

Start Up Loans

Social Media Toolkit



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What is social media?

Looking to boost your business, lower marketing costs, and increase sales? Get to grips with social media with this handy guide tailored to small businesses.



Social media has become a game changer in how businesses connect with customers. Whether posting special deals or tracking customer feedback, social media is a powerful way to promote your business and stay connected with your customers.

Social media platforms are free-to-use networks that unite individuals, businesses, and organisations online. Big-name social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn boast billions of users, allowing people to share images, join groups, play games, and chat online. Some platforms, such as Twitter – now rebranded as X – are all about quick updates and opinions, while others, such as Facebook, delve deeper, letting people share interests and events.

Why use social media?

Businesses use social media to connect with their customers, offering them deals, alerting them to special offers, or simply building brand awareness.

It can be a cheap and effective way to chat directly with customers and provide customer service too, and you can respond from your computer or mobile device, such as a smartphone.

Social media is now part of billions of people's everyday lives. As of July 2023, an estimated [4.88 billion individuals use social media](#) – 60.6% of the world's population. In the UK, the proportion is even greater, with data from September 2023 showing 57.1 million active social media users, 84.4% of the total population. The total number of social media users is [forecast to rise to 65.6 million](#) in the UK by 2028.

When used effectively, social media can bolster customer loyalty and help you find customers more likely to buy from your business.

What can you do on social media?

Many small business owners believe they don't have the time or resources to keep up with the fast-paced world of social networks.

However, this guide is designed to help you understand how to use social media, what platforms may be best for your business, and how to create successful posts effectively and cheaply.

We have also highlighted free tools that may help get you started.

So, what can a small business do with social media? Even if you don't have a promotional budget, some quick activities can help get the word out about your business.

- **Run promotions** – Use tactics such as flash sales or discount codes to encourage potential customers to buy.
- **Hold competitions** – Use competitions to encourage people to follow or like your social media channel. Small prize draws for people who sign up mean anything you post will appear in their newsfeed and be seen by their friends.
- **Send service updates** – Let your customers know when new items are in stock or if you're available for a job.
- **Chat directly** – Respond to customer posts and questions and remember to comment on posts by others, especially if they're influential people who might be able to sway potential customers.
- **Share customer content** – Encourage your customers to share their stories, product photos, reviews, and thoughts. Reward the best customer posts to build loyalty and spread the word.

60.6%

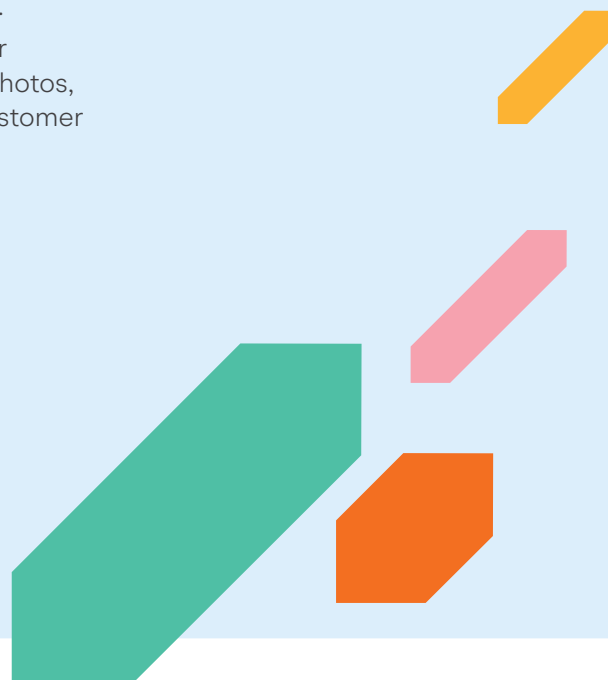
of the world's population use social media

84.4%

of the UK's population use social media in September 2023

35%

of the UK's population could be actively purchasing via social media by 2030.



Advantages of social media:

- **Cost-effective** – Cheap to set up and use, social media can lower marketing costs and increase sales.
- **Increases traffic** – Social media can bring more visitors to your website and help improve your search engine ranking.
- **Expand reach** – It can help you reach the right customers worldwide and connect you to other businesses and brands.
- **Provides customer feedback** – Social media is an easy way for customers to get in touch and share their opinions. You can ask them what they think of your products – a cheap way to conduct customer research.

