

Digital Culture Network Resources: Engaging Audiences with Social Media

Introduction

Whilst your audiences, participants or stakeholders may not be able to engage with you physically at the moment, you can still reach people through social media.

This resource looks at the pros and cons of the main platforms: Twitter, Instagram and YouTube and shows the ways these platforms are being used or can be used to engage with an audience. There are many ways arts and culture organisations are being creative in their use of social media, so we share examples and ideas for you to consider below.

Things to consider

When embarking on an audience engagement campaign, questions to ask yourself are:

Why social media? Are you engaging with your audience? What's your long-term goal/purpose?

- Is it for awareness raising?
- Is it for customer/audience retention?
- Is it for long term audience development for future work?
- Is it to create ambassadors for your brand/organisation?

Which platform? Once you have decided on your "why", think about what platform will be best to deliver your ambitions.

- Do you have an engaged audience already on your chosen platform?

- Can you easily reproduce or repurpose your chosen content method consistently?
- Does your chosen platform support the content format or types that you have decided to use?

Once you've taken into consideration all the above, there might be other "call to actions" or campaigns that you can run alongside your content such as:

- **Donations** – letting your audience know how they can support you financially
- **Mailing list** – ideally you should be aiming for people to want to continue to engage with you. Make sure you include an option for them to sign up to your mailing list.

The main platforms

Each of the major social media platforms has different features from live streams to videos or blogs and threads, that will allow you to share your content in unique ways or in ways that best suit your work and match your resources.

There are plenty of examples of these features being put to good use in the arts and culture sector currently. Below are some pros and cons of the main platforms with a selection of examples and best practice from the sector along with ideas of ways you can use other social media platforms to engage with your audience.

Twitter

Twitter is a very versatile platform that enables you to share videos and audio, run polls, live streams, microblogs and more.

Pros

- Information can be shared quickly
- Lots of features from video and live streaming as well as unique feature like Threads
- Easy to connect with new audiences and relevant influencers

Cons

- Limited character limits mean you must be precise with your messaging
- Has a reputation for trolling and as a platform where negative discourse can take place.

Below are some fantastic Threads being shared from creatives in the arts and culture sector that contain ideas on how to use the platform creatively:

The Museum of English Rural Life

Encouraged their users to explore their online collections of smocks and rural garments, and then make their own in the new Nintendo game, Animal Crossing.

<https://twitter.com/TheMERL/status/1242751265869910016>

British Museum Curator Sue Brunning – Covid-19 theme thread

Sue shares early European artefacts with a Covid-19 twist.

<https://twitter.com/SueBrunningBM/status/1239127744551833601?s=20>

Arts Professional and Jason Crouch - Live Stream Q & A

Another good way to use threads is to do a Q&A with your audience, and you can ask them to add their questions to your thread link.

<https://twitter.com/ArtsPro/status/1239939549788135426?s=20>

Barnsley Museum - Artefact Bingo

A curator showcases some of the artefacts from the museum using a bingo machine to pick out the artefact he is going to talk about.

<https://twitter.com/BarnsleyMuseums/status/1240941575531790336>

Instagram

Instagram has a plethora of features that can be used to connect with your audience from Instagram Stories/Live, IGTV and Polls. The platform is a great space to create informative content and engage in fun ways with your audiences.

Pros

- Easy to use short and long-form video formats.

- Reaches a younger audience. According to Statista, 65% of users are between 18 – 34.
- Can be connected to a Facebook account to share content between them.

Cons

- Organic reach is falling
- You can't easily link to multiple platforms/website

Below are some examples of cultural organisations that are using Instagram in fun and creative ways.

Field Museum

The Field Museum often have questions or call to actions in their post copy that encourages their audience to engage with them. The museum does this by using a combination of light-hearted copy and educational content pieces.

<https://www.instagram.com/fieldmuseum/?hl=en>

The Natural History Museum

They use a mixture of educational and informative posts and highlight their story well by posting behind the scenes videos, previous campaigns and events held at the museum and more.

https://www.instagram.com/natural_history_museum/?hl=en

YouTube

YouTube is a platform that is often overlooked when it comes to building an audience. However, when used correctly, organisations can develop truly engaged communities.

If you are an organisation with video content, then this is a perfect time to either re-share or repurpose your video content. Below are some great examples of cultural organisations that not only have hours of content for you to get lost in but a growing audience who tune in weekly for new content.

Pros

- YouTube is the 2nd biggest search engine in the world after Google. Optimising your videos/channel and using keywords and

thumbnails correctly will make your content easier to find and thus increase your audience.

- Over the last few years YouTube has expanded its platform enabling more significant community-building opportunities, adding features such as stories, forums and video premieres

Cons

- To build an audience on YouTube you need to be able to consistently generate and post video content which can be a potential barrier to entry.

The Tank Museum

The Tank Museum delivers new content every week and have lots of different playlists about its collection as well as interviews and thought pieces from its staff and other tank enthusiasts.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheTankMuseum/videos>

The British Museum

The British Museum, as you can imagine, has a wide range of content that it covers on its YouTube page. A strong example is its Curator Corner series, sharing a new video from its curators every Monday.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/britishmuseum/videos>

Resources and further reading

AMA - Nottingham Lakeside Arts

The team at Nottingham Lakeside Arts discuss why it reevaluated its audience segments and the effect that it has had on its overall social media strategy.

<https://www.a-m-a.co.uk/social-media-audiences-digilab/>

How to shoot a video on your phone

If you are nervous about shooting content on your phone, Digital Culture Network Tech Champion, Dean Shaw has created a how-to video that will equip you with the confidence to start creating content using your mobile device.

<https://youtu.be/vMBnMxVPAY8>

MERL case study

The Museum of English Rural Life demonstrates how it became a Social Media First organisation as well as how it approaches content and its collections.

https://youtu.be/g2cW_xlyJXc

MERL x Animal Crossing

Reaching new audience by connecting its artifacts with the new video game Animal Crossing, the story about MERL was picked up by gaming blog Polygon

<https://www.polygon.com/2020/3/26/21195434/animal-crossing-new-horizons-merl-rural-life-museum-smocks-design-clothes>

Further Support:

The Digital Culture Network is here to support you and your organisation. If you work for an arts and cultural organisation which is eligible for Arts Council England funding, and need help or would like to chat with us about any of the advice we have covered above, please get in touch by emailing digitalnetwork@artscouncil.org.uk with some background about you, your location and the challenges you're facing, and we will connect you with one of our nine Tech Champions for 1-2-1 support.

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