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BRIEFING 106

HR AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE NHS: THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR HR DIRECTORS AND MANAGERS

Since we published our first briefing on HR and social media in the NHS in 2013, social media use has continued to gather pace and scale across the UK with the trend in growth seen in both our personal and working lives. This briefing aims to help with integrating social media across your organisation and covers three key areas:

- 1. Recruitment:** Social media provides organisations with the opportunity to build a digital, sharable employee value proposition (EPV) and search for and directly approach candidates for their vacancies.
- 2. Staff engagement:** Social media provides a way of communicating to thousands of staff in a quick, personal and engaging manner. Leaders across the NHS are now using social media to help them publically praise the great work of their teams and listen to their feedback.
- 3. HR policy:** Discussing social media use at induction, in training and providing support in disciplinary cases can help staff stay safe online at work and at home.

Key points

- The next generation of NHS staff will never have known a world without the internet or mobile phones.
 - 64 per cent of the UK adult population say they use social media.
 - The content you share on social media shouldn't simply be lifted from your other channels. The content should be specifically designed for the platform it is shared on and the target audience.
 - Staff have a responsibility to behave online within the bounds of their professional and organisational policies. As Europe's largest employer, NHS organisations should consider how they can support staff to stay safe online.
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BACKGROUND

This briefing is aimed at HR professionals across the NHS, in both provider and commissioning organisations. [You can find further briefings, social media guidance, top tips and statistics on our website.](#)

SOCIAL MEDIA STATISTICS

The UK’s total digital audience stands at 50.3 million people (March 2016)¹, up from 47.5 million in 2015. Figure 1 shows the digital audience of a range, but not all, of social media platforms used in the UK, with comparison between April 2015 and April 2016.

Unique audience (millions) and reach as a % of total digital audience

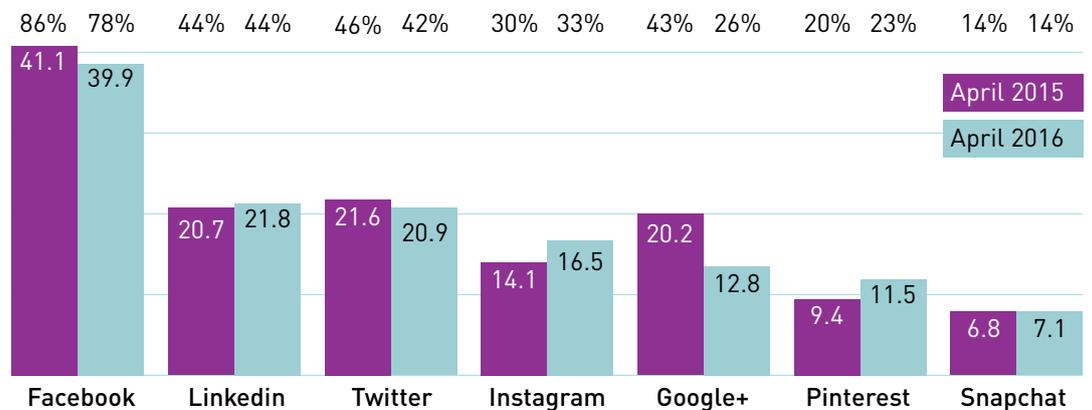


Figure 1: The unique audience of selected social media platforms shown in millions of people and as a percentage of total digital audience. [Source: Ofcom \(2016\), The communications market report, Figure 5.2, p181.](#)

64 per cent of UK adults aged 16 and over say they use social media each week. The level of use differs greatly across age groups (figure 2).

“Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the UK with a unique audience of 38.9m people”

Reach and proportion of time spent on social media (%)

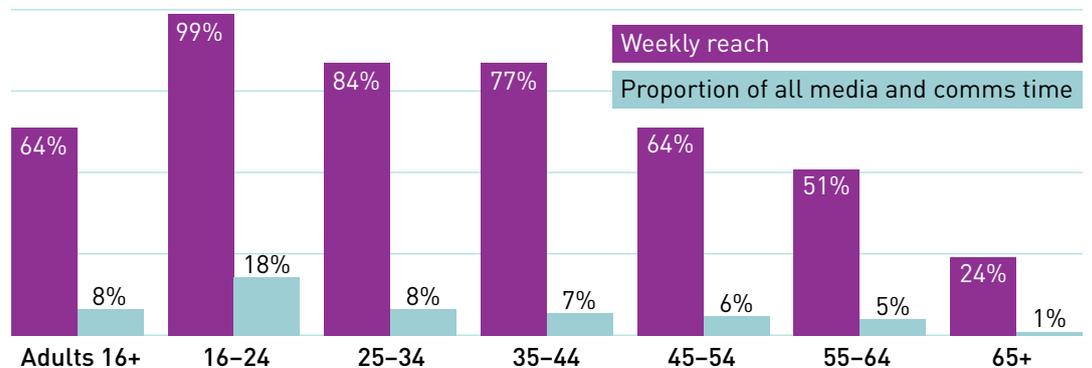


Figure 2: Social media use decreases with increasing age (the tallest bars). It is nearly ubiquitous in the 16-24 age group while one quarter of all 65+ year olds use it every week. Reach is defined as the percentage of the total digital audience. [Source: Ofcom \(2016\), The communications market report, Figure 5.4 page 183.](#)

“Facebook offers NHS organisations a variety of ways in which to find and engage prospective candidates”

RECRUITMENT

Social media profiles and networks can represent whole organisations, departments, teams and individual people. In turn they create the opportunity to search, contact and recruit candidates directly via social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the UK with a unique audience of 38.9m people, 17m more than LinkedIn in second place (see figure 1).

Most people use Facebook for a personal (non-work) profile. This means any use of Facebook by NHS organisations for recruitment has to match the personal and informal tone of Facebook's user for it to work.

Facebook offers NHS organisations a variety of ways in which to find and engage prospective candidates:

- 1. Pages:** In-page messaging gives a direct channel for recruiters to talk directly with potential job applicants. [🔗](#) Find out how to turn on page messaging on Facebook's help pages.
- 2. Groups:** Facebook offers public, closed (request to join) or secret (invite only) groups. Closed groups can be a good way of building a network of people who are interested in working at your organisation. By requesting to join a closed jobs group they also self-select themselves for you. [🔗](#) Find out more at Facebook's help centre.
- 3. Adverts:** Facebook Adverts can be targeted to local area(s), age ranges, education and interests. They are cheaper than print adverts and you can start with as little as £10, [🔗](#) you can find further information on Facebook's business page.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn has a unique audience of 21.8m in the UK with a growing number of NHS staff signing up to the platform².

In comparison to Facebook, LinkedIn is designed and used as a professional network. It is based around a digital version of someone's CV. There are three main ways NHS organisations can use LinkedIn to find and engage prospective candidates:

- 1. Company pages:** The centre of an organisation's presence on LinkedIn. HR team members can be made administrators for the page. There is also an option of paying for a [🔗](#) specific careers page.
- 2. Candidate search:** Using [🔗](#) Recruiter Lite on LinkedIn you can find candidates via 15+ premium search filters and contact them using up to 30 InMail messages per month. Plenty to help you get started.
- 3. Job slots (adverts):** These targeted job adverts can be sent out to LinkedIn users who match your requirements. [🔗](#) You can find out more about how they were successfully used in the Cambridge University Hospitals case study.

TOP TIP:

Images and short (less than 30 seconds) videos boost engagement with your social media posts. Try to use visual elements whenever possible.

“NHS organisations using Twitter for recruitment need to make their content relevant to an audience looking for the very latest information”

Twitter

Twitter is the third most popular social media platform in the UK with a unique audience of 20.9m people.

Twitter is a place to find and share time-sensitive news, views and opinions. NHS organisations using Twitter for recruitment need to make their content relevant to an audience looking for the very latest information.

