Poole Museum Social Media Strategy

An Overview

<u>Introduction</u>

This report contains the outline of a social media strategy for Poole Museum. It identifies areas of practice that have been previously explored in an assessment of approximately 18 different heritage organisation's social media profiles, making recommendations based on those observations that might benefit Poole Museum's online presence.

In anticipation of the *Our Museum* project that will be starting in the autumn of 2020, Poole Museum are attempting to revitalise how they operate online, specifically on social media. This review was outlined within the brief for NHLF funding and is integral to the project itself.

The recommendations supplied in this document follow the core objectives outlines within the NHLF brief which are as follows:

- Connecting with a younger audience
- Promoting the *Our Museum Project* online
- Generating data and information about audiences and their values
- Create engagement activities that are creative, engaging and generate debate

However, all content in this document can be applied to fulfil any of these objectives regardless of which section they have fallen under. The sections are designed to highlight which strategies and recommendations work best at achieving that specific goal.

After the different elements of the strategy have been discussed, recommendations will be outlined for the long term, medium and short term so that goals can be met and achieved in a realistic timeline.

Connecting with a younger audience

Instagram

Instagram has demonstrable success with a younger audience. This results in organisations being able to experiment with their brand and expose it to younger people without risk of alienating the older core demographic. Typically, it is worth putting the effort into taking good pictures for Instagram as the platform is visually oriented. Bright colours and exciting imagery capture the attention of users. It is quick and easy for a user to 'like' content and therefore engagement tends to be higher compared to rival platforms. Most organisations acquire more than double the likes they get on Facebook or Twitter on their Instagram accounts.

Creating a conversation

In tandem with using the correct platforms, Poole must create the best content to attract younger audiences. As seen in the best practice review, there are clear examples of content that has been created to attract a certain audience. Experimental and slightly more controversial topics may scare off Poole's more senior core demographic, but this may be the contrary for 18-24-year olds. Subject matter such as sexuality, social issues and historiographical debate that focuses on decolonising heritage are highly popular with this age group.

Social media can be a two-way street and it is possible to create a real conversation between audience and organisation. One such method of getting interaction and feedback from followers is by tapping into popular culture and current affairs in a way that brings focus back to you. One famous example of this would be 'The Dress', an image of a dress that went viral since people online could not agree whether the dress was black and blue, or white and gold. Many celebrities, companies and organisations chimed in with parodies or opinions on this event. Events such as these do not necessarily have to be related to your organisation's core message, although it is often useful to try and personalise your input online to get noticed.

A short example of how Poole Museum might contribute to this specific viral event could involve using the collection in a parodied method. "Does [object from the collection] appear to be 'X' or 'Y'?". It could even be as simple as asking the social media team their opinions and posting that online for your audience to see.

Our Museum Project

Style Guide

A style guide determines the tone and overall style of the content written for social media. Certain organisations such as the British Museum, opt for a much more structured and formal style which might have something to do with their global reach and research acumen. Basic words with a grammatical style that would not be out of place on BBC news or a public sector website is a style guide well suited to an organisation that serves a global audience.

However, smaller organisations have the freedom to explore and experiment with how they wish to convey themselves to an audience. Smaller museums such as the Jamaica Inn and Leeds Museum are far more casual, offering up colloquialisms and writing in a way that opens the barrier between the professional and pedestrian in relation to heritage.

Try being less formal, more personal and opting for unorthodox ways of communicating with your audience. Ultimately you want to break the trend of faceless social media profiles by being more emotive and human. Posting pictures of staff and writing in a way that you would when talking with friends (within reason) can really help to establish that bridge from professional to personal.

Consistency

Regular updates on all platforms is essential to maintain interest in your organisation and what they are doing online. The *Our Museum* project must have constant mention on all channels so that followers are exposed to your activities and invited to participate whilst new followers are alerted to your offer as soon as they subscribe to your profiles. Other than the *Our Museum* project, consistency can be achieved through establishing thematic days so that every project has the attention it needs to thrive online.

Postcards

Another project to undertake is under the working title of *Postcards from Poole* which aims to celebrate Poole's maritime and social history conveyed through the images on homemade postcards. The Old Fire Station in Oxford (featured in the Best Practice Review) utilises postcards sent in from their followers to then be showcased on their platforms. Taking inspiration from this idea and encouraging your followers to become stakeholders and invested in your profile creates consistent engagement. It is also a highly dynamic project where your only limitation is the canvas of a postcard itself. The imagery can convey many different aspects of Poole's heritage.

