



Digital Media Platform Overview and Best Practices

When you are considering which digital platforms and social networks to use, there are three key things to consider:

- 1. Target Audience**—Who is your target audience(s)? Where are they most represented online and on social media? Where do they get their information?
- 2. Objectives and Purpose**—What is the purpose of your online activities? How will your social media messages and content support your larger social marketing/communications strategy? What is the action that you want your engaged audiences to take? Engage in services and supports? Increase awareness about children’s mental health or reduce stigma? Consider creating an outline with your most important objective, followed by your secondary objectives, to help focus your marketing efforts.
- 3. Process and Resources**—What resources do you have to devote to your social and digital media strategy? Consider potential writers, graphic designers, social media publishers, and community managers. Who needs to review and approve copy? Do you have someone who can respond quickly to time-sensitive posts on your social media accounts? Take a look at your marketing budget to see if you can invest in social media advertisements. A little bit can go a long way! How will you evaluate your efforts?

The following is a list of commonly used social media networks and digital outreach channels, their best-use scenarios, and complementary app suggestions based on general trends and insights. Because your audiences, topics, and campaign content will vary from effort to effort, it’s important to always check your profile’s analytics and adapt your strategy or efforts to your findings.

Facebook

Demographic: According to Pew Research Center, 69 percent of U.S. adult internet users are on Facebook. Facebook is relatively commonly used across all age groups. Among internet users ages 50–64, Facebook use significantly outranks use of other social media platforms, with the exception of YouTube. Women tend to use Facebook more than men.

Business Page: A Facebook Business Page is a public profile used to post information about your organization. In addition to posting capabilities like that of personal pages, a Facebook Business Page offers other details such as hours of operation, website information, and call-to-action buttons, among other options based on services offered. Most important, Facebook Business Pages can provide page access to a number of team members with varying roles and access to manage the page, including administrators, advertisers, and editors.



Best uses: News and announcements; event highlights; photos or albums; online conversations among communities and directly with organizations; online event groups; links to relevant articles or blog posts; videos

To hashtagⁱⁱ or not to hashtag: Are you posting daily about one particular topic, conversation, or event but want all of the posts to be connected within the same “campaign”? Hashtags on Facebook are a helpful tool to connect posts for your target audience while also connecting them to an even larger audience having conversations around the same hashtag. Using a hashtag can mean more eyes on your post!

Facebook Live: This latest and popular feature allows you to broadcast video in real time so your followers can watch and/or interact with you. It is great for special event moments and announcements, behind-the-scenes looks, and personalized video updates. For more information, go to www.live.fb.com/about.

Facebook Stories: This feature allows you to use a slideshow format to post photos and videos, which will disappear after 24 hours.

Tips and best practices:

1. *Keep a schedule.* Use Facebook’s own built-in scheduler to schedule posts ahead of time.
2. *Measure up.* Use the built-in Insights feature to measure levels of engagement with a detailed outline of analytics.
3. *Be visual.* Posts with photos or videos often receive more attention than posts without visual elements.



Demographic: The third most used social media platform in the U.S., used by 37 percent of adult internet users, Instagram skews significantly toward younger adults (ages 18–29). Women tend to use Instagram more than men.

Best uses: Creative or aesthetically pleasing photos (don’t forget to use the built-in filters and photo effects to maximize visual impact); humor and aspirational content; short-lived content known as “Stories”

Helpful compatible apps:

- **Hyperlapse:** Allows you to make timelapseⁱⁱⁱ videos.
- **Boomerang:** Allows you to make one-second video loops to post on Instagram. (These often work on other social networks too.)
- **Layout:** Allows you to create collages of multiple photos in pre-designed grids.
- **Lifelapse:** Allows you to create stop-motion videos.

Hashtags: On Instagram, the rules of hashtags are simple. The more hashtags you use, the more likes you’re going to get. The downside is your posts might look a bit spam-like to your most engaged followers, so consider balancing which hashtags you use. Best practice allows for use of up to 10 hashtags within a post. Tools such as Hashtagify.me can help you determine which hashtags are trending.

