

DIVERSIFIED FARMERS' GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA

Using social media

Diversified businesses looking to bring in new customers need to create a social media strategy that is narrowly focused on their target audience to avoid wasting time and money. Many businesses are now aware of the need have an online presence but doing the wrong thing can turn people away. Before launching into myriad posts on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, you should take the following steps to make the most of your time spent online.

1. Identify the customers your business most wants to attract

Thinking about customers' age, location and interests will help you home in on which social media platform is best to reach them on. Facebook is still king but its likeability is waning. It is a directory rather than where people like to be. The average age of Facebook users is rising and the number of active users is falling, so if a business is specifically

looking to attract young people, it may want to consider alternatives such as Instagram.

You have to choose your platform carefully. There is no point being somewhere where you like being if that is not where your audience is. For businesses looking to attract corporate clients, such as those offering meeting rooms or commercial lets, LinkedIn would be a good starting point, while Pinterest should be investigated by those looking to market goods. Do not try and be everywhere to start with. Do one or two things well. It is quality over quantity. You can get some really good referrals from smaller audiences.

2. Tailor your content to your audience – and make it personal

Busy farmers who do not naturally feel at home online may be tempted to sub-contract the management of social media, but this should be avoided if possible. You have to know how you are going to attract your customers before you can tell someone else how to do it, or your content will be generic. People looking for inspiration should ask themselves what would be their ideal

Pros and cons of social media platforms

Platform	Positives	Negatives
Facebook	Best platform for targeting advertising at people in a particular locality. Large audience of older people will be attractive to many businesses.	Overall audience is dwindling, as young people desert it for newer alternatives. Advertising will cost €350/month to have a significant impact.
Twitter	Easy to reach a particular audience through the use of hashtags. Cheaper advertising than Facebook.	Audience is skewed towards men and people in professional jobs. Debate can often be bad tempered.
Instagram	Popular among young people and women.	Picture led, so can be difficult to transmit much information.
Snapchat	Popular with young people	Posts disappear rapidly so it can be hard to direct people to your website.
YouTube	Archives content in an accessible way for much longer.	Can be difficult to gain momentum with followers.
TikTok	Latest social media sensation – growing rapidly.	Audience still relatively small so far.

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customer's magazine choice? Then go and buy that magazine and examine the content.

A productive route for many family-run businesses is to talk about themselves, as customers respond more positively to businesses that do more than simply advertise their products.

This can begin long before a diversification is completed, as if you bring people along for the journey with you, they will be a more engaged audience by the time you do have something to sell.



Use social media to lead people to your own website.

3. Be consistent – and respond to people

Building up the identity you want your customers to see can take time, and one misstep can have serious consequences. If, for example, you want to target people to stay at your self-catering accommodation or B&B – with walking holidays as the main tourism market in your area, you could run into difficulties if you share testimonials from a hen party on social media.

Removing that content could see an uptake in interest and bookings from the

target market, as they will no longer be put off by it being associated with a very different type of getaway.

As well as public replies to posts, the more easily overlooked private messages should also be closely monitored and quickly responded to, as these will frequently be from customers with genuine enquiries.

4. Bring them back to resources you own

Social media is a tool to introduce your business to people, but it should be

treated as a means to an end, rather than the whole sales tool. Social media should drive potential customers to the business's own website, as this is an asset which you own and control, while social media is someone else's space, which is vulnerable to rapid change or even disappearing. Collecting email addresses and distributing a marketing email is another controllable way to maintain contact with people, while following the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into force across the EU on May 25, 2018.

Social media tips

- Make an effort to understand your audience and where they are – which social media platform is your target market most likely to be using?;
- be really open-minded if you are spending money to understand what works well – continually test – and don't be afraid to pull things which are not working;
- humanise your business – make it about the people involved and what you are doing on a day-to-day basis;
- think hard about the assets you can use to help your cause – if you are in a beautiful area make the most of your surroundings – if you have family members who are more online savvy, make use of their knowledge;
- collaborate with social media influencers or other businesses, which you have a common cause with;
- don't get into arguments with ranters; and,
- don't be inconsistent or infrequent – it is better not to post at all than do it rarely, which is why it is better to limit activity to a small number of platforms.

Further information

For further information please contact Barry Caslin, Teagasc, Rural Economy Development Programme at:
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The following resources are also helpful:

- 🌐 <https://covid19.failteireland.ie/sales-and-marketing/driving-domestic-sales/boosting-sales-with-social-media/>
- 🌐 www.localenterprise.ie/Find-Your-Local-Enterprise-Office/
- 🌐 www.etbi.ie/etbs/directory-of-etbs/
- 🌐 www.opt-in.ie

www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev

