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Scottish Pre-school Play Association

Using Social Media

Here is information which explains the benefits to your group of using social media along with tips on how to avoid potential pitfalls.

Facebook

Facebook is still the most popular social network and the most powerful. Having a Facebook page for your group allows you to post status updates, share photos and videos, and create events with all the people that like the page. It is a fantastic, highly visual communications tool that can be used to keep your current parents up to date whilst attracting potential parents with the range of activities you showcase.

Good for:

- Sharing photos
- Highlighting the wide range of activities you cover on a daily basis
- Communicating with parents. The Care Inspectorate expects parents to be included and well-informed, and Facebook is great for making this happen.
- Promoting the group

Safety tip:

- Make sure you have written consent from parents to use the child's images on social networks
- Avoid using the children's names when you post pictures and stories

Twitter

Twitter continues to attract new users all the time and is unrivalled for breaking news, both locally and nationally. It is the only social network to post all updates (text, photo or video) in real time, which means it is great for sharing news about what you've done that day or an event happening soon. With tweets limited to just 140 characters, it is short and sweet and quite fast paced which is great for a 'little and often' approach.

Good for:

- Breaking news and real time event coverage
- Bite sized tips and ideas
- Quick updates
- Sharing links
- Connecting with other organisations, locally and nationally

Safety Tip:

- Find out if your staff have Twitter profiles and monitor them
- As with all the networks, make sure you have consent to share images



Pinterest

Pinterest is intended to be a virtual pin board for all the things you love. People create 'boards' based on different themes, and pin images on to each board. Every image pinned will take the viewer back to the original website that the picture has been taken from when clicked on. This means it can be a good way of getting people to your website, as well as a good way of sharing images that reflect the values of the group. There are more women aged 25-45 using Pinterest than any other demographic which makes it ideal for targeting mothers.

Good for:

- Influencing and inspiring
- Showing images and pictures from the group that drive traffic back to your website
- Showing what ideas and values are important to the group (eg. Creating a board on Outdoor Play or Favourite Books etc.)
- Targeting parents (mothers especially)
- Busy settings – the pins don't have a time/date attached to them so you don't need to be active on it every day

Safety tip:

- Make sure all staff are clear on your values and expectations if you give them permission to pin images



YouTube

YouTube is now the second largest search engine in the world. Owned by Google, it is immensely popular and affects your online search rankings. Many people prefer watching a short video to reading so creating video on a regular basis can be a great way of promoting your setting. The videos you host on your own YouTube channel can also be used on Twitter, Facebook and your website too. As with all online images, issues of consent are vital.

Good for:

- Improving your search engine rankings

- Showing instead of telling
- Settings that already create a lot of video footage
- Giving prospective parents an insight
- Showcasing outings and special events and visits

Safety tip:

- Have tight regulations in place about what video footage your staff can and can't record and share. The policy should be included within your codes of conduct
- Canvas parental opinion about use of video sharing beforehand and consider having a private channel just for parents if people have concerns

Blogs

A blog (web-log) is an online article or journal that can include text, images and video. It is a great way of regularly sharing news and events from the setting and showing parents what kinds of things you've been up to. It can also be great for prospective parents to see what kinds of things you do. Most importantly, it gives people a reason to keep coming back to your website. If you start a blog, it does need to be regularly maintained however. Once a week is ideal - but no less than once a month.

Good for:

- PR
- Going into a bit more detail about all the great things you do
- Giving prospective parents an insight
- Showcasing outings and special events and visits
- Getting people to visit your website
- Improving your search engine rankings (Google likes fresh content)

Safety Tip:

- Avoid naming specific children in your blog posts

Google+

Google+ is still not as widely used as the other social networks, but it does influence search engine rankings so it may be worth having a Google+ page purely for search engine optimisation purposes. With this in mind, it is important to think about key words when creating posts and the kinds of things prospective parents might search for on Google.

Good for:

- Improving your search engine rankings

Safety tip:

- Use Google Alerts to monitor all mentions of your group online



LinkedIn is a social network that's designed to connect people and share their skills and experience for professional purposes. It can be a useful tool for settings when recruiting new staff or if their parents are largely working professionals. Ideally the setting's manager or owner would be the main ambassador on LinkedIn.

Good for:

- Networking
- Recruiting new staff
- Connecting with parents and potential parents in a professional manner

Safety tip:

- Have a pre-written paragraph that all employees post on their LinkedIn profiles that describes the setting. This ensures consistency and that the right messages go out.

Whichever networks you choose to use, always remember:

- Have a properly integrated strategy in place so all staff are clear about why you are using social media and what you hope to achieve
- Have a strong social media policy in place so that staff are clear on what they can and can't do. You have to protect your reputation at all times.
- Weigh up the time it will take to set up and manage each network with time available and consider only doing one network if you're unable to commit to regular activity on lots of them.
- Keep safeguarding in mind at all times. Collect parental consent for online publication of images before you start and make sure all staff and parents are aware of what you plan to do.
- Always check the spelling, punctuation, grammar and appropriateness of your posts before sharing. You are promoting an educational environment and need to be seen to be professional at all times.

- Integrate it with your other marketing and make sure you are consistent with your branding, tone of voice, public image etc. The last thing you want to do is confuse people!
- Consider using Facebook or Twitter ads. They can be incredibly targeted (eg. Women aged 25-35 expecting a baby within a 5 mile radius), they are very affordable and they deliver great results. If you can offer a promotion or special introductory offer, you'll see an even better take up.
- Monitor the results. Do parents value having an online space that they can use to contribute to the setting's life? Is this recorded and communicated to the Care Inspectorate? Do parents keep their children with you for longer as a result? Are more internet referrals leading to more places being filled? Do more people know about you as a result?

Finally, everyone involved in the group should enjoy what social media can offer, parents and staff alike

This information is from an article written for First Five magazine, by Kate Tyler who is Managing Director of Shake Social, which is a social media agency that specialises in the early years sector. Shake Social offers strategy, training and management to pre-school settings across the UK. Contact info@shakesocial.co.uk, call 0115 901 7357 or visit www.shakesocial.co.uk for more information.

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