Some popular mental health hashtags include:

- #mentalhealth
- #mentalhealthmatters
- #ok2talk



- #bethedifference
- #mentalhealthawareness
- #wellness
- #mindfulness
- #HeroesofHope
- #behavioralhealth

Instagram Stories: Like Facebook Stories, this feature allows you to post photos and videos in a slideshow format that disappears after 24 hours. You can add graphics, text, music, GIFs, geotags, and hashtags to all images and videos to enhance them for your audience. Instagram Stories are meant to be casual. Use the successive video feature to tell full-length stories and show events or ideas as they unfold.

Highlights: This feature lets you spotlight sets of Instagram Stories on your profile page. When users tap a specific highlight icon, they are able to see each story within that highlight. A major benefit of highlights is that they last forever, not just 24 hours. So, if you have important information—like phone numbers to crisis lines—this information can be readily available to your followers at all times.

Tips and best practices:

1. *Make your profile a “business profile.”* When you make your profile a business page, you gain access to insights like impressions, engagement, and reach on all of your posts and stories.
2. *Use hashtags.* When using a mobile device, you can easily discover popular hashtags to consider including on your posts. Start writing a hashtag with the “#” sign, and a dropdown menu with possible hashtags and their number of occurrences will appear. Be selective; using 10 irrelevant hashtags won’t help you boost engagement or attract the right audience.
3. *Upload stories and save to story highlights.* Have at least three to five highlights to start with, showing off different facets of your work, such as impact, supporters, organization information, campaigns, and recurring events.
4. *Always place a link in your bio.* You should get creative with the links you place in your bio section and direct readers to the “link in bio” in your photo captions or stories.



Demographic: 22 percent of U.S. adult internet users are on Twitter. Internet users in urban areas are much more likely to use Twitter than users in suburban or rural areas. More men than women use Twitter, in contrast with use of Facebook and Instagram.

Best uses: News and announcements; customer service; links to articles or blog posts; micro-blogging; live tweeting from events; participation in trending conversations

Helpful additional apps^{iv}:

- **Buffer:** Though not owned by Twitter, Buffer is a free app that allows you to draft and schedule up to 10 tweets ahead of time.



- **Hootsuite** and **TweetDeck** are other popular scheduling and publishing tools for Twitter, and both have versatile free versions.
- **Hashtagify.me** is a great resource to use to determine which hashtags are currently trending.

Hashtags: Twitter was the first social media platform to use hashtags. Use #hashtags on Twitter—but only one or two at a time! Any more than that and you run the risk of your content appearing to be spam, as well as going over your character limit. Be careful when creating new hashtags for your campaigns. Conduct research to ensure that the hashtag has not been taken or could be misread. When tweeting within the context of a larger conversation, use hashtags that already have established user practice or communities behind them. Don't hashtag random words—they have zero effect on search results.

Twitter Moments: Consider using Twitter Moments, a feature within the Twitter app and website, to aggregate and publish a series of relevant tweets from a tweet-worthy moment together in one place. For your Twitter Moment, you can aggregate a mix of your tweets along with relevant tweets from other accounts.

Tips and best practices:

1. *Conversate.* The best Twitter profiles don't just share links; they begin conversations, interact with users, and have a personal tone behind the account. A good social media rule of thumb is to spend at least six hours per week, or around one hour per day, engaging with your followers, according to *Social Media Today*.
2. *Shorten your URLs.* Twitter already automatically shortens all URLs while still showing the domain name. However, free shortening services like Bitly not only physically truncate a long, visually distracting URL but also allow you to track how many clicks your link receives through back-end analytics. **Pro tip:** Shortened or not, a link always takes up 23 of your 280 characters.
3. *Be strategic.* Put extra thought into crafting your messages to be effective within Twitter's 280-character limit.
4. *Pin it.* If you have a major event coming up or an important initiative that you are working on, don't be afraid to pin a tweet about it to the top of your profile. This way it is the first thing that visitors see when they view your profile.
5. *Use fewer hashtags,* and use them better. Research relevant and timely hashtags before you post. Make sure the hashtags you select are specific and relevant to your organization or campaign.



Demographic: 27 percent of U.S. adult internet users are on LinkedIn. LinkedIn has grown from a job search platform to a strong social media platform for professional development.