Disadvantages of social media:

- **Time-consuming** – Although it can be cheap to run, posting content and responding to customer comments can take time. You may need to engage and actively post constantly to grow your social media traffic.
- **Public posts** – Posts on social media can be visible to everyone, which means everyone can see any customer complaints, so it's important to respond quickly and positively.
- **Long-term effort** – Building a successful social media marketing channel takes time, and it might be months before you start to see any real results or return on investment. A large number of customers following your social media profile rarely happens overnight.
- **Security risks** – Social media accounts can be hacked, with fake and damaging posts made to your customers that look like they're from your business.



Developing a social media strategy

Get it right, and social media can greatly benefit your start-up. You can use it to build a strong community around your brand, drive traffic to your website, boost brand awareness, and generate sales.



The key to social media success is to have a strategy. Rather than randomly posting on platforms, you should take the time to work out what you want to achieve, what type of content you want to create, and which social media platforms will work best for your brand.

Steps for creating a social media strategy



1. Set goals

The first thing to consider is why you are using social media.

This can help dictate the platforms you use and the type of content you post. Your objectives could be building brand awareness, growing your social media following, building connections with potential partners, finding new employees, or generating sales.

Once you've decided on your goals, it's a good idea to set targets for the results you want to achieve. Give yourself key performance indicators with the results that you expect to achieve.

Learn more about [setting business aims and objectives](#).



2. Understand your audience

Knowing your audience is crucial for making a success of social media.

Consider using [market research](#), polls, surveys, and focus groups to understand who your target customers are and what they are looking for from a business like yours. You may already know this if you have a [business plan](#).

It's a good idea to be clear about which social media platforms your target customers use, as there may be little point in your business being on a platform that isn't relevant.

Ways to find this out include:

- setting up a focus group and asking them questions
- having it as a question in feedback surveys
- looking at the followers of your competitors
- searching social media platforms for relevant hashtags and terms related to your business.

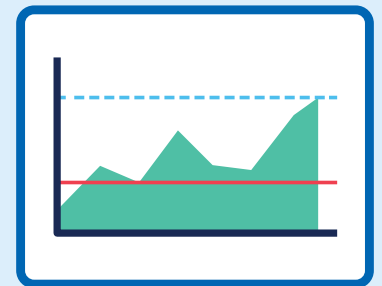
3. Choose your platforms

With so many social media platforms, it can be tricky to know which ones to use. It's common for start-ups to register with several simply because they feel they need a wide presence.

This isn't necessarily the best strategy though, as you need to make sure you are focusing on the platforms that your target customers use.

Start-ups often have tight budgets and limited resources, so you don't want to spread yourself too thinly. It might be best to use one or two platforms well, rather than using several but not having the time to engage with your followers properly.

[See the 'social media platforms' section for more details on the larger platforms and the types of businesses and content they are most suited for.](#)



4. Plan your content



By planning your content, you may be able to make the most of social media.

While being reactive and responding to trending topics and topical events is important, scheduling posts in advance can help you stay focused on your overall objectives.

Think about the different types of content you want to share and the times of day that are most relevant for posting them. You can also plan your content around particular times of the year, such as summer, Eid, and Christmas.

Recycling content can be good practice, too. For example, you might create a video interview that you then transcribe as text and share as a blog post.

You might also create a calendar that plots out your content. This could be a spreadsheet that you create yourself, or you could use the scheduling features of many social media management tools.

[See the 'free social media tools' section for examples.](#)

