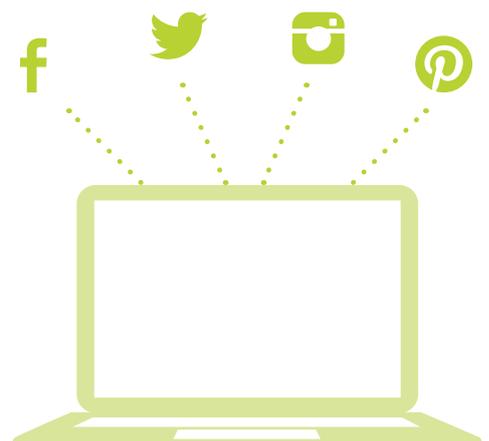




SOCIAL MEDIA & YOUR EVENT

Before, during and after

Your business has a **Facebook** page, a **Twitter** account and a **LinkedIn** presence. Depending on your market sector, you might also be on **Tumblr**, **Instagram**, **Pinterest**, **Google+** or any of the other geographic, professional or language-specific social networks. Marketing to social media might be second-nature to your organisation, but integrating social into a living, breathing real-time event adds a dimension that takes a new level of thought and management to succeed.



Using social media as an integral part of your event is so much more than sending event invitations on Facebook or tweeting a URL to register. A vertically integrated social media strategy based around a live event can provide real ROI before, during and a long time after the fact. What you need to be clear about is who your audience are, which networks they're on, and what they're prepared to do for you.



Thanks for sharing

The first thing to ensure is that you're communicating with your audience on the right channel. Each network has its own character, which affects the kind of material shared, the kind of brands and companies people pay attention to and how likely the audience is to publicly associate with your event. When people present themselves on social media, they do so in different ways according to the tone of the network.

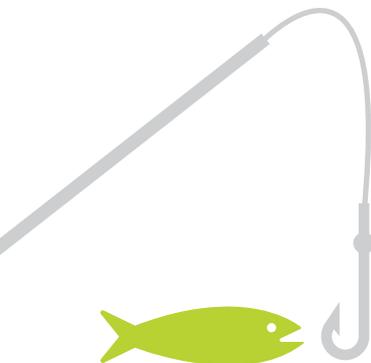
We all know that LinkedIn is the most formal of the big social networks. This is your customer in a suit, putting their best foot forward in the workplace. Facebook has a casual air, but belies the fact that everyone is carefully managing their appearance. Depending on industry sector, Twitter can be either a work tool to reinforce a form of personal branding, or a completely informal stream of consciousness. Pinterest has a reputation for leisure pursuits and domesticity. Both Instagram and Tumblr styles themselves leaders in culture, particularly visual. Understanding your target audience and the perception of your event in the market will help identify the most likely forum to communicate successfully.



Clickbait

Your social media presence is a great tool to draw people to your event. Start your promotion early to build anticipation. Build custom pages on your website that either provide a recap of a previous event or teasers about the next. Make it inviting, intriguing and above all, worth sharing.

Hit your database of previous attendees and your guest list with emails that lead to your social presence. Try to provide an incentive for people to both click through and share your information – discounts, content, and exclusivity – anything that would be perceived as a value-add. The trick to successful social marketing is very simple but very hard to get right; people will share content that makes them look intelligent, successful and interesting. Real success comes when you can identify and recruit the heavily socially connected parts of your audience to promote your content for you.



#iloveyouevent

Make sure that all of the mechanics of your live event's social presence are promoted way ahead of the date. This means that any hashtag, URL, YouTube channel, Facebook Page or Google+ Hangout that will be active during the show needs to be built in to all pre-event communication. Warm up the social platform you've built for the event in the lead-up by posting content to it and encouraging guests to do the same.

Keep in mind that you and your audience will keep adding more and more content to your chosen hashtag, page or channel before, during and after the event. Don't think of it as a disposable tool that will have served its purpose once the last audience member leaves the function – you are creating a marketing asset that you can continue to use for as long as it is relevant. Direct it, moderate its creation and it will continue to drive business as long as you choose to promote it.





Rush hour

Remember that social networks are powered by human behaviour, and because of that they run according to schedule defined by our daily habits. Each network has its own audience peaks and troughs during the day, which you need to take note of to make sure you're broadcasting your message in your audience's 'prime time'.

Research shows that Twitter and Facebook's peak viewing times are based around the working week. Maximum engagement is in business hours, peaking in the early afternoon. LinkedIn follows the same pattern as a business email inbox, busy first thing and last thing on workdays. Pinterest and Tumblr are used mostly in our leisure time – 8 PM to midnight and on weekends.

The medium is the message

With your audience spreading their attention across at least two, if not more, social networks, it's tempting to employ one of the many software platforms that offer some variation of a 'post it once, post it everywhere' cross-platform service. It's a seductive proposition; why should you manually post variations of the same information three or four times? Surely it's cleaner and more efficient to keep your message identical across networks?

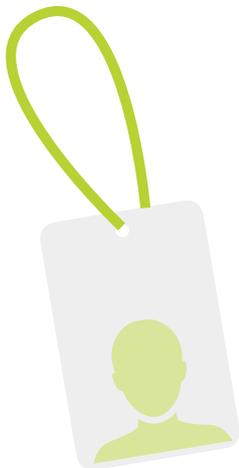
The problem is that each network has its own style, etiquette and tone, which in turn shapes the form of content posted. It's very common for people to link their Twitter feeds to their Facebook profiles, but this results in Facebook posts that feel too brief and impersonal. LinkedIn updates can be automatically shared to Twitter, but are too formal in tone for most of the Twitterati. Image and video attachments and links often don't survive cross-platform posting, which will frustrate your audience. As time consuming as it may sound, shaping the message according to the style and tone of the platform will provide the best results for your brand in the long term.



Access all areas

Good use of social media during an event enhances the experience for the attendees in the room and can capture the attention of your entire market. A lively Twitter feed displayed on screens in the venue encourages audience participation, but it also gives those who didn't attend a tantalising glimpse of what they're missing out on. User-generated images and video posted to Instagram and Vine will capture what it's like to be on the inside, again providing a powerful message to the social-only audience not to miss out next time.

Real-time social streams such as hashtags, or any other event-identified channel, need to be moderated live if they are being displayed or interacted with at the event. Event technical staff in co-operation with an organisation's marketing or communications personnel have to work together to ensure that no malicious, inaccurate or offensive content is accidentally broadcast to a mass audience. It's the double-edged sword of social media; in exchange for the possibility of almost unlimited promotion and publicity, you must guard against the possibility of your message being hijacked. Staging Connections have extensive experience in live moderation of social streams and can assist with this aspect at your event. If you're in doubt as to how this affects audience engagement, speak to a technical expert.





Second screening

Live event engagement on social media is mobile. The audience at the event will be participating via smartphone and tablet. Make it easy for them. Ensure that there's plenty of obvious information about, and links to, the correct app for their devices. If you have had an app developed especially for your event, ensure that you promote it in all pre-show communication and that instructions on how to install it are prominent throughout the venue.



Don't completely rely on your audience to document and content-create throughout your event – make sure you're getting material too. Capture it via webcast, record HD video and get great photos. Do all of this with a mind as to how you're going to continue to use the material as collateral, integrated with the social presence created for the show. Again, Staging Connections can work with you to extend the live and reach of your event.



Post production

If done correctly, the social channel you built for your event turns into a powerful marketing tool after the date has passed. Along with all of the pre-show teaser material and audience-created content before and during, you now add your own documentation and post-show wrap. Use YouTube or Vimeo to show off the highlights of your event, take to Twitter to brag about attendee numbers, thank everyone on Facebook for coming and poll the audience about their favourite content.

Email the potential audience for your next event linking to the social footprint of your last. If a potential customer is weighing whether or not to attend, positive social media posts are a convincing argument from a neutral third party. We are much more likely to trust a recommendation from a friend, family member or colleague than a direct communication from a brand or company. That's the heart of the power of social media – if you can gain your audience's trust, then they are ambassadors of your message to everybody that trusts them.



Interested in adding extra dimensions to your next event? Contact your Staging Connections representative or call us on **1800 209 099** or email marketing@stagingconnections.com