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BRIEFING 102

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## **A GUIDE TO RUNNING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS IN THE NHS**

This guide has been published to help NHS communication teams get the most from using social media in their campaigns. It covers three core areas of social media campaigns:

- alignment with the organisation's objectives and audiences
- content
- consistency.

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### **Key points**

- Align your campaign with your organisation's objectives.
  - Define your audience and prove they're using the social media channels you propose to use for the campaign.
  - Don't reinvent the wheel. When available, use nationally developed and evidence-based content.
  - Help your campaign generate support by providing excellent shareable content to staff and the public, for example the use of infographics and videos.
  - Maintain consistency of message across all channels.
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Top tip: Social media benefits from campaigns that have narrow objectives. For example, promote the existence of our COPD community care team to carers with social media profiles.

## ALIGNMENT

### Objectives

Every campaign should help your organisation achieve its objectives; social media campaigns are no different. Aligning your social media campaign to organisational and team objectives also helps you evaluate the campaign (see our [\[2\] Best practice in social media – measurement and evaluation](#) briefing for more on evaluation).



### Audience

The social media channels you use should be aligned with the ones your target audience uses. As you plan your social media campaign try to answer the question, “How can I prove our target audience is using this channel?” It may be that a local or national community of your target audience exists on social media already, or that you are able to search for people with relevant interests or experiences via tools such as Facebook’s [\[2\] Create an Ad](#) and [\[2\] LinkedIn’s search](#) function.



### Channels

When you are planning and implementing your social media campaign be careful to consider whether it is aligned with other channels the organisation is using. Is social media saying one thing and being contradicted by the email newsletter?

### Timing with other campaigns

In the NHS, multiple campaigns run alongside each other. For example, stop smoking, better use of A&E, cancer screening and healthy eating campaigns all run at the same time. Occasionally these campaigns’ messages compete with one another. For example, the Be Clear on Cancer campaign message, “If you’ve had a cough for more than three weeks you should see your doctor”, could compete with a campaign to try and get more people to use pharmacies for treating their winter colds.

Ensure your social media campaign aligns with other campaigns around it and their timing and messages are as aligned as possible in the complex world of healthcare.

## CONTENT

### Length

Content on social media differs significantly from content on traditional channels. First and foremost the length of social media content must be shorter, and any links to further content shouldn't (in general) take your audience from a ten-second read to a ten-page document.

When creating your content aim to get your primary message(s) across in 140 characters for Twitter (with space for a hashtag) and 250 for Facebook. Also, try explaining your primary message in 50-70 words on your website.

### Multimedia

Visually engaging content gets more engagement online than text alone. In research looking at how verified accounts on Twitter differed in their engagement levels, Twitter found a tweet with a photo averaged a  $\uparrow$  35 per cent boost in retweets. Photos also get  $\uparrow$  far and away the largest interaction rates on Facebook.

Multimedia content needn't be an elaborate video or lengthy podcast. Pictures, infographics and short videos (<60 seconds) are all content types that could be developed in-house.



### National content

National campaigns like NHS Employers' flu fighter develop evidence-based content to share online such as tweets, website banners and pictures. Local NHS organisations should always use relevant national content to maintain the campaign's consistency and use local resources efficiently. See the Consistency section for more.



Top tip: Make sure you don't link a short tweet to a lengthy page or document. Moving from 140 characters to 1,000s will lose your audience.

Top tip: Creating multimedia content may be as easy as repurposing charts and graphs from a document.

Top tip: Don't forget engagement is a neutral term. A comment on a Facebook page can be negative or positive. Be sure to measure and evaluate the sentiment of any engagement with your campaign and feed this into the development of the message(s).

## Tell an emotive story

Another way to help your target audience engage with your campaign is to tell an emotive story. Social media networks are based on connections between people, and people like and engage with content that develops a story and shows the campaign's impact on people. For example, you could use a [Patient Opinion](#) example that backs up your campaign's message.



## Lower barriers to action

Interaction on social media can be as easy as pressing one button. NHS campaigns are often about complex issues that require more than a button push to change behaviours or beliefs. However, to help people engage with your campaign it is a good idea to lower the barriers to action. For example, it may be your social media campaign asks followers to retweet the campaign's priority message and you use your other channels to promote more detailed information.

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## CONSISTENCY

### Message

It is important to ensure your message is consistent outside of your social media channels. Any press release, web page and articles in the staff newsletter must use the same messages as on social media.

This goes so far as the tone being the same. Tone on social media is often more informal and friendly than traditional communications. In order to achieve a consistent message it is important the tone used on social media isn't lost in any campaign material offline or on web pages.

## Images

Give the campaign a consistent visual brand by using the same images across all channels and make sure the images form a cohesive group that add context and depth to any accompanying text.

## Hashtags

Using hashtags on Twitter and Facebook are great ways to help add context to your content. Hashtags can also help collate campaign content, replies and engagement in one place. Here are four top tips for using a hashtag for your campaign:

- 1 Keep it consistent. If there is a national hashtag, use it. You can place a separate hashtag like #leeds elsewhere in the text to localise it.
- 2 Keep it short.
- 3 Use it across all your channels. For example highlight it on your campaign web page, in press releases and on posters.
- 4 If your hashtag is an acronym, explain it.

When developing your social media campaign use these three words to stay on the right track:

- alignment
- content
- consistency.

## Have fun!

## NHS Employers

The NHS Employers organisation is the voice of employers in the NHS, supporting them to put patients first. Our vision is to be the authoritative voice of workforce leaders, experts in HR, negotiating fairly to get the best deal for patients.

We help employers make sense of current and emerging healthcare issues to ensure that their voice is front and centre of health policy and practice. We keep them up to date with the latest workforce thinking and expert opinion, providing practical advice and information, and generating opportunities to network and share knowledge and best practice.

We work with employers in the NHS to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

The NHS Employers organisation is part of the NHS Confederation.

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