

**WHY SOCIAL MEDIA
SHOULD BE AT THE
CENTRE OF YOUR
COMMUNICATION PLANS**

INTRODUCTION

Every single second of the day 170,000 items are added to Facebook alone. That's before you even consider the 7,300 Tweets that get sent each second, or the 1,200 pictures per second added to Pinterest.

As you are reading this, millions of people are busy swapping information on social networks. According to Wikipedia, there are almost 100 social networks that have more than one million users – indeed many of them have hundreds of millions of subscribers.



INTRODUCTION

Whichever way you look, there are statistics that demonstrate that social media is vast, active and fundamental to the way people communicate these days.

You cannot ignore social media. It is omnipresent and, therefore, should feature in all kinds of communications plans.

Whether you want to promote something or respond to negative coverage, social media has a role to play. In times of crisis, social networks can often be the dominant means of communication; social media is the fastest means of communication to large groups of people.



SOCIAL MEDIA MAKES THE NEWS

At 3.31pm on 15th January 2009, US Airways Flight 1549 landed on its belly in the Hudson River, New York.

The plane had crash landed after having both its engines taken out by bird strikes. At 3.50pm, the [first picture](#) of people being rescued was published on Twitter, taken by a passenger on one of the ferries that were being used to rescue the aircraft's passengers.

However, even that 14-minute gap between the plane landing and social media spreading the news was slow. The [first Tweet](#) about the plane crash was whizzing its way around the world just two minutes after the aircraft hit the water.

The usually rapid CNN did not manage to get the news on-air until just after 4pm, some 35 minutes after the plane crash-landed.



SOCIAL MEDIA MAKES THE NEWS

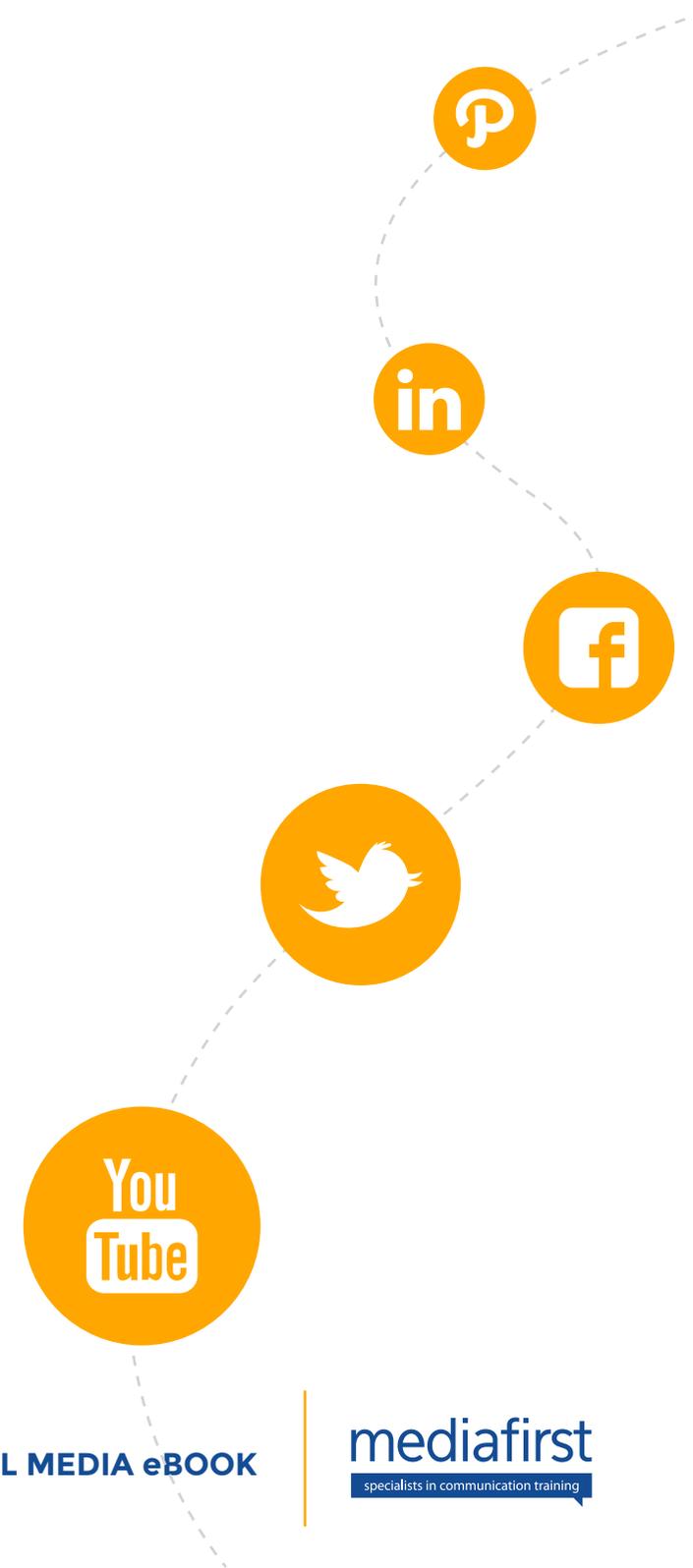
This incident was one of the first in which social media 'broke' the news.

