



# A guide to using Social Media

For RYA Clubs and Training Centres  
Communicating with Adults

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## Introduction

This guide aims to help you through the process of setting up social media communication with your existing and potential adult customers and members, and provide you with advice on how to make it work for you.

Do your instructors, club members and customers tell you: “We have to be on Facebook, Twitter and need to start a blog?” It’s so easy to get caught up on the social media wave and the energy and hype that surround it. Yes, many of the methods of social media can benefit your centre or club but let’s not forget it’s important to ask why use them?

You, your customers, club members and friends can find inspiration, information, like-minded people and create active communities faster than ever before. Look at the statistics:

- 123 million users of Facebook with the average user having 130 friends
- It is estimated 100 million videos are updated on YouTube a day

It’s a very big and daunting world when you’re new to it. Unlike the more traditional marketing tools, social media are informal, personal and immediate. The people who use them are very savvy, and will see through ‘PR puff’ immediately. Social media conversations are not sales pitches, but are very well-suited to the idea of an online sailing club, where people can chat, share photos and videos, find out about courses and events and generally get involved in club life.

This isn’t something you can do once a month – it’s an on-going conversation within a like-minded community, covering everything from current weather conditions to the food just being served in the bar.

Start by watching what others do and get a feel for how it works before you jump in with both feet! Your younger adult members/staff are likely to be social media users already, so don’t forget to ask for their help, advice and feedback.

### Getting to Know your Adult Customers and Members

This guide has been produced in part to support our work with Sport England on Market Segmentation. For the RYA, this has identified, in considerable detail, what kind of adults are most likely to participate in sailing and boating. This is invaluable in helping you to get to know your customers, showing you what their interests are, what they want, and most important here, the best ways of communicating with them. Further details can be found at: [www.rya.org.uk/go/KYC](http://www.rya.org.uk/go/KYC)

If you have any feedback or examples of best practice that you would like to share with us and other clubs and centres please email: [graham.manchester@rya.org.uk](mailto:graham.manchester@rya.org.uk)

This guide will be regularly updated and posted on the RYA web site under the club development section. Copies will also be available from your Regional Development Officer.

### The Sport Development Team

## First things first

It is essential to have a clear strategy before you start – the acronym POST is a useful one to remember:

### People

Establish who your audience is (see RYA Marketing Segmentation Pack. [www.rya.org.uk/go/KYC](http://www.rya.org.uk/go/KYC)), and where they are in the world of social media – are they on Facebook, or Twitter, or watching video, or reading blogs?

Social media are where your potential/existing club members and customers communicate, chat, network and socialise. They don't expect sales pitches or advertising – in fact, that would turn them off, so if you want to get in on their conversation so that they become aware of your club/centre and its activities, you need to start off by watching what they do before chatting too.

### Objective

What do you want this activity to achieve? Is it about getting more members, retaining the ones you have, increasing your income, or raising the profile of sailing and boating, or of your club/centre?

Your marketing objectives may be, for example, to *sell 10% more RYA courses over the next 12 months* or to *retain 25% of all course attendees as regular club members over the next 12 months* (make them specific and quantifiable so that you can measure later how well things are working).

### Strategy

What behaviour are you trying to change? Are you building a community? Are you trying to gain referrals from friends?

The RYA PR toolkit will advise you of more traditional methods of gaining publicity, but social media interaction is the way to grow your club community.

### Technology

Only at this stage, when you know who you want to target and what your goal is, can you choose the tool to achieve it.

This guide focuses on Facebook and Twitter, with some notes on blogging and YouTube. All these tools work best in tandem with your website, where customers/members can follow up on social media conversations and find facts and information about your club/centre – and, conversely, people who have found your website can hit the button that says *Share this on Facebook* or *Follow us on Twitter*.



## What can Facebook do for your club/centre?

Think of your Facebook page as a club noticeboard that can be seen, discussed and added to by members, and potential members, wherever they are, and at any time.

Just as you can create a personal profile page on Facebook, with photos, lists of personal interests, contact information, etc, you can create a Fan Page for your club/centre. You, and all other users, can communicate with fellow members and other interested readers through public posts on the 'wall', live chat or private messages, and also by posting and tagging photos, linking to YouTube videos and other content.

The Facebook page will quickly become a virtual club community – when members hit the 'like' button on the page, the messages you post on the 'wall' will appear on their 'wall' too, and when you post photos of club activity, they will tag themselves, and their friends will be able to see what they've been up to. No doubt some of those friends will start commenting, and getting interested in what's going on where you are ...