Best uses: Thought leadership and/or subject matter expertise; networking opportunities; partnership development; organizational news and announcements such as job opportunities; participation or moderation of topic-specific groups

LinkedIn Showcase Pages: These subpages allow organizations to showcase specific campaigns, initiatives, products, or sub-brands. Showcase Pages have their own destination and ability to post relevant content and amass followers, but they do not have all the features of a company/organization page.



Tips and best practices:

1. *Get the most out of your Company Page.* Company Pages are search engine optimization-friendly. If your organization has a global presence, LinkedIn offers capabilities to show Company Pages in 20 different languages. Google previews up to 156 characters of your page text, so be sure that your description leads with powerful, keyword-rich copy.
2. *Get staff to update their profiles.* When people search your nonprofit's name in the LinkedIn search bar, they will see both your Company Page and pages of staff members who have listed you as their employer.
3. *Leverage LinkedIn groups.* Groups function as discussion boards that provide a space for dialogue with thousands of other nonprofit professionals. Solicit feedback on your nonprofit's next event theme, or share your thoughts on an existing conversation.



Demographic: Snapchat has the youngest users out of all the social media platforms on this list. It is a mobile-first on-the-go social media community and boasts strong daily engagement among young adults (ages 18–24). Snapchat is also the only platform used equally by men and women.

Best uses: One-way conversations (though you can snap with other users, for brands and organizations, it's best to keep your communication limited to your one-way story); humor; behind-the-scenes of events, meetings, or conferences; storytelling

Best times for engagement: Content on Snapchat is ephemeral and lasts 24 hours. The best time to post is whenever the content you're recording is happening!

Snapchat Stories: All of your Snapchat friends will be able to see snaps you post to your "story." Stories have a lifespan of 24 hours, and there are no limits on how many times they can be viewed in that period.

Snapchat Memories: A feature within the Snapchat app now allows you to save Stories in the cloud or your phone and to share photos and videos taken any time in the past that are saved on your phone.

Snapchat geofilters: Personalize your own filters and lenses! For a small price, you can create custom filters to make any event more fun and allow your attendees to interact live at your event.

Tips and best practices:

1. *Start slow, and don't get overwhelmed.* An easy first snap would be a picture of your organization with a geofilter showing the location. Then, add text to declare that this is your first snap, include some stickers for fun, and share.
2. *Create a custom Snapcode.* One way to grow your Snapchat following is to create a custom Snapcode. Your supporters can easily add your organization as a friend by taking a screenshot of your Snapcode.
3. *Be creative and have fun.* The intimate and visual nature of the app might give your organization the freedom to experiment with more compelling content. Use Snapchat to show what your organization is really about, what you do, and how you do it. Or take a moment to be silly and show your organization's sense of humor.





Demographic: Surpassing Facebook in reach, YouTube has 73 percent of U.S. adults reporting that they use the video-sharing site. Among the 18–49 age group, YouTube accounts for 66 percent of videos watched across devices and platforms.

Best uses: Short-form videos; shareable and discoverable content; popular content (e.g., how-to, music, or animals)

Tags: Similar to hashtags, YouTube tags are used to index content on YouTube. There is no limit to the number of tags you can use! Be sure to add concise descriptions to your videos so your viewers will know quickly whether or not the video content is indeed what they are looking for. The descriptions also contribute to discoverability in both YouTube and Google searches. (Remember, Google owns YouTube!)

Tips and best practices:

1. *Consider the feedback* you get from YouTube (e.g., actual comments or when your videos get the most engagement, what types of titles work best, how your videos are upvoted or downvoted, and so on).
2. *Organize your videos.* Build a channel and playlists with a specific content area in mind.
3. *Have a schedule.* Viewers are much more likely to subscribe if they know you will be publishing content regularly (e.g., once a week on Tuesdays) than if they think you're just uploading content whenever it suits your need to embed a video on another website.
4. *Add a call to action* to the video. Include relevant links in your video descriptions as a way to pull audiences who are interested in learning more. Other calls to action include asking viewers to subscribe to your YouTube channel for more updates or to like or comment on your post.