5. Measure your success

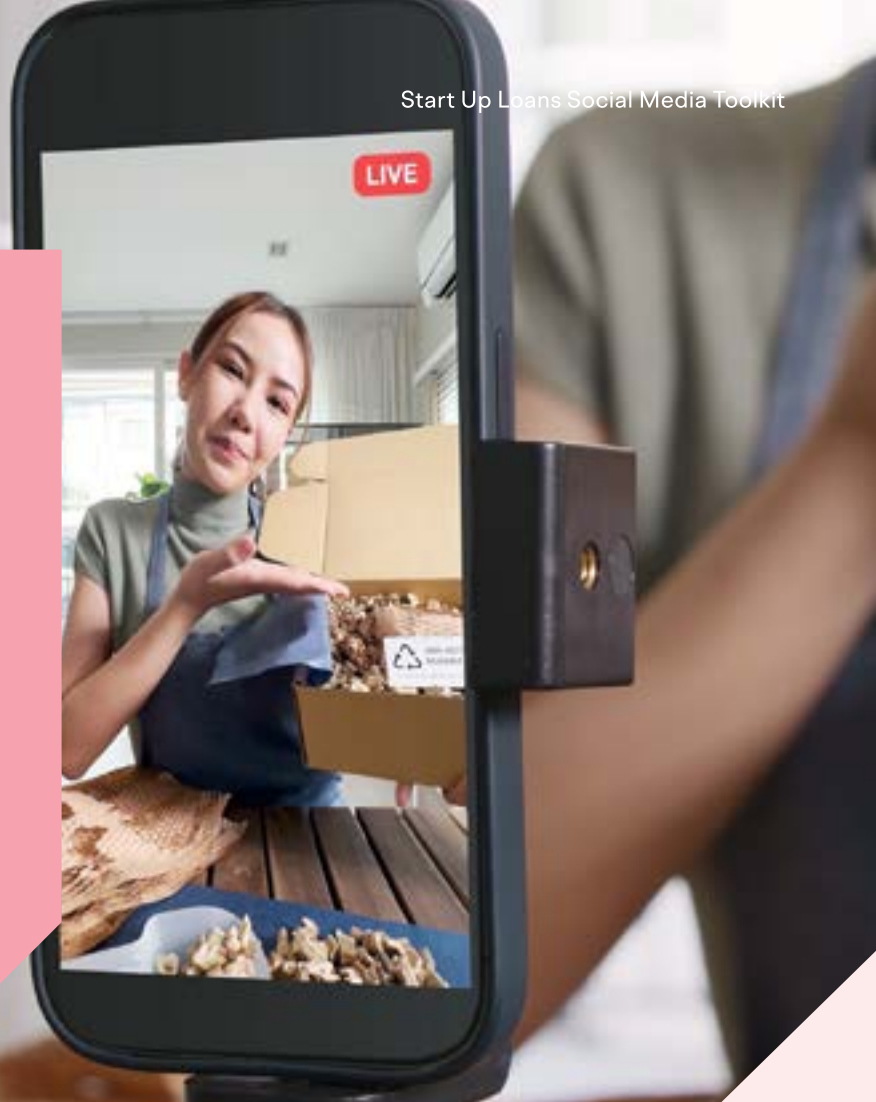
Tracking the performance of your social media activity is vital, preventing you from wasting time on activities that aren't delivering the results you want.

Have systems in place for monitoring how your content performs. Most social media platforms provide analytics, but you might also want to invest in external tools that deliver more comprehensive data.

If your content isn't working, adjust it. If something is working, then consider repeating it.

Social media platforms

Here are some of the most popular social media platforms and how you can use them for your business.



Facebook

Owned by Meta, [Facebook](#) is the most popular social network in the world, [with over 3 billion monthly users](#). Around 200 million businesses use Facebook, many of which are small companies and start-ups.

Businesses can use Facebook's huge user base to build awareness of their brand, creating connections with existing and potential customers. Facebook can also be a good platform for customer service, gathering reviews on products or services, and targeting customers based on age, location, interests, and other demographics.

Potential downsides to Facebook can include the ability for users to post negative comments and reviews about your business and the need to pay for advertising to make the most of the customer targeting features.

Instagram

Also owned by Meta, [Instagram](#) has [over 1.35 billion users worldwide](#). Many people use it as an app on their smartphone.

Instagram's focus on video and images makes it a good visual platform for businesses to showcase their products or services. Popular features include Stories, which are images and video content that disappear after 24 hours, and Reels, which are short-form videos.

Instagram has features that allow you to target people interested in your products. It also has a younger user demographic, which is useful if that's your target audience.

One of the potential drawbacks of Instagram is that organic engagement can be tricky, so you may need to pay for advertising. Meanwhile, poor-quality content might not generate the desired engagement, and you can't add clickable links to posts on your main Instagram feed.





X (formerly known as Twitter)

Launched in 2007 as Twitter, the platform was rebranded as X after Elon Musk bought it in 2022.

X is a fast-moving, news-focused platform that could be useful for businesses looking to connect with customers quickly, such as gathering feedback and dealing with customer service queries.

With a huge user base, businesses can use X to reach a broad target audience. Its downsides include the fact that criticism of a business can quickly get attention, spam accounts can be a problem, and it can be hard to build organic engagement.

LinkedIn

Owned by Microsoft, [LinkedIn](#) is a professional, employment and business-focused network founded in 2002.

This means it is particularly well suited to business-to-business (B2B) brands, although consumer businesses can use it too.

Individual users create CV-style pages to outline their experience and expertise. Businesses can use LinkedIn to promote their business, demonstrate thought leadership, make connections, and recruit new staff.

