



## Navigating the Social Web

**In a relatively short space of time social websites have become the largest growth area of internet activity. This has created opportunities for businesses willing to interact in this space, but in a changing market selecting which areas to target can prove problematic. In this information sheet we will examine the key social websites, their functions and how they can be useful to your businesses.**

There are four main groups of social website:

1. *Social Networks: Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace*
2. *Micro Blogs: Twitter, Tumblr*
3. *Blogs: Wordpress, Blogger, Posterous*
4. *Sharing: Flickr, YouTube*

In this information sheet we shall approach each group and discuss its implication for your business.

### Social Networks



Most people's first interaction with social website is via social networking, these sites facilitate connections between people allowing them to share information. The three key social networking sites are:

1. *Facebook: The largest social network on the internet and the most important for business with over half a billion*

*members.*

2. *LinkedIn: A business oriented social network designed to facilitate professional connections. It is useful to build personal networks but not to directly promote business.*
3. *MySpace: One of the first social networking sites it's now struggling to compete with Facebook (FB) it has re-centred on music and entertainment and is of little use to businesses unless the work is in this area.*

For businesses looking to develop new markets and open discussions with their customers a presence on FB is worth developing, but where to start?

The best way to promote your company here is through a 'page', these function in much the same way as a profile for an individual in that information you post will appear

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on the walls of people who have taken an interest in your business and 'Liked' it.

To set up a 'page' you will first need to visit [www.Facebook.com](http://www.Facebook.com) and select Create a Page from there you can follow the instructions to create your own custom 'page' which you can link to an FB profile.

You will then need to promote this 'page' to potential customers by offering them a reason to engage with you. Social web users don't want to be sold to; this will create a barrier to engagement. Instead you need to offer ideas, advice and participate in an honest conversation. If you do this and your content is interesting, relevant or solves a problem you will then start to develop followers.

However, to maximise the potential of a 'page' you need to link this to other social sites so that you can promote your position more widely.

### Microblogging



In the last five years Microblogging has grown exponentially in popularity, mostly due to the instantaneous nature of its content. This form of social website is characterised by its use of short messages to spread ideas among communities. There are two key platforms here that you need to understand:

1. *Twitter: the original short messaging service, Twitter limits users to sending messages (Tweets) of 140 characters or less. These tweets are then public and can themselves be shared (Retweeting) or commented on / discussed by anyone following the user; in short, ideas in this space can grow and evolve very quickly.*

2. *Tumblr: is a slightly more advanced platform, it allows users to post longer messages, images, videos, links, quotes and audio to their tumblelog, a short-form blog. Tumblr also allows users to create posts and schedule them for later release.*

For a business, stick to Twitter as this can provide an excellent platform to engage with and recruit new customers, colleagues and friends. To make the most of twitter you need to share interesting content, perhaps from FB or another social website, and again you will need to talk to people and develop conversations and relationships but a small investment of time can pay great dividends.

Recent studies have shown that even tweeters with few followers can spread ideas to people 3 or even 4 connections away with relative ease meaning that twitter is a powerful promotional tool. To increase your interactions on twitter you can use '#' to identify certain key terms in your tweets which other users might be discussing. This can help you find followers and increase the likelihood that your message will be spread by others. To get started simply go to [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) and create an account.

### Blogging



If you want to write more than just a 140 characters then you may want to consider a full blog. These allow users to write online journals discussing everything from Horticulture to Cooking and beyond. There are a number of platforms you can use to create a blog:



1. *Wordpress: is a professional, FREE content management system which is predominantly used for blogging. Wordpress (WP) allows for a full range of website functionality but requires a degree of technical skill to use it to its full potential.*

2. *Posterous: a simple blogging platform, it allows users to post in a variety of ways, supports integrated and automatic posting to other social media sites such as Flickr, Twitter, and FB and has built-in Google Analytics.*

3. *Blogger: is a Google owned blog-publishing service that allows private or multi-user blogs with time stamped entries, a very basic entry level site, and ideal for beginners.*

Your choice of platform will depend on your level of technical skill and what you hope to achieve but if you enjoy writing and have an interesting message, share blogging can be a great way to create content that can travel across your other social websites and draw in new visitors. One word of warning though, if you don't really want to blog, then don't. There are around 2 million blogs that start and remain unused each year, blog followers are loyal, but if you are not

going to share and communicate with them regularly find someone who will and can act as an apostle for you and your products.

### Social Sharing



The final category of websites encompasses those which allow users to share Photos (Flickr) and video (YouTube) these are powerful media voices and might form part of your overall strategy. For instance you might want to show and share product / location photos or create videos that people can watch which offer advice or explain your service. These innovative channels are becoming more popular, why not look at what some other companies are doing and how they are sharing their ideas, you will find there is more going on than you expected.

## Further information

This information sheet is part of a series following a set of marketing workshops led by Horticulture Wales titled Successfully Marketing your business online:

- Successfully marketing your business online
- Developing your web presence
- Ranking your website in google
- Navigating the social web

See [www.horticulturewales.co.uk](http://www.horticulturewales.co.uk) or email [horticulturewales@glyndwr.ac.uk](mailto:horticulturewales@glyndwr.ac.uk)

Websites for Social Networking: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)

Websites for Social Sharing: [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

Websites for Microblogging: [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) [www.tumblr.com](http://www.tumblr.com)

Websites for Blogging: [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com) [www.posterous.com](http://www.posterous.com) [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)

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