Tumblr is a blog creation tool with the sharing and liking capabilities of many of the other social media platforms listed. You can re-blog posts (in the same way you would retweet a tweet or share a Facebook post), and favorite posts (in the same way you would favorite a post on Twitter), and many posts are found by searching hashtags. There is no limit to the length of each post.

Best uses: Sharing stories; humor; visual content; GIFs; mental health awareness (there is a huge mental health advocacy community on Tumblr); witty content; television, film, or literature fandom content

Helpful additional apps: To keep up, you're probably going to want to search (or create) some GIFs at www.giphy.com, since visuals will increase attention to and interactions with your posts.

Hashtags: Just like on Twitter, Tumblr posts are found and archived by their hashtags. Unlike Twitter, the hashtags are inconspicuous and hidden below posts so they won't appear to be spam.

Tips and best practices:

1. *Don't link out* to external resources. Unlike Twitter and Facebook, Tumblr is not as effective at linking to external sources. It's best to use Tumblr as a means of engaging with your community within its own parameters.
2. *Have a conversation.* Tumblr has a message inbox feature that encourages anonymity; you can decide to lift the anonymity component or to deactivate the feature entirely at your own discretion. You can also turn on your ask page or take questions on the dashboard (do this by ending your post with a question mark).



3. *Engage with others.* Make sure to follow relevant blogs and engage with them in authentic ways. Tumblr blogs thrive thanks to the engagement of their loyal followers.
4. *Find a niche.* Unlike another blog service, Tumblr blogs can find success only by re-blogging posts. However, the best Tumblr blogs are known for specific content. Find your niche and stick to it.
5. *Show; don't tell.* Tumblr is a visual platform. Photos, GIFs, photo sets, gif sets, or videos usually do better than text or link posts.

Popular mental health Tumblr blogs include:

- www.onlinecounsellingcollege.tumblr.com
- www.bornthiswayfoundation.tumblr.com
- www.ok2talk.org
- www.mentalillnessmouse.tumblr.com
- www.noshameinoursickness.tumblr.com
- www.blackgirlmentalhealth.tumblr.com

Blogging

Blogging is still the best way to share longer form, more complex ideas in spaces that are permanent and easily searchable. It's also one of the best ways to keep your website relevant and at the top of search engine results.

Self-hosted: Self-hosted blogs are highly recommended, as they let you set up on your own website's server. Though there are a few companies that provide this kind of service, the most widely used and intuitive is WordPress. In fact, WordPress often is used as a content management system (CMS) and is more than capable to use for an entire website—not just the blogging component. Self-hosted blogs are completely customizable, unlike blogs set up at different providers.

Best uses: Longer-form content and complex ideas; content with accompanying media; articles; beginning discussions; search engine optimization

Best times for engagement: Until your blog becomes a mainstay with your readership, the best times for engagement will coincide with your online engagement on social media, as content shared there can be a good source of referrals to your website.

Platform options:

- WordPress is known for its bevy of third-party plugins, all indexed at www.wordpress.org/plugins.
- Other popular self-host blogging options include **Squarespace**, **Wix**, and **Medium**.

Hashtags: Hashtags will not work on your self-hosted blog (unless you find a plugin for it). However, blogs usually do use categories and tags to label and structure posts. But these will only serve to index posts within your own site and not on external websites.

Tips and best practices:

1. *Match length and tone to audience.* The ideal blog post length is however long it takes to succinctly



and articulately get your point across. That being said, many find that 600 words is optimal for getting shares. Meanwhile 1,000+ words is optimal for getting comments.

2. *Ask for help*, if needed. A self-hosted blog, though sometimes easy to maintain, is usually too complex for someone who isn't a professional to set up. Consult with your web manager.
3. *Prioritize blogging*. If you decide to start a blog, for a while, blogging needs to be an important piece of your weekly or monthly routine. As you establish the habit, blogging regularly will get easier.
4. *Include visuals*. Find ways to pull in photos, videos, audio, and social media posts to break up long blocks of text. WordPress makes it easy to embed YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, as well as other social media platforms.



