

Social strategies to share

Social media marketing is the cornerstone of successful business events, but poor messaging can undo all your hard work **By Ian Lloyd Neubauer**



Keep the fundamentals Kunchalee Sumleerat of DigiNative says it still starts with defining your objectives and the behaviour of your target market

Going back a decade or two, delegates would spend half an hour registering for an event, show up on the day, attend a few lectures or workshops, get tipsy at a cocktail party, go home and not give it much more thought until the following year.

Social media has changed all of that, enabling planners to have intimate and nuanced interactions with delegates and exhibitors before, during and long after an event. Social media also provides planners with a powerful and cost-effective way to reach audiences previously unknown, to sell tickets and content, conduct surveys and share ideas with people all over the world.

But how can planners develop the right social-media mix to maximise the ROI of their events? Does advertising on social media work? What are the major pitfalls, and how does one amend for a social media mistake?

Picking your platforms

Facebook. Twitter. LinkedIn. Instagram. Google+. Pinterest. Flickr. Meetup. Vine. Snapchat. YouTube. Tumblr. With so many social media platforms competing for audiences' attention, choosing the right ones can be daunting.

“With social media you can be much more specific and target your audience”

Kunchalee Sumleerat, DigiNative

“The decision should be based on your event’s objectives and the behaviour of your target market,” says Kunchalee Sumleerat of DigiNative, a Bangkok-based social media consultant for Ogilvy & Mather and GMM Grammy, the largest advertising and entertainment firms in Thailand respectively. “A good one for consumer events is Facebook. Because of its size, you have a bigger audience and it covers every kind of topic. However, LinkedIn works very well for business events as it lets you connect with professionals and their resumes are online.”

Sumleerat also points to popular websites in non-English-speaking countries such as Sina Weibo, a Chinese Twitter-Facebook hybrid with 600 million monthly users. “In Thailand we have Pantip, which focuses on very specific interests like investment and beauty. We also have

Dek-D, which is all about education. If you’re holding an event in Thailand to promote a foreign university, it is perfect for you.”

However according to Kellee Cruse of Bon PR, a Sydney-based digital marketing specialist, choosing the right social media platforms is only the start of the journey.

“I would go for those that are the most relevant with the broadest reach—Facebook, Instagram and Twitter usually,” she says. “Then I would drill down into audience segments based on the things they like and their habits to ensure I post promotional material at the right time. Understanding what time of the day your audience is online is crucial to your success.”

Target and track

“The real beauty of social media is that you

WHY DOESN'T THE WIFI WORK?



Most planners assume the wifi at venues will work despite not properly taking into account their event's extraordinary connectivity needs: an army of wifi-hungry devices, exhibitor demos and mobile event apps descending upon a relatively small space at the same time. Meanwhile, the network infrastructure of even the newest convention centres is ageing like cut flowers. Servers get bottle-necked and suddenly attendees can't even check their email. In fact, connectivity issues at centres is chief among attendees' complaints.

Most planners are not sophisticated telecom buyers—nor are they expected to be. But in an age where connectivity issues can irreversibly harm an event's reputation, you need to know what questions to ask a venue's IT manager beyond 'Do you have wifi?'.

Here are a few planning steps from Ian Framson, co-founder of Trade Show Internet, a San Francisco-based provider of network solutions for events:

1 Consider your event's requirements

What types of devices will your attendees bring—smartphones, laptops, tablets? What types of content will they consume—voice, text, images, video? Are there peak usage times? Do session rooms require more bandwidth? Will presenters and/or exhibitors be streaming video?

2 Determine the venue's network coverage and capacity

Start with the floor plan—which rooms are covered? How will they provide connectivity in each area—a combination of wired ethernet drops and wifi? How many routers/access points are there? Where are they located and how many

concurrent users can each one support? How much dedicated bandwidth is allocated? Will uploading be as fast as downloading? Will there be a separate network for speakers and staff? What trouble-shooting support do they offer: a hot-line; a help desk with a network engineer; a service level guarantee in contract?

3 In-house or outsource?

If your event's internet access is mission critical, seeking the help of an independent Internet Service Provider (ISP) who specialises in events may be advisable. But the venue may not like it, so get informed, give your client a realistic budget as soon as possible and negotiate with the venue before the contracts are signed.

The more you can stress how mission-critical reliable internet is to your event and the earlier you negotiate, the more leverage you bring to the table and the easier your negotiation will be. If the venue expects to earn revenue by selling you internet services, expect an uphill battle.

OUTSIDE THE SQUARE

When the issue of event connectivity was raised at serverfault.com, a Q&A website for network administrators, one respondent opined: "In all the conferences I've organised—about 10 now—the best solution to the wifi problem is holding the conference somewhere that has solved the problem already at a large scale. The answer? Universities and colleges. They already have to provide wireless access to thousands.



Taking on the big boys Jacky Tan

"You need to know what questions to ask a venue's IT manager beyond 'Do you have wifi?'"



Bring in expert help Lidia Dalton of Event Experts (top left); Kellee Cruse of Bon PR (above left); Ian Framson of Trade Show Internet (above right)

can target your audience so effectively," says Sumleerat. "Before with traditional advertising, you'd buy advertising in a specific section of a newspaper or magazine that targets your industry. But with social media you can be much more specific and target your audience based on their personal interests, demographic or geographical location—or a combination of those things. It is far more effective."

But knowing which social media platforms to invest your event's precious advertising dollars in often comes down to trial-and-error.

