

# A SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT FOR THE NHS

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NOVEMBER 2016



## Social media

noun plural but singular or plural  
in construction

Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

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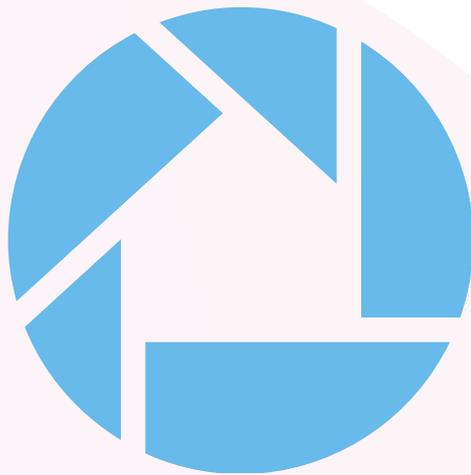
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# Introduction

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**The pace and scale of change that social media has brought to society has been significant, and will continue to be. In the NHS, the use of social media has evolved from communications teams tweeting press releases, to staff and leaders at all levels taking part in spontaneous and structured conversations across multiple platforms.**

**Regional and national campaigns are now expected to consider whether social media provides a way of engaging with their target audiences, while media teams care what journalists are tweeting and not just what they file. Social media, and the culture surrounding it, is changing the nature of how people work in the NHS and beyond.**



## Social network

noun

A dedicated website or other application which enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, images, etc.

### Social media – what’s all the fuss about?

- **99 per cent** of 16 to 24 year olds use social media<sup>2</sup>
- **64 per cent** of those aged over 16 use social media, up from 45 per cent in 2013<sup>2</sup>
- **71 per cent** of all UK adults access the internet on a mobile phone<sup>2</sup>
- **86 per cent** of the population use the internet, up from 78 per cent in 2013<sup>2</sup>
- more than **seven in ten adults** in the UK who go online (72 per cent) **have a social media profile**, an increase from 66 per cent in 2013<sup>2</sup>
- in the UK the unique audiences of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are 39m, 21.8m and 20.9m respectively<sup>1</sup>
- YouTube is used by **82 per cent of the UK’s online population**<sup>1</sup>.

Since the first edition of this toolkit in 2014, social media use by staff across the NHS has grown. However, communications teams often remain the source of advice and content when organisations review their social media practices and policies. Across the NHS, communications staff are helping to write social media policies, plans and strategies, and supporting colleagues to use social media effectively.

This is why we have put this toolkit together. It contains all you need as a communications lead, team or organisation to review and refresh how you are using social media. It focuses on aligning your work on social media to the wider objectives of your organisation and provides a six stage process to structure your review.

This toolkit:

- provides you with a framework to help reflect on whether the way you’re using social media is right for your organisation
- gives a selection of social media template policies and processes, to save you time writing and updating your own.

You won’t find easy answers. Social media, like any other communications channel, requires you as a content producer to think about your aims and objectives, whether you have the content that matches the communication channel’s culture and whether your target audience is using that channel. You will, however, find steps to take you towards answering all of these questions.

### Why does social media matter to the NHS?

NHS staff and the public use digital communications and social media in their everyday lives – for chatting with friends, comparing services and discussing their health. The NHS must keep up with them or face increased problems in getting the right information to the right audiences at the right time. For example, 32 per cent of students, 45 per cent of employed people and 39 per cent of retirees have used the internet to find information to improve their health<sup>3</sup>. If the NHS does not use digital communications to provide information for these online audiences, what other online sources might audiences use?

How the NHS ensures these audiences can access easy to understand and useful information about their healthcare will be crucial in putting patients at the centre of the healthcare system.

### Resourcing social media

Social media is free monetarily, but not free when it comes to your time. It is important to be clear from the beginning how much time you can commit to social media work. Some budget is recommended for paid advertising on social media platforms. This has already shown promise across NHS settings due to its low-cost, highly targeted nature.

Social media should complement rather than replace other communication channels. It will affect the amount of time you can spend on more traditional forms of communications, but it will generally be time well spent.