As well as being useful for start-ups targeting other businesses as customers, it's also a good place for business owners to connect with investors and other influencers.

However, it can take some time to build high levels of engagement, while advertising can be expensive, and spam and fake profiles can be an issue.

TikTok

Launched in 2017, [TikTok](#) is a short-form video-sharing app with over [1.2 billion active users worldwide](#).

TikTok focuses on users embracing trending topics with entertaining and amusing videos. There's also lots of educational and informative content.

The platform can be a cost-effective way to build engagement because authentic and low-budget content filmed on a smartphone tends to do well. The algorithm is driven by interest and engagement, so even accounts with low follower numbers can quickly go viral.

TikTok isn't for all businesses, and it may not be suitable if you aren't confident with video content. Advertising on TikTok can also be expensive compared to other platforms.

Pinterest

Launched in 2010, [Pinterest](#) is a social network that allows users to share videos and images that they 'pin' to 'boards'. [According to Pinterest data](#), women make up 60% of the website's 465 million users.

Pinterest is sometimes described as a visual search engine because people use it for aesthetic and artistic inspiration. Users might look for recipes, a new outfit for a party, or ideas for a holiday. What they often find is a product shared by a business. Pinterest reports that 46% of weekly users have discovered a new brand or product on the network.

It can be a good platform for product businesses in sectors such as homewares, arts and crafts, and wellness. If you share engaging content that piques users' interest, it can be very effective. The nature of the platform and its demographics means it's not for all businesses though, such as service-based companies and those that aren't particularly visual.

LinkedIn is a good place for business owners to connect with investors and other influencers.



Organic content creation

Organic content describes social media posts that are published without paying for advertising.

Understand the platforms

Different platforms suit different types of content, and it can pay to understand what works for each one.

TikTok, for example, is focused on videos. Instagram also has a focus on video, but images are important too.

To maximise engagement, you must know the recommended image sizes on each platform. [The sizes as of Autumn 2023 are in this post.](#)



[Find out the recommended image sizes on each platform \(October 2023\)](#)

Encouraging your users to create content is a powerful way to build organic social media engagement.

Provide value

You'll need to think about how to build a relationship with your audience, so your content shouldn't all be about directly promoting your products and services.

A long-term theory is the 80/20 rule, which says 80% of your content should provide value, and 20% should promote your products or services.

Types of valuable content include:

- industry news
- how-to guides
- content linked to trending topics
- opinion on topical news stories
- interactive content such as polls and competitions
- amusing content such as memes, jokes, and parodies
- content linked to national holidays and special days
 - [X has a calendar here](#)
- infographics displaying data in an engaging way
- electronic books (e-books)
- content showing behind the scenes at your business.

Promote your products or services

Although it's important to produce content that's not overly focused on sales, you ultimately want people to buy your products or services – so promotional posts can be helpful.

While this content can contain direct links to your products or services, think about other ways to encourage sales, such as product demonstrations and testimonials from happy customers.

User-generated content

Encouraging your users to create content is a powerful way to build organic social media engagement. It helps to build trust among your target customers because if they see people like them engaging with your brand, they may be more likely to do the same thing.

Ways to create user-generated content include:

- a brand hashtag that your followers can use in posts and that you then share
- a competition encouraging followers to share content in exchange for a prize
- working with social media influencers that are relevant to your brand (see the 'social media influencers' section below for more details).

When sharing user-generated content, be sure to credit appropriately and ask for permission if necessary.



Social media influencers


Influencers are individuals with authority, expertise, and an interest in particular areas who have a substantial following on social media.



A social media influencer can have a significant impact on the purchasing decisions of their followers. By associating your brand with an influencer, you can attract interest in your business.

Many influencers have millions of followers, but they may not be suitable for start-ups due to the high fees they may charge.

However, there are many more influencers you could work with. They might only have a few thousand followers but could have a stronger connection to your products or services.



Understand your target audience and know which social media platforms they use.



Tips for working with influencers

1. Decide your budget and set clear goals for what you want to achieve.
2. Understand your target audience and know which social media platforms they use.
3. Find influencers relevant to your brand using the platforms that your customers use – search for them on those platforms, ask your customers, or use specialist influencer agencies and marketplaces.
4. Contact the influencers and, if they agree to work with you, draw up an agreement outlining what you will provide and what you expect the influencer to deliver – such as the number of posts and the hashtags they'll use.
5. For payment, you could either gift the influencer with a product in return for social media posts or pay a fee.
6. Have a system in place for tracking the impact of the influencer's content, such as tracking links and

special ecommerce codes.