Engage with the audience

It is a good idea to engage with your audience when they comment on social media posts. This encourages people to invest the time in your online presence if they know that their insights are acknowledged. Ensure that you maintain your tone of voice always be respectful when you engage with others. Engagement makes others feel like a valued member of your online community and they may invest more time in your organisation as a result.

Data about Audiences

Utilise Platform Features

Each social media site has unique features that allow for different audience insights and participation. Facebook has an event organiser which can be used to showcase events and gauge potential attendance figures. This in turn can be used as data to determine the success of your organisation's events. Polls and surveys can also be carried out on social media to gather a brief audience insight on certain matters. Be sure to also read comments and analyse engagement on posts so that you can gain feedback or insight into engagement levels.

Admittedly, Instagram and Twitter are lacking in these features and therefore it is most worthwhile familiarising yourself with how Facebook's pages operate and the different features that you can utilise. The reason for this is due to the large user base of Facebook. For example, whilst Poole uses Eventbrite to schedule and organise events, Facebook events can still be used in tandem to generate more exposure for the event. Links can be added to the Eventbrite page to direct your Facebook traffic forward.

Different Platforms for different data

Each platform has its own strengths and weaknesses, for instance Facebook allows organisations to view comments and opinions of their audience. It is also a diverse platform where text and image posts can be used. On the other hand, Twitter and Instagram can host wildly different audiences. Twitter has many professional organisations interacting with one another online whilst Instagram panders more toward the individual user. Each platform can be used to extend your brand and alter it to fit the demographics that are popular within it. For instance, Facebook's average user may be older than the average individual Instagram user and thus might require a different approach, to expand on this point please refer to the style guide section.

Creative Engagement activities

Collaboration

It is valuable to be using social media to collaborate with similar organisations that share your values and interests. This is primarily useful on Twitter, where companies and organisations can retweet and reply to one another's posts easily in full view of your followers and audience. Collaborations online can expose your organisation to other audiences that may follow one of your rival or partner organisations which can result in a cross pollination of followers who subscribe to your feeds based on what they have been exposed to.

Creating a list of potential people/organisations that Poole might collaborate with is a good way to allow for further research into a partner to see if they might be a good fit for your organisation. You can view this as a living collaboration database and can add or remove people when needed. With a list, you can also segment it to suit different needs. For example, a list for creative individuals, corporations, local businesses, and other museums.

Humour

Do not be afraid to insert humour and less serious subject matter into your social media programming. Posts with comedic value have been observed to have a high yield in terms of engagement, both for likes and feedback. York Museum's Trust has demonstrated this with a post comparing Dame Judy Dench to items within their collection. As comedy and humour is a subjective matter, there is no clear and defined way to get laughs out of your audience. Although it is likely you will want to keep it tasteful and apolitical with an emphasis on heritage and Poole.

New Angle and interpretation on Collections

Your collection is the most extensive asset that you have as a museum. This can be utilised to create unique and interesting content. Unique items that Poole is known to have should be displayed often as an advertising technique. Anthropomorphic items might be able to be characterised online and given personalities in a similar vein to the Mary Rose and their skeletal canine mascot Hatch. Doing such a thing raises the profile of your collection. You can also perceive social media as an opportunity to showcase items that are currently in storage and cannot be seen by the public.

Online Exhibitions

During the UK Lockdown, an increasing number of museums were beginning to create online exhibitions for the public to enjoy since they were unable to visit in person. Many exhibitions were

previously paid but put online for free. Exhibitions do not necessarily have to be structured with expert curation *a la* The British Museum, it can simply be a collection of objects tied together with a loose theme and simple and clear interpretation. Ad hoc exhibitions can add a lot of content and are transferable across all major platforms.

Use of 'a thread'

Threads are chains of posts unique to Twitter that are made about one topic. Think of a thread as an umbrella which your posts will reside within. Using a thread is a good idea for online exhibitions or showcases as each post follows the other without interruption. This style of post also solves the issue of having text heavy posts when talking about a collection as information is usually in smaller sizes due to Twitter's character limit. Another advantage to using threads is that it encourages actively engagement as audiences must select your thread and scroll through it to see the items in order,

Authenticity

Above all it is Important that during the project the social media profiles are run according to the organisation's own values and beliefs. To a certain extent, developing a style guide remedies this as it is entirely up to you how the social media posts are written.