Twitter can be used by NHS organisations' recruitment teams in three ways:

- 1. Broadcasting:** Not everyone who would like to work in the NHS knows about NHS Jobs. This is especially true for administrative roles. Posting your job roles on Twitter along with intelligent use of mentions and hashtags can increase your job advert's audience.
- 2. Hashtags:** Using hashtags such as #wenurses #radiology and #nhsjobs will help you increase the half-life of your tweet (how long it might be seen by others) and target the job advert at specific groups of professionals.
- 3. Adverts:** Twitter Ads can be targeted in many ways including by location, gender, interests, device type, keywords and more. Like Facebook, they are cheaper than print adverts and you can start with as little as £10. [🔗](#) Find out more on Twitter's business page

“Multimedia and multi-channel strategies in recruitment give you the ability to reach beyond immediate networks and package employee value proposition digitally”

Digital Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

The use of multimedia and multi-channel strategies in recruitment is giving innovative NHS organisations the ability to reach beyond their immediate networks and package their employee value proposition digitally. For example, providing video, pictures and blogs from staff talking about why they love working for their organisation.

The Millom Health Action Group showcased their EVP digitally through creation of a recruitment video. To support their local community, the group produced a video showing off all that Cumbria and the Millom community had to offer prospective GPs. Its success secured the recruitment of four GPs, securing primary care services for the people of Millom, without any further advertising. [🔗](#) Find out more on Fab NHS stuff.

A crucial learning point is that great social media content is designed specifically for use online and tailored to each platform.

TOP TIP:

You can use information from an applicant's online profile(s) during shortlisting and interview as long as you do not discriminate on the grounds of age, sex, disability, race, marital status, religion and belief or sexual orientation.

“Great social media content is designed specifically for use online and tailored to each platform”



“Leaders and staff across the NHS are using their social media profiles to give an insight into their work and praise the work of their colleagues”

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Leaders and staff across the NHS are using their social media profiles, especially Twitter, to give an insight into their work and praise the work of their colleagues. This use of social media helps the organisation build and maintain its EVP by personalising the organisation’s vision and linking the work people are doing to strategic objectives.



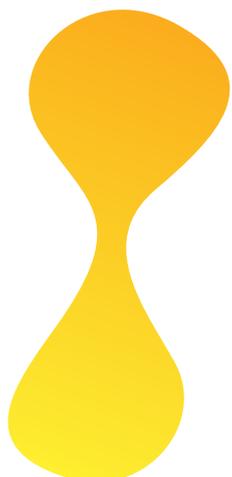
Figure 3: Dr Adrian Bull, Chief Executive of East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust praises and promotes the work of his staff, and links it to the transformation being undertaken to better join-up health and social care.



Figure 4: Melanie Walker, Chief Executive of Devon Partnership NHS Trust helps build the trust’s employee value proposition by highlighting Exeter cathedral and the proximity of the beach.



Figure 5: It isn’t all chief executives either, here Hilary Kircher, Clinical and Operational lead for Outpatient Physiotherapy at East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust shows her pride in the team’s work and celebrates one colleague’s incredible length of service!



“The amount of online feedback from patients continues to rise, offering organisations the opportunity to share and celebrate day-to-day staff achievements”

“In the large majority of cases social media use by staff is without incident and helps to build a wider and stronger network of NHS staff and patients”

“Training should go beyond helping people understand social media from a work perspective and give information to understand such technologies in personal lives too”

Patient feedback

United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust’s (ULHT) closed (request to join) Facebook group has over 2,500³ staff members. The patient experience team share patient feedback with the group and have seen a real community build up on the group which has helped “staff morale flourish”. [🔗](#) Find out more about the benefits of this approach in ULHT’s blog post on Patient Opinion.

Staff feedback

Social media’s popularity has opened up a good potential channel for staff to share their feedback with senior management.

As social media and chat apps evolve, there is a growing trend to look at how they can be used to help staff (frontline in particular) to feed into organisation news and plans. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook messenger offer an opportunity to provide staff with a way of communicating with senior managers which doesn’t require them to log on to a PC.

MANAGING STAFF USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In the large majority of cases social media use by staff is without incident and helps to build a wider and stronger network of NHS staff and patients across the country.