1 Ofcom (2016) The communications market report <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/cmr/cmr16>

2 Ofcom (2015) The communications market report <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/cmr/cmr15>

3 OxlIS (2013) Cultures of the internet: the internet in Britain.

# A process to help you review your social media strategy

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**The six-stage process outlined in this document will help you review how your organisation is currently using social media. Use the accompanying worksheets as you work through each stage.**

**Completing all six stages should take you about two hours.**

**To get the most from this you should read your organisation's strategy to know what the organisation-wide objectives are. The process is something you can use every six months to help keep your efforts on track.**



# STAGE ONE

## Identify your drivers to use social media and your aim when using it

See the worksheet:



See also:  
“NHS leaders encouraged to communicate online” [↗](#)

### Identify what is driving you and your organisation to use social media

Here are some examples of drivers:

- 1 Driven from the top** – your chief executive or other board members want it to happen, because of staff feedback, an open and transparent agenda or because they have seen many of their peers using social media.
- 2 Driven from a specific audience** – your organisation wants to engage with a particular audience online, or they want to engage with you.
- 3 Patient and public feedback** – good or bad reviews shared on social media platforms are pressuring your organisation to engage with them online.
- 4 Driven by peer pressure** – everyone else is using social media.

Only the fourth one, peer pressure, is considered an unacceptable reason to be using or considering using social media. To use or not to use social media is a question that should be answered like any other that impacts on the NHS’ resources – does it help the organisation achieve its objectives? With that in mind, a chief executive who wants to be online because their peers are will want to be confident about what being there does for the organisation’s objectives.

**Work sheet**

Make a note of your organisational drivers.

### Describe what your organisation aims to achieve by using social media

Write down what should be achieved if you were to use social media. This aim is the foundation upon which all subsequent social media plans and work are built.

Examples of potential social media aims:

- By using social media, NHS Anywhere aims to build a community of patients online to collect their feedback and knowledge of our services.
- By using social media, NHS Anywhere aims to help staff and the public engage with our annual general meetings, annual members’ meetings and governor elections.
- By using social media, NHS Anywhere aims to engage online with local pressure groups to help discuss NHS Anywhere’s information on particular subjects and to correct misinformation.

By linking all future work on social media back to one or more aims, you will help ensure that the time and effort you put into your social media work will not go to waste.

**Work sheet**

Write down what should be achieved if you were to use social media.

**Work sheet**

Consider if your proposed aim is achievable and warranted.

# STAGE TWO

## Align your social media objectives to your organisation's objectives

See the worksheet:

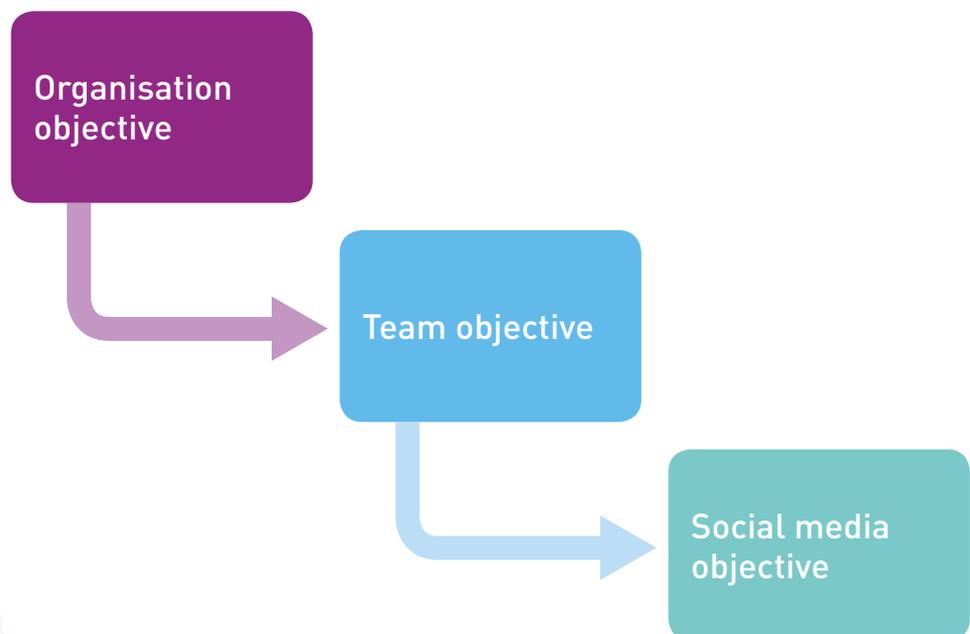


### Does your social media aim align with your wider objectives?

Work not aligned to the organisation's overall strategy is often wasted. Using social media may be free monetarily but it is not free to resource – time and effort are needed to work on social media just as they are on drafting and issuing press releases.

