Using social media at UCL

'Social media' is a term describing content created by the general public that can be shared with others online. It can include blogs, wikis, social networks, and a variety of other platform types.

There has been a huge growth in the use of social media over recent years due to a) increase in broadband access, b) high street availability of powerful computers, and c) new website technologies that make content sharing easier. The most popular social media platforms are used by many millions of visitors (Facebook alone had over a billion users in March 2015).

Social media offers a variety of ways that UCL departments can engage with their target audiences, many of whom are likely to already be using these platforms.

Before you get started

Who do you want to reach?

There are thousands of social media platforms available, each with different purposes, styles and user demographics. Before deciding on which platform to use, think about what your target audience is, and which platform would be most appropriate. You can do this by consulting existing statistics of demographic use of social media¹ and reflecting on whether a particular audience is likely to engage with a media type.

Deciding on what type of social media platform to use can be more difficult, as the range of tools and websites can be overwhelming. Some recommendations on the various types are provided below, as well as how you can use them, and whether they will actually be appropriate. You can also find tutorials on getting started on these platforms at the UCL Social Media website².

Social media types

Blogs

Blogs can be used to disseminate your research, news, or other thoughts quickly and easily. Once users have found your blog, they can subscribe to it via 'RSS'³ and receive updates every time you write a new post. Users can also discuss interesting points by adding comments which normally appear at the bottom of a post.

Before setting up a blog:


² http://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-media/tutorials

³ See http://www.whatisrss.com/
• Does your team/department have the resource (and motivation) to keep the blog updated on a reasonably regular basis? A blog that hasn’t been updated for six months won’t look so impressive!

• It is well worth monitoring comments in case hateful, obscene or other inappropriate content is sent. Most blogs give the option to be emailed whenever a new comment is submitted (before it appears publicly), so it is easy to remove such content if necessary.

Can be used for:

• Academics updating others on latest research, news, or useful information (e.g. see Andy Hudson-Smith’s Digital Urban blog - http://www.digitalurban.org/)

• Departments providing latest news and other items which could be of interest to target audiences (UCL E-Learning Environments - http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ele)

If your department would like to set up a blog that uses the UCL corporate identity, visit http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ and follow the relevant instructions.

Social networks
Some social networks can be used for staff and students to discuss, share and recommend content to one other. They can also be engaged with on a corporate level: Facebook, for instance, offers organisations the possibility of setting up a ‘page’ which other users can interact with. In this way, the UCL Facebook page\(^4\) lets Facebook users add comments to a ‘wall’, watch UCL YouTube videos, and ‘like’ or share content that they can recommend to their Facebook ‘friends’.

Before working on a social network

• If you’re setting up a Facebook page, you’ll need to ensure that you have the resource and motivation to regularly update it with content, such as latest news, discussion, images, etc. An empty Facebook wall (or one that is filled with other users’ promotions) does not reflect well on your department.

• Also ensure that you have the time and motivation to deal with feedback – both positive and negative.

Can be used for:

• Promoting your team/department, and engaging with Facebook users through discussion and content-sharing.

Social multimedia sites
Websites such as YouTube (video sharing), Flickr, Instagram and Pinterest (photo sharing) and SoundCloud (audio sharing) enable users to easily upload content and let others receive and interact with it by, e.g. posting comments.

Can be used for:

• Promoting content within the sites’ communities

\(^4\) http://www.facebook.com/pages/UCL/92637159209
Developing media repositories, so that individual videos can be linked to from other websites.

For information about producing your own video content, please see the CAM toolkit at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/cam

**Microblogs**

Microblogs such as Twitter allow you to post short ‘Tweets’ of information that are no longer than 140 characters. Twitter can be used as a fast way to tell others about the latest news, discuss information with other users, and cover live activities. Rather than blogs, which can be more reflective, Tweets are quick and conversational. See the UCL social media website for examples of UCL Twitter users.

*Can be used for:*

- Telling others about latest news
- Discussions with other users
- Covering and interacting with live events (e.g. submitting questions to a speaker; detailing what is happening in a conference, etc.)
- Interacting with specialist staff. For instance, UCL Museums have been involved in the ‘#askacurator’ campaign in which questions (in the form of Tweets) are sent to curators, and replies are then sent back using the UCL Museums Twitter account.

**Wikis**

Wikis are websites that allow users to easily create and edit existing webpages. The most famous wiki is Wikipedia, which enables users to collaborate on encyclopedia-style articles.

There is an existing UCL wiki service which can be used by UCL staff at http://wiki.ucl.ac.uk/

*Can be used for:*

- Collaborative documentation within teams
- Promoting your department’s research and activities by adding relevant information to other wikis (e.g. providing useful content to a public wiki about a subject that involves your department’s research).

**Discussion forums**

Forums have been popular for many years, allowing users to post messages to a ‘thread’ about a particular issue. Forums often cover niche subjects, and can be used to make contacts, engage with users who are interested in a particular subject, or as a way to put questions to a particular community.

There has recently been a growth in the ‘question and answer’ style of forum, through the website ‘Quora’. Quora lets users post questions, post answers, and rate the answers of other users.

*Can be used for:*

5 http://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-media/users
• Generating contacts in a particular subject area
• Basic research and discussion
• Promoting department activity and research

**Social bookmarking websites**
Social bookmarking websites are extremely useful tools for saving your browser bookmarks onto an external website. You can then access your bookmarks from any computer which has access to the internet. Most social bookmarking websites also enable users to follow others’ bookmarks, share their own, or to even display latest bookmarks on their own websites. Currently there are a variety of popular bookmarking tools such as Delicious (http://www.delicious.com), Diigo (http://www.diigo.com) or Google Bookmarks (https://www.google.com/bookmarks/).

*Can be used for:*
• Following interesting academics or writers in your subject area
• Sharing selected bookmarks with others (e.g. students) an example of an academic's reading material.

**Location based services**
Through the growth of smartphone usage and GPS, 'location based services' have had a surge of new activity. Typically these involve users interacting with a location in some way (e.g. by checking in, voting for it, leaving tips about it, etc.). Services include TripAdvisor (http://www.tripadvisor.com), Google Places (http://www.google.com/intl/en_us/latitude/intro.html), and Facebook Places (http://www.facebook.com/places/).

*Can be used for:*
• Monitoring people’s comments about your public exhibitions and events
• Sharing with others the interesting locations you’ve visited (e.g. for academic field trips)
• Tips (e.g. local coffee shops, venues, etc.) that may be of interest to newcomers to your department.

**Finally…**
We recommend that you visit http://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-media for further guidelines for social media use. If you have any further queries regarding social media, feel free to email us at digital-media@ucl.ac.uk

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6 A note on promotion: Social media platforms can be used to promote research, events, and other activities. However such promotion must be done with care: Most online communities will frown on new users coming to simply advertise things. Instead, it is worth promoting yourself by engaging with groups by providing interesting content (through multimedia generation; answering other's questions on discussion forums, etc). Similarly, more people are likely to follow your Twitter or blog feeds if you're providing interesting content. If these are simply lists of adverts, then users could lose patience and unsubscribe.

As ever, for further advice see http://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-media/guidelines