Nowadays it is commonplace.

Indeed, during the terrorist attack in Paris in November 2015, victims were using social media to communicate with the world outside; we were able to be witnesses to the incident, live, as it happened.

The fact that people involved with news events can 'report' them as they happen has not escaped journalists.

They now monitor social media regularly to make sure they do not miss out on 'the latest'. Twitter, especially, has become an important source of news for journalists.



SOCIAL MEDIA BACKS THE NEWS

As soon as journalists get hold of a story – even if it did not come from Twitter – one of their first ports of call is social media.

They can immediately track down the people involved, for instance. Alternatively they can find out contacts within a company using a service such as LinkedIn.

Using elementary search tools within social networks it is easy to find friends, relatives and neighbours of the people in the news.

As a result, journalists have a tool that helps them gain all kinds of background information, as well as additional people to interview.

They can also get pictures or even videos to help them with their reporting. There is a wealth of information within social networks that is publicly available and journalists tap into it on a regular basis.



SOCIAL MEDIA BACKS THE NEWS

Journalists also use social media to locate potential interviewees. If they need an expert on a topic, for instance, they'll send out an interview request using the hashtag #journorequest.

That hashtag is monitored by many people in corporate communications teams or by public relations companies.

As soon as they see a message for which they have a suitable interviewee, they can respond quickly to the journalist who needs such a person.

It is a quick and easy way for journalists to find people to interview – as well as for communications teams to use the opportunity created.



SOCIAL MEDIA IS THE NEWS

In January 2014, copywriter Marty Christmas made a joke on Twitter about some fish at Sainsbury's not having a bar code on the packet.

For the next three hours, the social media team at Sainsbury's responded with witty banter about fish. The Twitter-based conversation became mainstream news because it showed that the supermarket had a sense of humour.

But social media can just as easily make the news for negative reasons. One of the more high profile examples is HMV.

When a number of the company's employees were being dismissed, in 2013, disgruntled staffers with access to the corporate social media accounts took to Twitter to air their grievances. @hmvtweets tweeted that the layoffs were a 'mass execution of loyal employees who love the brand' and regularly used the hashtag #hmvXFactorFiring.



SOCIAL MEDIA IS THE NEWS

Needless to say, workers live blogging their own dismissals on the company's account captured the interest of mainstream media.

Other notable social media 'gaffes' include in 2009, 13 staff at Virgin Atlantic being dismissed having called their customers 'chavs' in a conversation on Facebook and in 2014, US Airways accidentally tweeting an offensive, pornographic image, revealing more than they intended.

These social media 'gaffes' are not uncommon but they become news because they are seen by so many people online.



SOCIAL MEDIA ENABLES CUSTOMERS TO TELL YOUR STORY FOR YOU

One of the great advantages of social media is that it enables customers to spread good news about your organisation and its employees.

Little things that may have gone unreported before now get circulated widely and generate mainstream media coverage. Take the case of [Iceland delivery driver](#) Vince Brown.

In June 2015, Mr Brown was stuck in traffic on the M62 when he noticed a man next to him was struggling in the heat.

That man, Tom Lofus, has diabetes and had left home without his medication. He was becoming increasingly ill when Mr Brown came over and offered him food and drink from his cab.

A friend of Mr Lofus posted a message thanking Mr Brown on the Iceland Facebook page and inadvertently turned him into an overnight internet sensation.

That post quickly generated more than 150,000 likes and was shared more than 90,000 times before being picked up by mainstream media.



SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING IS ESSENTIAL

If you want to avoid gaffes, you need to know what is going on in the social media world.

That means you need to monitor what other people are saying about your business or organisation.

When you keep a constant watch over what is being said about you, it provides you with two opportunities.

Firstly, you can prevent the problems arising by dealing with the negatives, resolving them before the mainstream media gets to notice.

Secondly, you can get engaged with the positive conversations, even using fun and humour, thereby getting the chance of positive coverage for your social media usage.



SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING IS ESSENTIAL

To monitor what is happening on social media you need to use a management tool, such as HootSuite or SproutSocial.

These tools can help you monitor a range of social networks for information that is directly relevant to your company or organisation.

It means you get immediate alerts, enabling you to respond quickly.

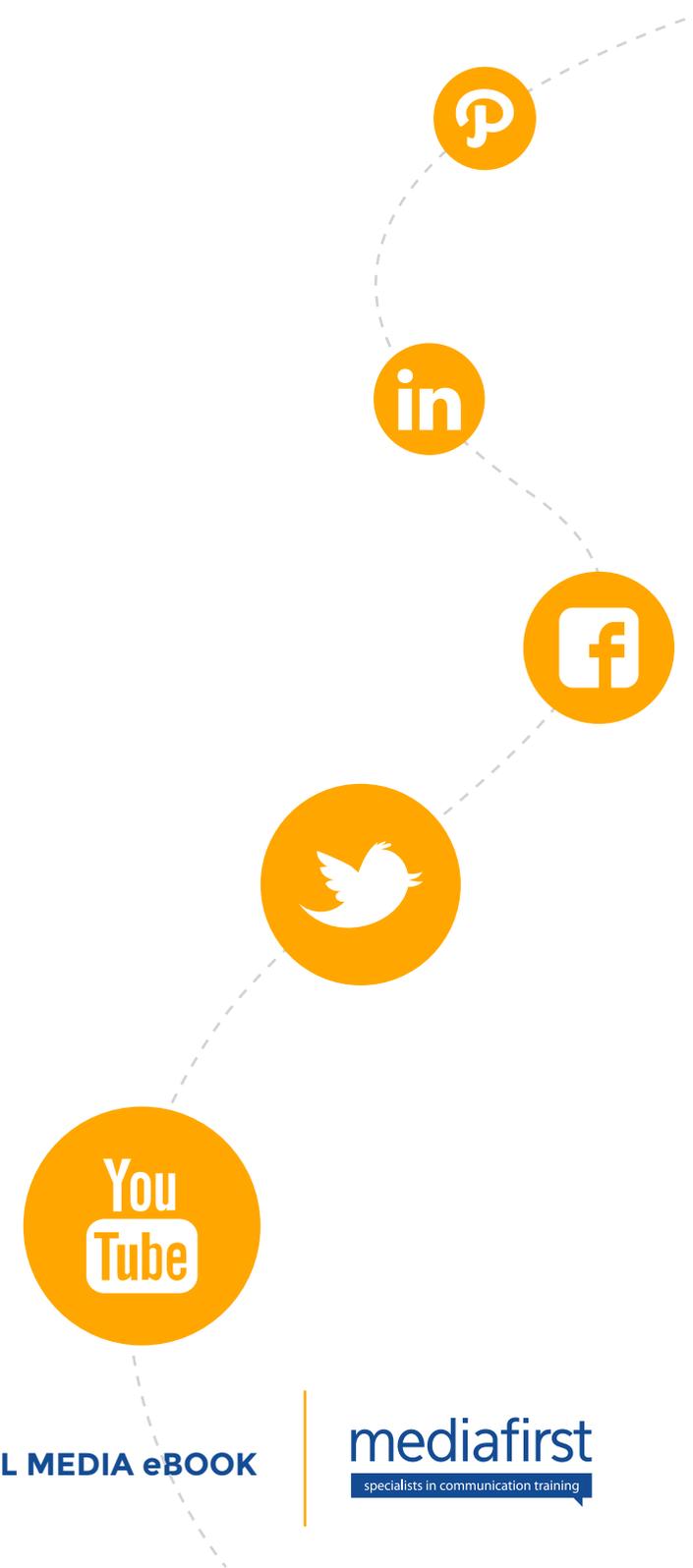
The speed of response is essential – a Tweet, for instance, has a lifetime of about two hours. After that, it has virtually evaporated.