As communications leads and teams have to do more for less across the NHS, careful thought and planning is needed to ensure the time you spend on social media will help your organisation achieve its objectives.

Social media work tends to benefit from narrow objectives. Online communities will rarely want to discuss everything going on at your organisation, but will cluster around specific topics of interest. These communities of interest should be considered when forming your aims and objectives.



“Communities will rarely want to discuss everything going on at your organisation, but will cluster around specific topics of interest”

**Work sheet** Identify which of the organisation’s and team’s objectives your proposed aim could help achieve.

If your social media aim doesn’t align with your organisation’s objectives, then stop and revisit it. Remember, you don’t have to use social media – only use it if it will help your organisation achieve its objectives.

## Does your social media aim align itself with your team’s objectives?

As each team has a finite resource, their work should be defensible when asked, ‘How does this piece of work help the organisation meet its objectives?’<sup>4</sup> This is echoed in the Government Communications Network guidance on digital channels and social media, which states that government communications work: “Should be conducted in an economic and appropriate way, and should be able to justify the costs as expenditure of public funds.”<sup>5</sup> The NHS will clearly be held to a similar standard.

**Work sheet** Consider how your team’s work helps to achieve your organisation’s objectives.

**Work sheet** Also think about how social media could help achieve those objectives.

## What are your SMART social media objectives?

**Work sheet** Can you produce a range of specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound (SMART) objectives? Think about when you will evaluate your work to see whether it has been a success, and what you can measure when you come to evaluate your work.

<sup>4</sup> Research shows that when objectives run through an organisation from boardroom to ward and show how each job helps the organisation achieve its aims the organisation performs better. West, M and Dawson, F (2012) *Employee engagement and NHS performance*. The King’s Fund.

<sup>5</sup> Government Communication Service, *Propriety guidance*: <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/propriety/>



# STAGE THREE

## Map your online stakeholders

See the worksheet:



When you have worked out what you're aiming for when using social media, linked it to your organisation's and team's objectives, and estimated the resource implications, it is time to work out who you want to engage with online.

By mapping where your stakeholders are active online, you reduce the likelihood of starting up a social media presence that misses its target audience.

This stage should also help you focus on who your most important stakeholders are. Tight resources mean hard decisions.

### Sources of information

Sources of information on who is and isn't online can come from a variety of places. Some of these are shown below.

#### Facebook advert creator [↗](#)

To use this you will need a profile to login, but you will not need to pay anything to get an estimated audience size.

Go to create an ad > login > scroll down and input a target audience's details. For example, male, 34 years old, location – Manchester, interests – diabetes > see how many profiles Facebook estimates for this demographic.





## Department for Culture, Media & Sport, Taking part survey [↗](#)

This survey includes useful demographic break-downs of users on each of the major social media platforms - including age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation and disability status.



## Ofcom, annual communications market report [↗](#)

This is an in-depth look at communications trends across the country, covering TV, radio, the internet and telecoms. It is a great place to consider national trends and to get age, socio-demographic group and device ownership statistics.

## Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) [↗](#)

Using a scalable sample of the UK's population, this report looks at emerging trends of internet use. It has some great socio-economic data within it. Importantly, it also goes into detail on why non-users and ex-users of the internet don't use the internet. It is a potentially powerful set of data and ideas if combined with patient statistics, for example, around questions on A&E attendance.

## Office for National Statistics (ONS), internet users statistical bulletin [↗](#)

This yearly bulletin breaks down internet users into demographic and geographic groups. It provides useful data on NHS audiences such as older people and people with disabilities.

**“Make a note of which platforms your top five stakeholders are using. These are the platforms that would be most beneficial for you to use”**

### Twitter search [↗](#)

You do not need a Twitter account to use this functionality, although having one will enable you to see people’s or organisations’ lists and favourite tweets. Type in your organisation’s name, what results do you find? Are patients, the media or the public already talking about your organisation on Twitter? Below are a few search term tips:

- Many people will not know the official statutory name of an NHS organisation, for example, “Anywhere NHS Foundation Trust”. So, search for the colloquial name of the organisation instead.
- Input your town, city or county and “NHS” into the search field. People will not necessarily name specific organisations on Twitter and might instead say, “The NHS in Bristol is ...”
- The public might not even use “NHS” in their comments due to the ubiquity of NHS services across the country. Many people may just use the words “doctor”, “nurse” or “hospital” along with a place name.

