

Superfast Business Wales



Business Guide

Using Social Media to Develop International Trade

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How to use Social Media to Develop International Trade

Introduction

Social media can be a great way to connect with customers abroad, building your brand, providing services, and reducing the distance between your company and its markets.

But as with any form of international business, conducting conversations around the globe on Facebook, Twitter and the like brings new challenges.

The good news – as so often with social media – is that most of these primarily need thought, rather than investment.

This guide will help you pinpoint and answer some key questions, though of course exactly how you implement international social media depends on what you're selling, where, and to whom.

Did you know?

If Facebook was a country it would be the **third most populated** in the world, ahead of the United States, with only China and India having higher populations.

Top brands can gain **more than a million** followers on Chinese social media service Sina Weibo.

There were **1.65 billion social accounts** accessing via mobile around the world in January 2015.

(We Are Social report 'Digital, Social and Mobile in 2015')



Understand

International Social Media – the Opportunities and Challenges

Social media's main benefits are the same internationally as at home. It can help you:

- Build your brand and your image with consumers and fellow professionals
- Promote products, services and offers
- Provide customer support

And the major steps in establishing a presence are also similar. You'll need to:

- Define your goals, and identify how social can help you achieve them
- Choose the right channels, in the right countries
- Set guidelines for content
- Choose people to manage day-to-day operations and regular updates
- Monitor constantly

A Superfast Broadband connection will make it much easier to manage this process, providing high bandwidth access to your chosen channels and constant access to your chosen monitoring and analytical tools.

While this guide looks largely at using social to reach consumers, many of its points also apply to B2B marketing via social media.

Adopt

Getting Started – Choosing Countries and Platforms

In any country, the simplest way to take advantage of a popular social media platform is to advertise on it. But while that may be a useful way of gaining some quick exposure and testing the waters, it gives you very few of the benefits of a real social media presence.

To engage your customers in genuine conversations, your presence most likely needs to be localised. Although your British page on Facebook.com (for example) can theoretically be seen by most of the world, in practice many people prefer to visit a page with more locally-oriented content, in their own language.

The best solution can be (taking Facebook as an example) a global page with updates related to your whole company and major brands, complemented by country-specific pages for



engagement directly with consumers. And if you have a large portfolio of very diverse products, you could make those pages brand-specific as well as country-specific.

The reality is a little more complex because people in some countries favour social networks little-known outside their borders, but as a general principle it's not a bad one.

Still, you can't launch fully-fledged social media activity in every country of the world simultaneously. So where do you start?

The answer is largely dictated by your business goals. There is little point spending time on social media in a country where you don't have, or intend to develop, sales (either via e-commerce or on the ground). But even that may still leave too many countries on your shortlist.

One rule of thumb suggests that when 5% of the fans (or followers, or contacts, etc.) on your global page come from a given country, it's a good prompt to consider spinning off a country-specific presence.

Language may also help to narrow down the list: managing social media for the United States or Australia is clearly going to be a lot easier for most British firms than doing it for Brazil or Japan.

However, it's worth noting three countries frequently spoken of as hot spots for international social media: Brazil, China and Russia. They are, of course, all part of the famous BRIC quartet of rapidly-developing economies, and if you're hoping to do business in any of them you should seriously consider using social.

In the next section we'll take a look at some of the leading social networks around the world, more to demonstrate their variety than to provide an exhaustive directory.

Getting Started – Practical Considerations

As we've seen, the basic principles of setting up an overseas social media presence aren't much different from doing it in the UK. But there are some extra details to consider.

Unless you are targeting other parts of the English-speaking world, language is obviously a huge issue:

- First, forget the idea of relying on machine translation (such as Google Translate). It's just not good enough for a professional-sounding message. At best you'll seem ignorant and uncommitted to the local market; at worst you'll say the opposite of what you meant
- So, you will need to either hire people fluent in the target country's language, or pay for translation



- And don't make the mistake of dividing the world up purely by language. There are strong variations: Spaniards and Argentinians both speak 'Spanish' but they do it very differently (and Spaniards from Barcelona probably prefer to be addressed in Catalan, anyway)

How far can you reuse your **UK social media content**? It may not be relevant in some countries. It could be confusing (for example with references to British popular culture), and it could even be offensive or fall foul of censorship. Consider, too: is your 'Britishness' a strength in the eyes of overseas customers, and therefore something you should emphasise, or is it irrelevant?

These issues then raise another key question: should you **do it all yourself from home base**, or hire social media managers to produce content and handle social relationships in the target country? And if so, how do you manage them unless you already have a subsidiary or trusted partner there?

Remember you need to **deliver what you promise**. If your business is not already set up to deal with international enquiries, shipping, returns, refunds and so on, there's little point in establishing a social presence which will rely on these working efficiently. Remember, too, that what matters is **local expectations of customer service**, not British ones.

You'll need to check out what the law says in each country, not just about business in general but about advertising, marketing and commercial communications. For example, making certain claims for your product may be illegal.

Exploit

Social Media Around the World

In this section we take a whistle-stop tour of some important social media services in major international markets. A few names have near-global presence – above all Facebook, but also Twitter and LinkedIn – yet there are also noteworthy local alternatives in many countries.

Detailed research is essential, as even the most popular social media services can fall by the wayside and be replaced by new ones; fortunately, there's a wealth of statistics and trend-spotting articles about social available for free online.

As always with social, choose the platforms whose users match your target market. Don't be swayed by technology features; however clever or impressive they may be, if you're reaching the wrong people, your effort is wasted.

Argentina

Argentines are among the world's heaviest users of mobile Internet. As a result the Facebook-owned **WhatsApp** is vastly popular, though **Facebook** itself also has strong support.