If you do not monitor in “real time”, you miss out on preventing the spread of negatives as well as capitalising on the positives.

Monitoring also means you can keep up-to-date with breaking news, enabling a further opportunity.

You can use the news item’s hashtag, for instance, to offer your experts for an interview.

If you do not monitor the social networks for news – and your competitors do – it means they have a much greater chance of their spokespeople being used, instead of yours.



SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY IS ESSENTIAL

If all you do is monitor the social media world you are listening but not taking part. You are a 'lurker'.

If you lurk in the shadows of social media, no-one knows you are there.

This means that should you wish to take up an opportunity that the monitoring suggests, you will be primarily talking to yourself. Unless you are followed on social networks you are invisible.

You are only going to get followed if you are interesting. That means regular and frequent posts that your target audience finds useful and valuable.



SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY IS ESSENTIAL

Given that the average life of a social media post is about two hours, it means you need to be active on social networks every two hours at a minimum.

It does not matter if you repeat yourself – the people who follow you and check in to social media in the morning, will not know that you said the same thing the night before.

Nor will the people who check social media in the afternoon, know you said the same thing this morning.

So, even though you need to be active and visible almost continuously, you can repeat yourself – you do not have to be original time after time.

Also, you can use services such as the HootSuite “publisher” tool and Typecast6 to help you create fresh content, to keep your stream of activity live.



SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY IS ESSENTIAL

As you can tell, you cannot approach social media without a plan.

What things are you going to monitor the social networks for? Who is going to do the monitoring? What is going to happen when they find something of interest? Who is going to create your social media content? Do they have a budget for images? How often are they going to produce original material or repeat old posts?

There are plenty of questions like these that need answering. You cannot just launch yourself into the world of social media without some thought and planning.



SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY IS ESSENTIAL

There are plenty of other things to consider too – such as what hashtags will you use, what linking system will you use and how will you coordinate your website activities with your social media content.

Social media is clearly not something you can “just do”; there needs to be considerable thought and planning involved.

Indeed, such strategic thinking comes into its own should you face a crisis.

With a clear strategy and plan you will be able to take to the social media airwaves during a crisis so that you can communicate well with everyone involved.

This will help allay fears and concerns as well as reduce the negativity that is inevitable in a crisis. When managing a crisis, the last thing you want to worry about is what to do with social media. That should run like clockwork, thanks to a successful strategy and plan, all worked out well in advance.



SOCIAL MEDIA IS ESSENTIAL

Social networks are inhabited by more than journalists looking for news. Your staff, your customers and your competitors are all involved in social networks too.

When you communicate something on social media, you reach of all them at the same time. Your customers see something positive and your competitors get concerned because you are engaging with people.

Meanwhile, your staff see you being positive and engaging as well as being responsive.



SOCIAL MEDIA IS ESSENTIAL

That makes your firm or organisation an excellent place to work and encourages staff retention, perhaps.