"I advertised my event on Google AdWords, Facebook and LinkedIn," says Jacky Tan, the Singaporean author of *Social 'M'—How Your Start-Up Can Take On the Big Boys Today* and planner-owner of the island-state's inaugural Marketing Asia Conference. "Advertising on social media gave me a better outcome because I could see who was reading my content, whereas on Google AdWords I couldn't. As for which social media platform gave me the better ROI, I can't say. But if I were to guess I would say LinkedIn because it's specific to business."

But LinkedIn is still not specific enough,

according to Lidia Dalton, managing director of Expert Events, a Brisbane-based planner that recently held a joint conference for the Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental Pharmacologists and Toxicologists and its British counterpart, the British Pharmacological Society, at the University of Hong Kong.

"The result we have seen for the type of scientific conferences we hold is that advertising on LinkedIn does not actually produce new registrations because our audiences are very niche markets," she says. "Perhaps it would be more effective for larger consumer events. But as far as associations go, I'm not sure it's the right thing."

#Socialmediafails

As 34 million global viewers tuned in to watch the 88th Academy Awards on February 29, Los Angeles-based lifestyle website Totalbeauty.com posted a Tweet that wrongly identified Whoopi Goldberg as Oprah Winfrey. Given the controversy around the #OscarsSoWhite debate at this year's Academy Awards, mixing up two of America's most famous black women was seen as a social media fail writ large.

"You can put an incredible amount of effort into your event, but if your social media posts are inappropriate or full of typos, it will take the shine off what you are trying to deliver," says Bon PR's Cruse. "People who were thinking about attending your event may reconsider and your client will be disappointed. Every post needs to be polished as it's all a reflection of the event and your professionalism."

To save such disappointment, Cruse recommends assigning a moderator to fact-check and spell-check every post before it goes live. For larger events, planners may need a team of like-minded moderators with a designated leader.

But once a mistake is made, how can one repent—other than deleting it? The best way, according to DigiNative's Sumleerat, is to own it.

"People make mistakes. But the important thing is to accept the fact that you made a mistake, because when it comes to social media, audiences demand transparency and explanations as to how and why it happened," she explains. "In my crisis management training courses I always say if you make a mistake, then own it, apologise, express your remorse and explain how you're going to prevent it from happening again."

So how did Totalbeauty.com repent for its colossal social media fail? With grace and generosity—and a new post on Twitter. "Using this #Oscars #SNAFU [situation normal, all-fouled up] as an opportunity to donate US\$10K to @whoopigoldberg & @oprah's charity of choice. #ThatsNotOprah #WeMeanIt."

Inspire your audience

Above and beyond all the jargon, analytics and rules, your social media posts should aim to inspire your audience. This is where creativity, colour, charisma and multimedia come into play.

"I always try to have three kinds of content for my posts—a few lines of copy, a link to a website and infographics, because they're easy for people to share and understand," says Tan of the Marketing Asia Conference. "After all, we are visual creatures."

Bon PR's Cruse concurs: "Without inspiring your audience, you'll have trouble engaging them and the traction stops there. But if your posts are inspiring, you'll drive them back to your website or event, and have a chance of converting them into a customer."

Did you know: Half of the world's social media users live in Asia Pacific.



left); Kellee Cruse of Bon PR (above left); Ian Framson of Trade Show Internet (above right)

TOP 4 SOCIAL MEDIA APPS FOR EVENTS

Like wifi, the social media requirements of each event are different. Savvy planners will begin by studying attendees' needs—and how an app can boost engagement, retention and ticket sales—not a list of 'what's hot and what's not'. That said, here's our list of what's hot and what's not based solely on monthly usage:

**Facebook****Monthly users**

About 1.6 billion. More than the population of any country on earth.

Essentially A scrollable album of multi-media content—words, music, pictures and video—that create 'identities' for individuals, businesses, groups, brands or events.

Good It's fun! And members-only; you choose who to invite. Has a dedicated event feature. It's also free, kind of, until you start advertising.

Bad It's distracting. The average user wastes 20 minutes per day. In total that's US\$3.5 trillion in lost productivity since 2004, according to a report by NBC.

**Twitter****Monthly users**

About 320 million. The same as the population of the United States.

Essentially A scrollable record of 'tweets'—public announcements posted by users that can be accompanied by multimedia and/or links.

Good Tweets must be short—maximum 140 characters. Makes you think before you write. Excellent for spotting trends and breaking company, brand or event news.

Bad The 140-character limit makes you write like a teenager. Twitter rife with celebrity nonsense, sports, idle chatter and spam.

**LinkedIn****Monthly users**

Approximately 100 million, but has 400 million registered members.

Essentially A B2B version of Facebook where your homepage is your resume.

Good Search for new business contacts in specific fields. Your resume is interactive, uses multimedia and is easy to update. Has a dedicated event feature.

Bad Getting a sales pitch from a total stranger five minutes after connecting with them.

**Instagram****Monthly users**

About 400 million.

Around the same as LinkedIn and Twitter put together.

Essentially A scrollable album of photos or video clips often accompanied by text that capture a moment. Like Twitter, you choose who you follow, but anyone can follow you.

Good Millennials can't get enough of it and interactivity is off the chart. Instagram users are 58 times more likely to like, comment, or share a brand's post than Facebook users and 120 times more likely than Twitter, according to Forrester Research. Instagram influencers (those with large numbers of followers) are marketing rock stars.

Bad It's rife with people posting revealing photos of themselves to get the approval of strangers. ■

OUTSIDE THE SQUARE

Hootsuite is a tool that allows you to post to all of your social media accounts from one dashboard. It's a huge time-saver.