Email Marketing

Like newsletters, email marketing is an essential communications tool. They have the ability to inspire, connect, engage, and raise money. And with just a little bit of planning and effort, you can turn your e-newsletter into a transformative tool for your organization. Though we live in the age of social media, sending content straight to someone's email inbox is still the best way to engage them. Open rates for nonprofit e-newsletters are around 20 percent. Click-through rates are around 3 percent or below.^v Don't feel as though your e-newsletter needs to get astronomically high open and click-through rates to be valuable.

Best uses: Keeping targeted segment(s) informed and engaged; marketing events or products; one-way conversations; sharing interesting content or ideas

Best time for engagement: Monday–Wednesday from 9 a.m.–12 p.m., in general. However, it's best to look at your own analytics and see when the users in your email list are the most engaged.

Tips and best practices:

1. *Use services* like **MailChimp** or **Constant Contact**. Besides having pre-made templates, the most valuable tools these services provide are statistics and data; you want to know how many people opened the email, which links they clicked, what kind of subject lines were successful, which users are the most loyal, and who doesn't click at all. They also will provide contextual data so you can understand how you perform compared to e-newsletters in similar industries.
2. *Carefully craft your email subject line*—this is the most important aspect of your entire e-newsletter, as it determines whether or not a user will open to read your content. Get creative with it while conveying the idea of the message you're sending out. However, keep it short. Research has found that a subject line with 29 to 39 characters gets the best click-through rate, and a line with 4 to 15 characters has the best open rate.
 - a. Example of a bad subject line: "REGISTER FOR OUR WEBINAR TODAY!" This language is vague and does not specify if the webinar is being held today or if the user is being asked to register today. It also does not offer any details about the webinar content, leaving out critical information that would encourage a user to open the email.
 - b. Example of a good subject line: "The Social Marketing in Rural Communities webinar takes place June 23—Register now." This language clearly states the topic and date of the webinar. It also has a clear call to action—the user knows that by clicking on the email, he or she can register for an upcoming webinar.



- c. The most important thing is to keep your subject line short and to test subject lines with your email list (most e-newsletter services will allow you to A/B split test^{vi} campaigns, too).
3. *Carefully craft the first sentence of your e-newsletter.* This first sentence is usually, in a pre-made template, above the header of your e-newsletter. This sentence is the first thing a user reads in the description section of their email and is second only to your subject line in determining whether someone opens your e-newsletter or not.
4. *Categorize your email list into segments*—it allows you to send specific messages to a targeted audience. Each email should be centered on topics that are interesting or relevant to your customer base. If they are not, you risk people opting out of your email list.
5. *Stick to a schedule.* People will come to expect your e-newsletter at a certain time of the week or month, and you don't want to disappoint them. It is recommended to send an e-newsletter at least once a month, but it is fine to send more frequent emails or alerts leading up to a big event. However, sending too many emails can cause people to unsubscribe from your list. It is a balancing act. If you see your unsubscribe rate going up, reconsider how often you send out materials.
6. *Include a call to action in your emails.* Monthly e-newsletters often include many calls to action, but regular email updates should have one clear call to action (whether that is to follow a social media profile, register for an event, or anything in between).

ⁱ You can find more demographic data for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social networks at Pew's website: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/>

ⁱⁱ Hashtags are categorizations preceded by the pound sign (#), which then automatically hyperlink to a page that aggregates all posts including that same hashtag.

ⁱⁱⁱ A timelapse is a video typically created from a series of multiple photos to create the illusion that time is elapsing rapidly. Hyperlapse artificially recreates this by speeding up video recorded in the app.

^{iv} Additional apps as listed in this document are apps that are not owned by the social network but that many users utilize to craft their posts. Because these are not owned and operated by the companies themselves (for example, Buffer is its own company unaffiliated with Twitter, but still an app many use to schedule tweets), they may be unreliable. Some additional apps expand on features already available in the native apps.

^v Mailchimp. (n.d.). Email marketing benchmarks. Retrieved from <https://mailchimp.com/resources/email-marketing-benchmarks/>

^{vi} An A/B split test is a feature of most e-newsletter services that allows you to send slightly different content to different segments of your email list to see how well each version performs. You can send the same email content to two groups with different subject lines; you can send the same email content to two groups with different names in the "From" field; or you can change other information about your email. Typically, you can set it up so that the email with the most open rates is used for a third untested segment of your email list to boost the overall success of your email campaign.

