

Social media is a great way to share news, views and information. Never before has there been so many ways to communicate with others – it's exciting, powerful and engaging. So if you're not already familiar with some of the social media platforms, give them a go.

Social media allows users to interact, comment, share videos, photos, to communicate and to collaborate. It's accessible on mobile technology – not just the home PC – and allows us to reach more and more people.

The top four social media platforms in the UK (Feb 2013) are:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest

This is a brief guide to social media – what to use and when – along with some useful advice.

Facebook

The most popular social networking site with over 200m users. You create a profile and become 'friends' with people. Organisations can create groups, causes and fan pages. Postings such as status updates, photos and videos are visible in a public timeline. You can join groups and write on other user's walls. Facebook is simple to set up and maintain although there is a time commitment in terms of keeping your account updated regularly and responding to posts or messages left by others. Like Twitter though, your content needs to be interesting and varied, frequent and timely and also credible and authentic.

Twitter

This is a bit like text messaging but in a public forum, or micro-blogging. You decide who to follow and receive messages from. Users post short, snappy messages of up to 140 characters and updates are visible in a public timeline. Twitter allows you to alert people directly and links within tweets can take the user direct to the information source such as a website or blog. It's quick and simple to use but does take some time to update and to monitor feedback or send replies. Many people complain that most tweets are rubbish or boring so make sure you provide interesting, varied and short messages. Oh, and be human!

LinkedIn

This is a very popular social networking site among professionals. It's a platform to exchange ideas and information and allows users to stay informed about industry developments, keep in contact with clients and colleagues and find like-minded people.

Pinterest

Growing in popularity, this is basically an online pinboard where people can organise and share the things that they like. It's very popular in the world of weddings!

And finally ... a word on blogging

The word blog comes from the words 'web' and 'log'. It's a bit like keeping an online diary where people can follow the bloggers thoughts. Many comment on news or particular subjects such as technology or sport. Blogs can include images, videos and links and readers can usually leave comments. Blogs need updated regularly and with millions of blogs out there already, your blog needs to be special to stand out.