## The basics of setting up a Facebook Fan Page

Go to <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php>, choose *Local business or place of interest*, and follow the simple step-by-step instructions which will take you through the process of adding content and making people aware of the page.

You will notice that there are extra options not available on personal profile pages – to add sections for events and discussions, for example. Also, as administrator, you (and whoever else you allow) will be able to view statistics (*Insights*) as to who is accessing your page and how they are using it – these will help you to measure the success of your posts, and to change them if necessary.

## Advice about using Facebook

Mark Saul, OnBoard Development Officer at Lagoon Watersports - <http://www.facebook.com/LagoonWatersports> – offers a few hints:

- Update your Facebook status regularly, at least once a week, so that people keep coming back to look.
- When there's nothing much happening at your club/centre, trawl the web – sites like Yachts and Yachting – and post links to teaching videos or other interesting items you've found, to keep people thinking about sailing and windsurfing and feeling involved.
- Post last-minute course availability on your status: I recently wanted to fill an instructor course, so I posted a question about "who wants to come on a course?" and I filled four places! In the old days, you'd have had to print 1000 flyers or send out a huge bulk email to get that sort of response – it's so easy!
- Encourage your storage members to join, as we did - these guys have their own kit and access to our storage pavilion. In the past, they never really went out in the

winter while the main centre was closed – but this year has been a really good success. They've set up a Facebook **group** so that they can communicate easily and regularly with each other to see who is going out, and when. And because it's their group, it doesn't clog up our main Facebook page:

[http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group\\_103475529717473](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_103475529717473)

Andy Hooper, Regional Development Officer for the South, adds:

- Add links to videos you've uploaded to YouTube. You can see from the *Insights* how many hits they get – in my experience video gets twice as many as other posts.

You also might like to try:

- Tagging – not just photos, but mentioning people in your updates, preceding their name with the @ symbol to create the tag. Tags automatically create a link to that person's page, publish your status on their wall and email them to tell them they've been tagged.

#### **Do:**

- Make sure you tag the pictures you post so that fans know when you have put their picture online (but get their permission first).
- Take advantage of Facebook Places, which allows people to 'check-in' - telling all their friends where they are – when they arrive somewhere. Encourage your members to 'check-in' to your club/centre on Facebook.
- Create a short vanity URL. Once your fan page has more than 25 fans, you will be able to create a shortened URL for the page, rather than the long one Facebook gave you when you started up. You can obtain this by going to [www.facebook.com/username](http://www.facebook.com/username), just be careful not to set the vanity URL you want for your page as the URL for your personal profile.
- Encourage your fans to post their own updates, photos and videos on your fan page.
- Promote your fan page on your website.
- Ask questions when you post updates. Users are more likely to interact with your page if you're asking for their opinion and the more interactions you have, the higher the chance people will see your page and join it.

#### **Don't:**

- Use your fan page to make a hard sell. Remember this is an informal community conversation, not a shop front.
- Allow spam posts and links onto the 'wall' – check regularly and delete them.
- Update too frequently – you will be flooding your fans' walls with your messages, and they may block them if they are irritating. Instant updates are better on Twitter.

#### **More examples to check out**

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Lyme-Regis-Sailing-Club/164995797338>



### What can Twitter do for your club/centre?

Think of your Twitter account as a way of sending and receiving text messages to and from your members, and potential members, that they can all see and respond to at the same time. It's a conversation between people with similar interests, about what's happening right now.

Twitter is a way to share short pieces of information, and keep track of people and items of interest – it allows you to send messages, known as tweets, of up to 140 characters to anyone, anytime, anywhere. It's very easy to use on mobile and smart phones, so it is popular with people on the move.

Tweets are visible to all (though you can restrict messages to just your followers) so people can choose to follow your tweets. They can also retweet (RT) your tweets to **their** followers, so increasing your Twitter community and sphere of influence. Imagine how powerful a tweet from you about perfect weather conditions at your venue **right now** could be ...

### The basics of setting up a club or centre account

On the Twitter website – [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) - click the Sign Up button, and fill in the Join the Conversation form to create an account profile. Choose an appropriate username that other Twitter users in your target market segments will recognise.

You'll be given opportunities to customise your profile. The most important things are to include a photo of yourself – it can be quirky, and have some kind of sailing/boating image; remember that Twitter is all about people talking to people – and to complete your profile, to let people know who you are and what you're interested in. Start following people you know, and those you find who have an interest in watersports.

To mention or tweet someone specific on the public feed, add in the @ symbol before their username to attract their attention and start a conversation. To direct message (DM) someone privately, go to your *Messages* page and click on the *New Message* button.