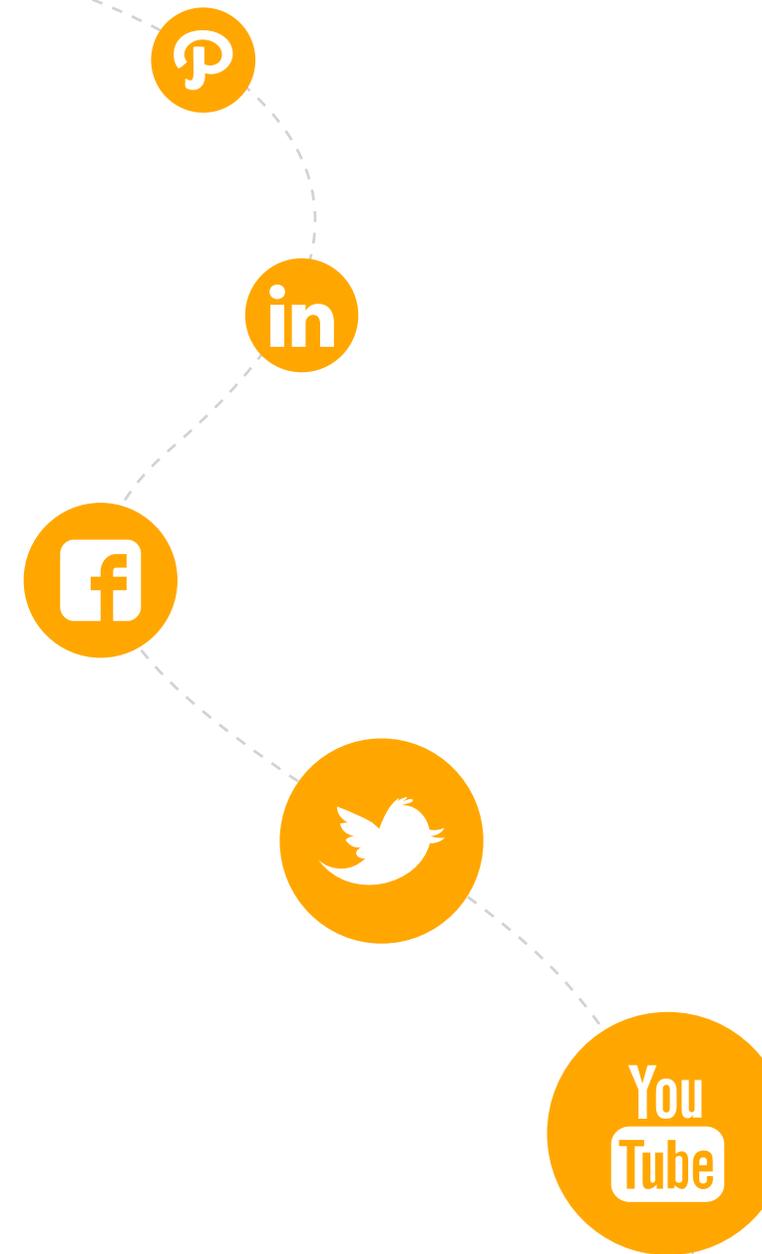
You also demonstrate what a forward-thinking and active company you are to potential employees.

Social media reaches everyone.

It helps create a brand image, as well as enabling rapid and efficient communication on specific topics to particular people.

It helps with customer service and it can even help you find better suppliers.

In short, without social media your business or organisation will suffer as you will not be communicating as best you might to all the people who matter.



WHO IS DOING IT RIGHT?

Research shows that companies who respond in “real time” have received a greater increase in shareholder valuation.

Companies that ignore social media have mostly seen a share price fall in recent years. Similarly, studies have demonstrated that organisations that use social media the most are the ones that have had the biggest rise in profitability.

Now, this doesn't mean that social media alone leads to a rise in profits and shareholder value. Rather, it points to the way such companies conduct themselves.

Being open to change, allowing staff some freedom to communicate in real time and adopting new technologies quickly are all associated with financial success.

Social media is not the way companies help raise their financial position, but a symptom of the way they work.



WHO IS DOING IT RIGHT?

Some companies are doing very well, thank you very much, and social media is playing its part.

The organisations which respond to more than two-thirds of social media opportunities appear to be the ones that have the greatest financial benefits.

The Dutch airline, KLM, for instance, responds to 98.76% of its social media messages. The industry average is 54%.

Meanwhile, the mobile phone company, Orange, responds to social media posts in which it is mentioned in an average of 18 minutes.

Clearly, such large organisations have significant resources and teams to help organise their social media activity.

However, even comparatively small companies can benefit. The LED lighting company, Cree, for instance, ran a hugely successful Facebook campaign in which it encouraged people to send in examples of poorly lit areas, such as offices.

Each week a winner was selected who received some vouchers. The campaign engaged people and made them more aware of Cree lighting products.



FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA:

1. Formulate a strategy and plan – what do you want out of social media and how are you going to get it?
2. Select the right management tool for your organisation.
3. Add content frequently and regularly.
4. Monitor and prioritise responses.
5. Engage with your followers, hold conversations.



ABOUT US

Media First has been delivering bespoke communications training for more than 30 years.

As social media has become an integrated part of most businesses' internal and external communication plans, we have been increasingly asked to deliver social media training.

This has included large companies asking us to design and develop workshop style courses which highlight the benefits of a company, or its employees using social media.

We are also regularly asked to help clients produce better social media content and test social media communications plans in a crisis scenario.

Depending on the social media experience of an organisation, our training could be provided by journalists, television presenters or an internet psychologist.

Our tutors have a unique understanding of what makes an audience tick. To find out more about our social media training courses please get in touch on 0118 918 050, hello@mediafirst.co.uk or visit www.mediafirst.co.uk.