Australia

The social landscape in Australia generally resembles the rest of the English-speaking world.

Facebook and **YouTube** seem dominant; **Twitter** is a long way behind.

Belgium

Along with familiar international names, the Belgian-run **Netlog** is a popular site for youth both here and internationally.

Brazil

Brazilians are some of the world's most enthusiastic users of social, with **Facebook** and **Twitter** high on their lists. (The Google-owned **Orkut** was also very popular in Brazil until its closure last year.) Blogging is avidly pursued in much of Latin America, too.

Canada

Canada has the highest penetration of social media in the world (i.e. the largest percentage of adults who use it), according to some rankings. The sites Canadians favour are much the same as in the U.S.: **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Google+**, and **LinkedIn**.

China

More than any other major country, China differs from the rest of the world where social is concerned, in a large part because of government censorship – Facebook and Twitter are blocked, although some users still manage to access them. All the most significant Chinese networks are home-grown (and even on these every post has to be manually examined to check it doesn't infringe rules).

Sina Weibo is a Twitter-like micro-blogging site on an enormous scale, with hundreds of millions of users (although only a small minority post original content), and it must be seriously considered by anyone interested in joining the Chinese social conversation. One way to gain significant exposure through Sina Weibo quickly is via celebrity endorsement deals, which can be set up by advertising agencies operating in China.

Other major Chinese names appeal to specific demographics. **Qzone** is of similar size to Sina Weibo, and popular with the young. **Renren** is a good way to reach university students, while **Kaixin001** appeals to a white-collar working crowd.

East Asian social users in general are especially keen on sharing and downloading music and videos – often illegally, of course, but this gives an insight into the kind of content that can appeal.

France

Facebook again...and **Viadeo** for B2B networking.



Germany

Once again **Facebook** is a major social site here, with **Google+** also scoring highly. An important locally-created alternative is **Xing**, a LinkedIn competitor founded in Germany but now with international reach. German users are reputed to be especially concerned about privacy.

India

Like Brazil, India was a major territory for **Orkut** until its closure, and once more **Facebook** and **Twitter** seem to be filling the gap. Online gaming is also popular in India.

Italy

Facebook again...and **Twitter** and **LinkedIn**. Italy's domestic contenders are comparatively weak.

Japan

As in China, the Japanese market has been dominated more by local operators than by the internationals, although that is changing. **Mixi** is a major Japanese network but sign-up restrictions make it difficult for non-Japanese to access. **Facebook** is making some inroads into Mixi's territory but, unusually, **Twitter** is the better-established of the global giants in Japan.

Another leading local service is the smartphone-based **Line**, which also has substantial user numbers in East Asian countries such as Thailand and Indonesia.

Japanese internet users are said to be more willing than those in many countries to pay for online content.

Netherlands

Facebook and **YouTube** are the big names here, with **LinkedIn** and **Twitter** lagging behind.

Poland

Facebook again...but also **NK.pl**, a Poland-specific service.

Russia

Russians are very heavy users of social media. **Facebook** and (to a much lesser extent) **Twitter** are present, but the dominant site is **Vkontakte**, a local equivalent of LinkedIn. Also popular, although narrower in focus, is **Odnoklassniki**, a schoolmates-reunited site.

Censorship of social is not as harsh as in China but the Putin government has been slowly tightening its control.

South Korea

KakaoTalk is a social platform used by nearly all smartphone owners in South Korea, one of the most technology-hungry countries in the world. It should be considered along with more



mainstream choices like **Facebook**, which have been gaining ground at the expense of local operations such as **Cyworld**.

Spain

The local platform **Tuenti** was powerful in Spain but much of its lead, particularly among young people, has been eroded – especially by **Twitter**. Of course, **Facebook** is also popular. For B2B networking, **Viadeo** is strong, as in France.

United States

Unsurprisingly, **Facebook** absolutely dominates the U.S. social market, accounting for nearly 60% of site visits. **YouTube**, **LinkedIn** and **Google+** are among other important names.

Top Tips

- Consider timing carefully. Not only do time zones vary, so do working weeks and public holidays. This will affect when people are most likely to engage with social media services – and the kind of message they'll be receptive to.
- Measure and monitor the things that really matter. For example, retweets may be more significant than Twitter followers; actual postings on your Facebook page probably indicate more interest than mere likes. And try to find a way of gauging the tone of interactions, not just their quantity. Were customers pleased to chat, or angry?
- Use your website, emails, print and packaging to point people toward your social media accounts.
- It's worth registering your company name, and major brand or product names, on all the globe's most important social media services – even if you don't plan to use them yet.
- Study what other businesses are doing in your target markets, and learn from the big brands too. Coca-Cola, Liverpool FC and Starbucks are three with highly successful approaches to social media.
- Just as the major steps toward social success abroad are the same as at home, so are the no-no's. Never let your social media activities become inconsistent or dishonest. And don't fall victim to short-termism – give yourself time for success.
- Should your social media spokesperson be a man or a woman? You might want to say "it doesn't matter", but in some countries it certainly does.
- It's better to completely abandon a particular social presence (for example, a Facebook page) than to never update it or respond to messages.



NEXT STEPS

1. Register to attend a fully-funded Business Development Workshop.
www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/events
2. Make an appointment to see a Business Advisor who will help you create a personal action plan to grow your business.
www.business.wales.gov.uk/contact-us

For further information on Social Media take a look at:

See how other businesses in Wales have exploited Superfast Broadband
www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/superfast-success-stories

Find out how much your business could save with our
www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/savings-calculator

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