### Google Alerts [↗](#)

This is an easy-to-use, free service that monitors the mention of keywords and provides daily or weekly alerts of those mentions. It is a great starting point for building your evidence base. It will alert you to those talking about your organisation online.

Despite the existence of all of this data, additional sources of data such as self-reported use of social media platforms by patients in patient feedback or membership registration forms can add a valuable layer of local data. What current processes could you change to get this data?

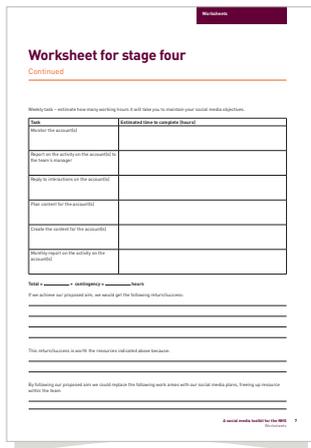
#### Work sheet

Make a note of which platforms your top five stakeholders are using. These are the platforms that would be most beneficial for you to use.

# STAGE FOUR

## Resources and possible reward

See the worksheet:



### Plan the time it will take you to set up your social media work

Managing an existing social media presence or starting a new one can take up different amounts of time.

**Work sheet** Plan the number of work hours you are expecting to spend on social media as you set up your organisation’s presence and policies.

**Work sheet** The worksheet contains some of the common tasks done when setting up a social media presence.

### Estimate the amount of time you think your social media work will take up each week

When you have set up your social media approach, put the work in to source, create and publish the content you have planned to post on your chosen platforms. Find time to monitor, measure, evaluate and report on activity on your account(s). Depending on the scale of your aim, this number might be consistent, have peaks and troughs or have a spike followed by a reduction in activity. For example, in the case of an online element to a 12-week consultation.

**Work sheet** Examples of potential weekly tasks are given in the worksheet.

Think about what contingency you might need if your social media accounts suddenly become busy, for example during a major incident. Plan what will help you deal with any spikes in activity. See thoughts on social media activity during a crisis in Appendix E.

### What will you get in return for using your resources?

In stage two (page 5), you linked your social media work to your organisation’s objectives. Now is the time to gauge how much your social media work will contribute to your organisation’s objectives:

- Will spending those resources on social media instead of other work lead to better outcomes for the organisation?
- What will success look like if you achieve your aim?

**Work sheet** Take your time and work through questions nine and ten with care.

Weigh up the risks and potential rewards.



## If the resource required is greater than expected, what work that you are doing now could be stopped?

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Using social media is not just another way of sending out information; it can be another way of working entirely.

If your social media plans from stages one, two and three are proving to be resource intensive, perhaps you are beginning to form a proposal of changing the way you work.

### Work sheet

Ask yourself whether what you plan to do using social media could replace some of the work you are already doing.



# STAGE FIVE

## What is your content and where is it going to come from?

See the worksheet:



Content is the king of the online world. Without it, you have nothing.

This might be an exaggeration, but without anything to publish what have you got? Developing channel-specific content is important. What works for a board meeting most likely won't work on social media.

Every organisation will have to work with their content producers and their own personalities to decide what is best for them.

- What are you going to send out to your stakeholders on social media?
- Can you write to a 140 character limit and still make it engaging?
- Where can you get engaging pictures and videos from?

**Work sheet** Consider how you could change the way you currently work, to create media-friendly content.

**Work sheet** Are you able to produce videos to meet the rising trend for consuming multimedia? Videos get the most engagement of all online content.

**Work sheet** Is the communications team the sole publisher of social media content or are colleagues across the organisation encouraged to use their social media profiles to talk about the organisation's work as well?

**Work sheet** If so, who has control over any sign-off processes? Do you even need a sign-off process?

## Align your content with your social media aim

Your content plans should be closely aligned to your overall aim when using social media. If you're aiming to inform the public and patients about a consultation, then how will you turn the complex 12-week process, and processes before and after it, into content that can be easily shared and understood online?

**Work sheet** What supporting content, for example infographics or videos, might you need to add depth to your blogs, updates or tweets?