However, as HR teams will be aware, unfortunately some people’s use of social media in and/or outside of work premises and time have led to them being dismissed. Therefore it is vital NHS organisations provide a set of behavioural guidelines which help people understand what is and isn’t acceptable as a member of NHS staff. Through their HR policies NHS organisations have a brilliant opportunity to help their staff use social media professionally and personally.

Induction

Covering social media use in staff inductions should extend far beyond: “Here’s the policy, please read it”. Induction gives the organisation, departments and teams the opportunity to highlight areas of best practice on social media, introduce new staff to current staff who use social media for work and promote professional bodies’ social media guidance.

[🔗](#) You can find a list of links to the professional bodies’ social media guidance on our social media web pages.

Training

For those staff already at the organisation, offering social media training can help them develop new skills and understand what good and poor behaviour looks like online.

Such training should look to go beyond helping people understand social media and digital communications from a work perspective and give them information and support to understand and use such technologies in their personal lives too.

This may take the format of how to set your Facebook privacy settings to stop patients seeing the weekend BBQ photos, for example. This helps to contextualise the use of social media in a person’s day-to-day life. Such practical training often does well when bundled with pre-existing training courses. If you are looking to organise social media training at your organisation, NHS Employers offers a range of social media courses from beginner to expert level, across all platforms. Email communications@nhsemployers.org if you’d like to find out more.

Social media policy

[🔗](#) To help NHS HR and communications teams we have developed a range of template social media policies, which you can download as a pdf from our website.

“The key to creating a good social media policy is providing a boundary around good behaviour online”

The key to creating a good social media policy is providing a boundary around good behaviour online. This may also be covered in other policies such as bullying and harassment, internet usage or dignity and respect policies.

Importantly, such policies should also consider how the organisation can support colleagues who have been the victim of poor behaviour on social media.

NHS GRADUATE MANAGEMENT TRAINING SCHEME CASE STUDY

NHS Graduate Management Training Scheme recruits top undergraduate and postgraduate talent from across the UK and beyond to train the NHS managers of the future. The scheme has traditionally been promoted on university campuses across the UK. From feedback received, it was clear there was a need to carry on the conversation started with students and at various careers fairs and campuses. Regular social media use by the target audience offered a chance to continue these conversations independent of location.

Rob Farace, senior programme lead for resourcing, describes their approach:

“We use social media to help build engagement with candidates for the scheme. It is an invaluable tool in giving candidates an insight into the culture of our scheme and the type of people we are looking for.

“Social media requires us to be flexible in how we communicate with candidates – it certainly can’t be Monday to Friday, nine to five. And it also allows us to adopt a different tone of voice.

“Judging by the positive feedback we’ve received and the use candidates make of our social media channels, the investment of our time has certainly been worthwhile.”

“Candidates appreciate the time we invest with them and the opportunity they have to talk to us on a platform they’re used to and feel comfortable with.”

Using its Facebook app, the scheme organises live Q&A sessions with current trainees and alumni. This allows prospective applicants to get a feel for life as an NHS graduate trainee, and enhances the scheme’s online employee value proposition.

Applicants engage far more with information posted by real people than by the organisation. This approach has enabled applicants to break through the usual application talk and get a true insight into the NHS. Through this approach, the scheme has developed an online talent pool of students and graduates helping to improve the quality of the candidates.

This approach has been so successful for the scheme it has realised substantial savings and seen them branch out from Facebook and Twitter into Snapchat, YouTube, Storify, Periscope and various other social media apps.

In 2015 the scheme won best use of social media in *The Times* Top 100 Graduate Employers and the best use of social media in graduate recruitment in the Social Media Awards 2014.

Of the future, Rob says: “It would be hard for us to move away from using these communication channels, as candidates have made it abundantly clear this is their preferred method of talking to us.”

The NHS Graduate Management Training Scheme is run by the NHS Leadership Academy - follow the scheme on Twitter: @NHSGradScheme

REFERENCES

1. [Ofcom \(2016\)](#), *The communications market report*, Section 5.3.2, page 198.
2. [The basics of using LinkedIn in NHS resourcing](#).
3. [The updated group membership number can be found in this tweet from ULHT Chief Executive Jan Sobieraj](#).



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.

Acknowledgements

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