

An introduction to social media



What is it?

Social networks are places where people go to share information and have conversations about their interests, eg facebook, meetup, forums.

Social media refers to the tools which enable people to share content , e.g. twitter, flickr, blogs.

A social network is essentially the same as your own networks of family, friends and/or local Ramblers group, however it's on the internet. Social networking is a way of using your computer to talk to other people, exchange pictures, find out about interests or hobbies.

The BBC has some basic online resources on social media:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/topics/email-and-sharing/social-media>

Why do people use it?

The internet has become a more socially interactive place, where people can network and share content with one another.

The web is another place to have a conversation, like your local shop, pub or park, but it brings together millions of people from around the world and a wealth of information and resources to help you find what you want within seconds.

Businesses and organisations, or those representing them, can use social networking to engage with and inspire supporters, raise awareness of its work, and show that it is relevant to the wider community.

Debunking the myths

There are a lot of myths about social networking:

- (i) "It's for kids"
Recent Ofcom stats revealed that over 50% of the people on social networks are aged 35 and over. The Ramblers facebook and twitter accounts have an average age of 40. Retired people are the biggest growing audience on social media.
- (ii) "Your personal data is at risk"
Social media is no more risky than any other internet page and if you exercise caution over your personal data you won't be at any higher risk than when online banking or shopping.
- (iii) "It's difficult to use"
It just takes a bit of time, like everything. The most confusing element is the terminology, which changes as quickly as the tools, because this is an area of rapid development and evolution. However, when you know the basics you very easily understand enough to use it without needing to get bogged down in the latest lingo.

Why should Ramblers groups use social media?

Everyday people use social media as a tool to find out information and communicate, in the same way as they would use a TV, radio, library, community service, etc.

It's used for information gathering, to share news, exchange ideas and have fun, e.g finding out the

latest news via twitter or a BBC news feed; researching the best value piece of kit via blogs; chatting to people about where to go walking at the weekend on facebook; and posting images of that walk on twitter afterwards.

Businesses and organisations can no longer expect people to come to them; they need to go to the consumers/supporters. It's the same for the Ramblers and whether it's via press, publicity materials, magazines, websites or social media, we need to make sure we are communicating our work to potential and current walkers, who will hopefully become members and volunteers.

Social media is another way of communicating what we do to people and demonstrate how they can get involved. It's also a very easy way to network and raise awareness about our mission. If someone wants to go for a walk, they will google to find a local group, or they will go to Meetup to find one. Every day people are on twitter discussing where they have been that day and where they want to go walking next weekend. If we want people to walk with the Ramblers, we need to ensure we are promoting ourselves in these places.

Which tools to use?

Social media is changing all the time and there are new tools being launched almost every day. It's practically impossible and not very effective to try and use everything.

The best idea is use tools that are fairly well-established (as far as possible) and to consider what tools the people you are trying to reach are using. For example facebook and twitter are both very well-established and incredibly popular. By using these, you would be immediately tapping into a huge resource of information and people, plus it's fairly unlikely they will collapse and expire any time soon (a risk in social media).

The Ramblers – staff and volunteers - use facebook, twitter, youtube and blogs to engage with the people about our mission and to share content such as images and information. You can see some of the Ramblers GB accounts here:

www.facebook.com/ramblers

www.twitter.com/ramblersgb

<http://www.youtube.com/ramblersgb>

How we should communicate via social media: sharing and engaging

It's important to remember that whilst social media is a way to communicate our message, the point of it is to enable people to share content. So it shouldn't be seen in the same way as traditional media, i.e., a place to broadcast a message. It should be seen as a facilitator for a conversation and a way to engage with people.

In the same way it wouldn't be polite to meet a new person and just blast a lot of information at them, it isn't good etiquette to broadcast information all the time on social media. For example, if you met a new person on a walk, you would have a conversation, ask questions, show interest and then perhaps talk about yourself. Ditto on social media. Find people, start conversations, share ideas, then put across your message.

Tone of voice

Social media is informal. It is genuine and personal. Corporate bland faceless brands do not work well. Individuals and organisations need to be real in order to be noticed and engaged with. Your tone of voice should be light-hearted and friendly whilst remaining professional. If you are setting up an account as a group use the third person, to represent the whole, not just an individual (unless you are setting up as an individual volunteer).

June 2013