Content takes time to create. You may want to revisit your aim and narrow its parameters a little to make sure your plans remain within your resource limitations. You can create masses of content for a small audience and receive great feedback, but leave a larger audience with poorer content. Look at what content you already have that could be re-purposed. For example, graphs and charts in board papers.

**Work sheet** Consider whether your content plans are warranted for the size and importance of the target audience.

“In the last 18 months more and more individual staff members from across the healthcare sector have begun using social media professionally”

## Social media and professionalism

Your organisation will have to decide whether it wants to promote individual staff members' use of social media in a professional capacity, as well as have a corporate profile on social media platforms. This toolkit's appendices contain templates for staff-facing social media policies to help you set parameters and start a discussion within your organisation.

In the last 18 months, more and more individual staff members from across the healthcare sector have begun using social media professionally. Communities such as **#nhssm** (NHS social media) and **#wenurses** continue to grow and introduce NHS staff to Twitter and blogging, in particular.

In our briefing, 'Increasing staff engagement with social media' [\[2\]](#), we discussed how engaging and helping staff who are already using social media can lead to gains across the organisation. An important challenge when starting to use social media professionally across your organisation is how to help the people already using it without isolating those who are not using it.

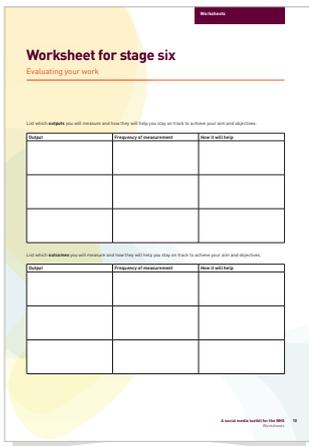
You can also get some more ideas of how to do this in practice from a blog post by Rachel Royall, director of communications at Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust on how the trust ran a social media week for colleagues. [\[2\]](#)



# STAGE SIX

## Evaluating your work

See the worksheet:



As marketing on the internet grew in popularity in the early 2000s, a commonly cited benefit was the ease of measuring the return on investment (ROI) when using a digital format. However, the ROI of changing health behaviours and beliefs using digital communications has not become much easier to measure.

### Output versus outcome

Evaluating your work can be broken down into measuring:

- what **outputs** you have created and evaluated – for example, 20 tweets sent to 500 followers
- what those outputs have or haven't **achieved** – for example, of the 20 tweets, five elicited a response.

### Measuring

You might measure the average number of tweets your account sends per week, or the number of tweets with multimedia attachments sent each week. You could measure the number of blog posts you publish each month, or the amount of time you spend writing content.

These sorts of output measurement will help you when you come to evaluate your work. They may be helpful statistics, but ask yourself the 'so what' question, then set about evaluating.

### Evaluating

When evaluating, put together your output measurements with engagement measurements and knowledge from outside of the platform, for example, "On [date] there was a big national media story on A&E waiting times", and make a judgement on whether your work has led to the desired outcome.

Whatever you evaluate, be it Twitter, Facebook, a blog, a website, an e-newsletter, forum or other forms of digital communication, be sure to measure **engagement** and not just **pure outputs**.

“When evaluating, put together your output measurements with engagement measurements and knowledge from outside of the platform”

For example, you notice one week that you tweeted less than usual but received more retweets than usual. You find that a particular piece of content about the maternity consultation process led to the increased engagement. Viewing the web page analytics shows more people visited that page after the retweets and spent, on average, three minutes on the page.

You would then consider whether this content and the engagement with it helps you achieve one of your social media objectives. Remember, without having set your objectives in the first place you cannot tell whether you have achieved your goals as you did not articulate them beforehand.

Suggested further reading on the topic of measuring and evaluating social media work is a post on the Government Digital Services blog: *Social media – must we measure?* [\[2\]](#) and our briefing *Best practice in social media measurement and evaluation* [\[2\]](#)

**Work sheet**

Measure those social media actions, for example ‘likes’, ‘follows’, sign-ups or page views, the user has to consciously decide to do. Coupled with your SMART objectives (see stage two), measuring engagement will guide you to your outcomes.

**Work sheet**

Use the table in the worksheet to list what you will measure and what you will use to evaluate your work.

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- 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.

## Acknowledgements

This toolkit was drafted by Alex Talbott, Managing Partner at Super Ant. Contact Alex on Twitter @a\_double\_tt or via alex@superant.co.uk.

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