It is crucial that the social media is run in a way that the team are comfortable and happy with. This will foster more creative thought and generate more genuine posts. It will take less time to think of posts as social media will become an extension of the museum's personality.

You must enjoy what you are doing, or it will get old and stale fast. To this end, it might be appropriate to say that authenticity is the backbone of any good marketing/branding online.

Recommendations

Short Term

Photography

Getting Instagram photos right with good lighting and interesting subject matter is a quick way to dramatically improve the quality of an Instagram profile. Anyone with a modern smartphone camera has the tools to make it work. Look at Instagram content from the Best Practice review for inspiration and examples of quality photos. Lighting is essential to get a photo to appear well, angles and perspective are down to creative licence and is up to the photographer to decide how they would like to feature their object. Your subject can be an item from the collection, a piece of architecture or even a piece of computer-generated graphic design. Ultimately it should be quick and simple to take photos, although it might take practice to get it right.

Less Text

Generally, less is more when it comes to text on social media posts. Whilst Twitter has a 280-character limit, it is quite easy to go overboard on Facebook and Instagram. Attention spans on online are short and many people will not take the time to read a long paragraph. Whilst this does not mean all posts should be short sentences, all text should have a reason for being there and anything unnecessary must be avoided. Sentences that are strategic and concise will be read in their entirety and you will have passed on the information needed rather than having people scroll past your lengthy posts or unfollowing you. This is especially relevant on posts with photos. Text should not overcrowd an image and should merely compliment the imagery with a small caption or piece of interpretation.

Humour

Looking at examples of humour in social media on the Best Practice Review can give an idea of how to implement this style of post. It is ultimately a matter of subjectivity to trial and error. The best way to experiment is to play it safe and see how the audience reacts. It may be useful to alter the style of post depending on the platform due to demographic variations.

Medium Term

Consistency

Whilst consistency may seem simple and easy, it requires a constant flow of content and ideas to be regularly posted without too much repetition. To post regular updates, a consistent programme of topics may need to be established so that little is left to improvisation. A simple programme of thematic days can allow a wide range of posts, alternatively you may decide to have engagement heavy days that are followed by simpler posts the next day. Another great way to keep consistency is by using a third party programme that can schedule social media posts which takes the stress out of needing to past every day and instead creating a steady backlog of posts to go out that only need little management.

Collaborations

Take time to identify businesses and local organisations that you might wish to collaborate online with. It is quite common for an organisation to work with creatives and small businesses in their area. No formal arrangements need to be made, if an artist or other entity wishes to work with you it is as easy as promoting or featuring their work on your platforms/brining attention to what they do. This sort of minor collaboration can lead to deeper partnerships or even bring in some new audiences of your own. It is also easy to reach out to other heritage organisations online, especially on Twitter where it is easy to retweet and expose followers to new accounts through your own timeline. This can result in a cross pollination of followers who have seen your content on a different heritage social media account.

Long Term

Style Guide

Poole Museum lends itself to a more personable writing style online. Mainly due to its local reach and emphasis on the heritage of the immediate area rather than on a wider scale. Experiment with slang and casual writing. Try to avoid using complex words or overly formal sentence structures that might appear to place Poole as an authority rather than on the same level as the audience.

Although in a similar vain to getting consistency right, a style guide can take time to develop. It is unwise to suddenly decide to write in a formal or informal style without everyone involved with

social media being aware of how or why posts should be written in a certain way. Tone of voice online is more than using choice words and writing in a clear and concise manner. The way your organisation communicates online represents your organisation's ethos and values, be them local or international. It also establishes how you wish to connect to your audience and how you wish to be perceived by them. All these aspects need to be addressed prior to creating a document that all those involved with social media can access and use to write consistent content.

You want to showcase those working on your social media team so that audiences can put a name to a face when reading posts. Outlining names in the bio or within individual posts allows people to identify team members. Celebrating your team and allowing some minor personal touches in each post (within reason) can cement that personal feel needed to draw back the curtain on heritage.