### Advice about using Twitter

Mark Saul <http://twitter.com/hovelagoon> again has some advice:

- **Encourage your members and followers to sign up for text alerts with Twitter (go to *Mobile* in the *Settings* for your page). We used to pay to send text alerts to our members – Twitter has changed all that forever!**

## You might also like to try:

- Checking out the page of any new followers, to see if they fit your customer/member profile ([www.rya.org.uk/go/KYC](http://www.rya.org.uk/go/KYC)). If so, follow back – you may find their tweets helpful in targeting your own, and you will be able to share a dialogue with them. (Please note that you can block any followers to protect your security, and avoid ‘clutter’.)
- Grouping your posts together by topic by using hashtags (e.g. #sailingcoursesKent or #windHaylingIsland) in the body of your tweet –you, your followers and everyone on Twitter can then find your tweets by searching on that topic.
- Using url shortening services such as bit.ly, goo.gl, and tr.im to shorten links and fit your tweets into the requisite 140 characters.
- Ensuring that your tweets have added value – tweets that include links to photos, videos or sailing news, the words ‘please RT’ and a newsy style are more likely to be retweeted by your followers. And bizarrely, 4pm on a Friday is the best time if you want your message retweeted!
- Mention your followers in your Tweets. e.g. Great to see @username on the water today, big jumps

## Do:

- Remember to be yourself – this is a conversation between people
- Take time to watch and learn the culture and language of Twitter
- Retweet (RT) other people’s tweets if useful to your followers
- Build relationships
- Ask your followers for help, advice and feedback

## Don’t

- Try being ‘corporate’ or to sell stuff
- Post press releases or adverts – Twitter isn’t a newspaper

## More examples to check out

<http://twitter.com/#!/bolton>

<http://twitter.com/#!/YeadonSailing>

**NOTE:** There are ways in which you can link your tweets and Facebook updates, so that the same message appears on both feeds. Just log into Facebook and search for the Twitter application.

This can be useful - especially if your messages are often weather updates for windsurfers! However, bear in mind that unless your Facebook audience is a different group from your Twitter followers, there will also be a lot of repetition for those people (although they may rather know twice than not at all). Consider your decision to link the two media carefully.

## Other productive ways to engage in social media



YouTube is a video sharing website which allows people to upload, share and watch videos. As it's owned by Google, uploading your videos to YouTube will make them more likely to appear in search results, and increase the visibility of your club/centre and its activities. When you make videos to upload, remember to keep them short, sharp, snappy and relevant to your marketing objectives – you want to attract people, and ultimately their money, into your club/centre, rather than just entertaining them from afar. Think about opportunities to raise awareness and enthusiasm, and as a result:

- Increase sales of merchandise
- Increase sponsorship
- Increase youth participation

Here are some examples:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JP8FhkIB\\_Tk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JP8FhkIB_Tk)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vawNbxXIS4>

### Blogging

A blog is basically online journal: create a regular blog on your website, with appealing and relevant content about club activity, individuals' achievements, events etc. Add photographs and YouTube links to show people what you're up to. Then link to your blog from Facebook and Twitter as part of your conversation, and encourage readers to comment on it, subscribe to it, and get their friends more involved by sharing/retweeting your links. It is this interactivity that makes blogs different from websites, and contributes to your social media community. Blog software, such as the very popular Wordpress, hosted on your club/centre website, will attract search engines, and increase its visibility and ranking in cyberspace.

Here are some examples:

<http://www.bartleysc.co.uk/blog.php>  
<http://www.maldenyachtclub.org/blog/>



## Keeping the conversation going

The key pointers for success in social media are:

- Provide your fans and followers with regular information-rich opportunities for interaction
- Maintain the community by giving them constant reasons to come back
- Encourage your fans and followers to draw more people in
- Post photos regularly and encourage tagging and comments on them; encourage others to do the same
- Post links, photos, YouTube videos, blogs
- Share information
- Ask questions

## Safeguarding younger members

This Guide is about communicating with adults, but club members aged under 18 are very likely to have access to your website or Facebook page. There are a few issues to bear in mind in relation to children and young people:

- Follow the RYA guidance on the use of images of children - don't publish a picture of a child without their parent's consent, and don't include details that would enable someone with the wrong motives to contact the child. For more information see the RYA Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines at <http://www.rya.org.uk/go/childprotection>
- Ensure that the content and language on your site or page, including contributions to blogs, forums etc, is not inappropriate for younger visitors and does not link directly to unsuitable material on other sites
- Provide a clear process for parents and others to report inappropriate content or online bullying and to request that content is removed
- Have a robust procedure for handling and assessing such a report or request and acting promptly to remove the offending content.