funding bodies
- Activity supporters and rail users
- Local community groups
- Local / national media outlets

Interact with a variety of users: Tweets allow for user responses. Ask questions, engage in conversation. Retweet and favourite tweets that may interest you followers.

Schedule your posts to suit your audience: As with Facebook, you don't have to be sat at your computer, phone or tablet when you want a post to go live. Twitter doesn't have its own in built scheduling tools but there are some great third-party options such as Tweetdeck and Hootsuite, that will get the job done. (See also [Twitter scheduling](#), which can be found on page 10).

Tweet the good tweet

Twitter's defining feature is its limited character count. You only have 280 characters, so make them count! Twitter is particularly good for really honing your messages and stories into a couple of concise sentences. A useful rule is to keep each tweet focused on one specific message.

Add times / dates / locations / links for activities and events: You want people to turn up to your activities and events? Let them know where, when and how they can get there. If you have links to relevant websites for further information, make sure they're posted as well. This is a great way to drive traffic to your website where followers will be able to find out further information about you.

Add an image or two: Users Twitter feeds can move at a pace and a majority of the time are text only. Adding a colourful image, video, or GIF to your tweets adds a touch of personality, and leads to higher Tweet engagement rates.

Ask a question, set a competition, set a poll and get your followers engaged: Tweets provide such an easy way to engage and gain instant feedback. Ask questions whenever you can, and reward with retweets and likes. Asking questions is an effective way to interact with your audience, bring readers into the conversation, and understand people's opinions. Tweet open-ended questions or use Twitter polls to survey on specific responses.

Get your partners and supporters involved: By tagging your partners in photos or adding their Twitter handle into a tweet. This will show up in their notifications and will give them the opportunity to retweet, sharing your content with their followers.



Top tip

If you find yourself running out of characters, then create a headline, add a link and signpost back to your website.

Summary | Twitter

Set the scene: use your 280 characters wisely

Tag in your partners: encourages retweets and follows

Signpost: add a link to your website

Add an image: engage visually



Harness the hashtag

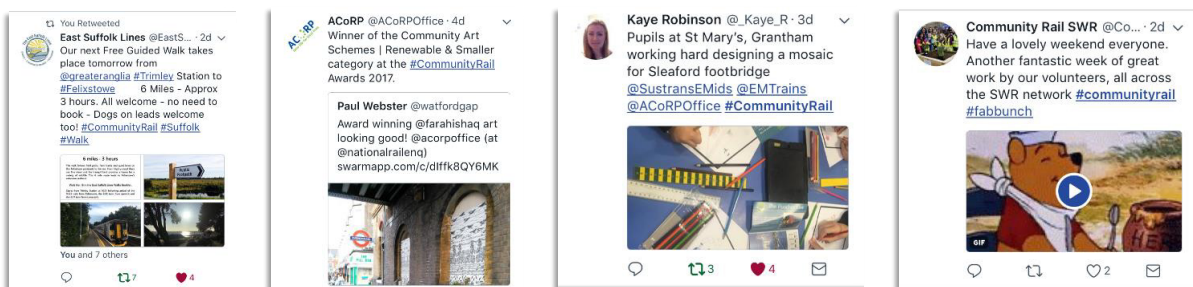
Tweeters use the hashtag symbol (#), before a relevant keyword or phrase in their Tweet, to categorise their tweet and them show more easily in Twitter searches.

Clicking or tapping on a hash-tagged word in any message shows you other tweets that include that hashtag.

Hashtags can be included anywhere in a tweet.

Your hashtag for community rail is **#CommunityRail**

#CommunityRail



The retweet

Retweeting is a common way to share something interesting from someone you follow to your own set of followers. Sharing tweets and content from partners is a great way of building relationships and further spreading your story. There are two ways to do this, a **retweet** (which just reposts a user's tweet to your followers) or a **quote tweet**, in which you comment along with a link to their original tweet.

Retweets



Hit the  to retweet to your followers

Quote retweet to add your own comment

How often should we post?

Depending on how many people and organisations you are following, and follow you, Twitter feeds can be fast paced, so we recommend the following:

Ideally, post a couple of tweets a day. If you don't have the content, then at least a few times a week. Like Facebook, this keeps your feed fresh and shows users that you're active. If you have nothing to tweet, remember that you can retweet content from people you follow or from hashtags you are involved in, if you think it's relevant for your followers.

Bearing in mind that Twitter feeds can be fast paced, you can make use of recycling tweets to keep your feed fresh and active. For example, if you have an event that you want to publicise, you can 'cut and paste' that tweet and post in the morning, afternoon and evening over multiple days to gain maximum exposure.

You also have the opportunity to set up tweets in advance with scheduling.

When should we post?

Your ideal time to post on Twitter is dependent on the audience you're aiming at. As a guide:

Organisations, businesses, third sector: During working hours (09:00 - 17:00). Peak usage is estimated between 09:00 - 15:00.

Individuals: Commute times (07:30 - 09:00), lunch (12:15 - 13:45), early evening (18:30 - 20:00) on weekdays. Between 09:00 - 20:00 on weekends.

It's also important with Twitter to be as prompt, timely and immediate as possible. Twitter is well-suited to staging a build-up for activities that you want people to know about and get involved in. It's also great for tweeting 'live' as things happen from a smart phone, which helps to show immediacy, and for people who aren't there to feel connected. When events and activities happen, give updates as things unfold ideally, and/or straight away afterwards, with links to more detailed reports or follow-ups later.

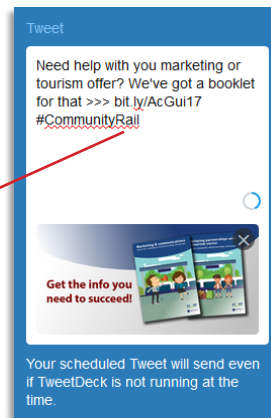


Twitter scheduling

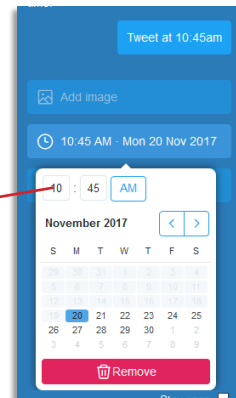
It's not possible to be on Twitter all the time. Online applications such as **Tweetdeck** and **Hootsuite**, that will enable you to set your Tweets up ahead of time.

Scheduling with Tweetdeck

Create your tweet



Choose the time and date you'd like the tweet to appear



Social media do's and don't's

Do

- **Be clear and concise** in what you want to say
- **Add images**, to stand out from the crowd
- **Signpost**, wherever possible, with a weblink to your and / or a partner's website. This is great for search engine optimisation / Google search rankings also
- **Engage** with your friends and followers. Reply, share, like, retweet and show that you're listening
- **Mention and tag** partner organisations or organisations you're wishing to influence / promote, for extra shares and retweets

Don't

- **Post just a weblink**. Add context first, web link second
- **Post criticism** of your train operating company, partners or any other organisation or individuals. Please keep this to private correspondence
- **Post personal political opinion** or any other personal grievances on your CRP or station group accounts