There are advertising rules for working with social media influencers.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) says: "People should be able to recognise immediately when content is advertising, without having to click or otherwise interact with it. It needs to be clear and obvious, so people shouldn't need any special knowledge or have to figure it out."

Steps to take include ensuring that the influencer uses hashtags in their posts such as #Ad, #Advert, or #Advertisement.



[Read the ASA's guidance in full](#)

Social media advertising

It's becoming increasingly important for small businesses to consider including paid advertising in their social media strategy.

Platforms regularly optimise the content seen by users and prioritise paid over organic posts.



You can use social media advertising to target users based on specific demographics such as age, gender, location, and interests.

Actions you can encourage them to do include:

- following your social media page
- visiting your website
- filling in a form
- watching a video
- buying a product.

Unlike other types of advertising – such as those delivered via internet search engines – social media ads can be generally hard to distinguish from organic posts. This makes them less intrusive and more likely to encourage engagement from your target customers.

All of the major social media platforms offer advertising with varying formats to choose from. Costs depend on several factors, including your objectives, budget, the

industry you operate in, and the competition from other businesses. You pay when an action is taken, such as a user clicking on a link, watching a video, following a page, or installing an app.

Costs vary depending on the platform. For example, X has less competition than other social networks, so it might be more cost-effective for your business. However, it can be harder to generate engagement than on Facebook, which has a larger user base and more targeting options.

If you get it right, social media advertising can be very powerful and play a significant role in your start-up's growth. However, it's easy to spend money and still not get the engagement you need.

As such, you should be clear about your objectives from the start and consistently monitor the performance of your adverts to ensure those objectives are being met.

Social media advertising can be complicated, and if you don't have the knowledge or experience, you might choose to work with an expert.

Types of social media advertising

There are many types of social media adverts, but here are some examples to consider.

One of the simplest types of social media advertising is boosting posts on Facebook and Instagram. You pay to boost the post for a specific period and get it seen by more relevant people, including those who don't currently follow your business page.

The objective of post boosting is to generate engagement on that specific post and improve the visibility of your brand.

Facebook and Instagram's other more complex advertising formats allow you to focus on more targeted actions such as clicks to your website, buying a product, downloading an app, registering for an event, or generating sales leads.

TikTok and Instagram can be useful for e-commerce and retail brands, as they allow you to create adverts to promote your products further.

On LinkedIn, you can use advertising to reach professionals, including potential new employees. Formats include sponsored content to demonstrate your thought leadership and sending direct messages which appear in users' private messaging inboxes. LinkedIn also has a dedicated recruitment section where you can promote job vacancies.

Video advertising options on TikTok include the hashtag challenge format, which encourages users to film themselves doing something specific and post it with a hashtag created by your brand.

TikTok also offers in-feed ads, which appear in the native newsfeed as users scroll through the app, as well as brand takeover ads, which appear as soon as a user opens the app.

Useful links for social media advertising

- [Advertising on X](#)
- [Advertising on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp](#)
- [Advertising on TikTok](#)
- [Advertising on LinkedIn](#)
- [Advertising on Pinterest](#)
- [Advertising on YouTube](#)
- [Advertising on Snapchat](#)



Free social media tools

While many social media tools require payment, several services have free plans that can be helpful for start-ups on a budget.

Social media management

It can be time-consuming to post on social media platforms, so these tools allow you to schedule posts in advance, which are then posted automatically.

Most provide a calendar feature, which is useful for planning your social media content and seeing all your posts in one place. They also often include ways to monitor social media for mentions of your brand or other related topics.

Free options include [Buffer](#), [Later](#), [Crowdfire](#), and [SocialOomph](#).

Social media analytics

Measuring the performance of your social media posts and the level of engagement they receive is essential.

You can then repeat what works and adjust your posts if they aren't attracting the people you want. Social media analytics tools allow you to measure the success of your posts.

Free options include [Buffer](#), [Later](#), and [Fedica](#).

Design and images

Good quality images and graphics are important on social media if you want to maximise your engagement by creating standout content. Various design platforms allow you to create great content using templates, stock images, and other features.

When using images that you did not create yourself, you should make sure that you have permission to use it from the image's owner. If you use a copyrighted image without permission you may be in breach of the copyright and could face a fine.

There are also dedicated platforms providing free stock images, such as [Canva](#), [Adobe Express](#), [Visme](#), [VistaCreate](#), [Pixlr X](#), [Unsplash](#), and [Pixabay](#).

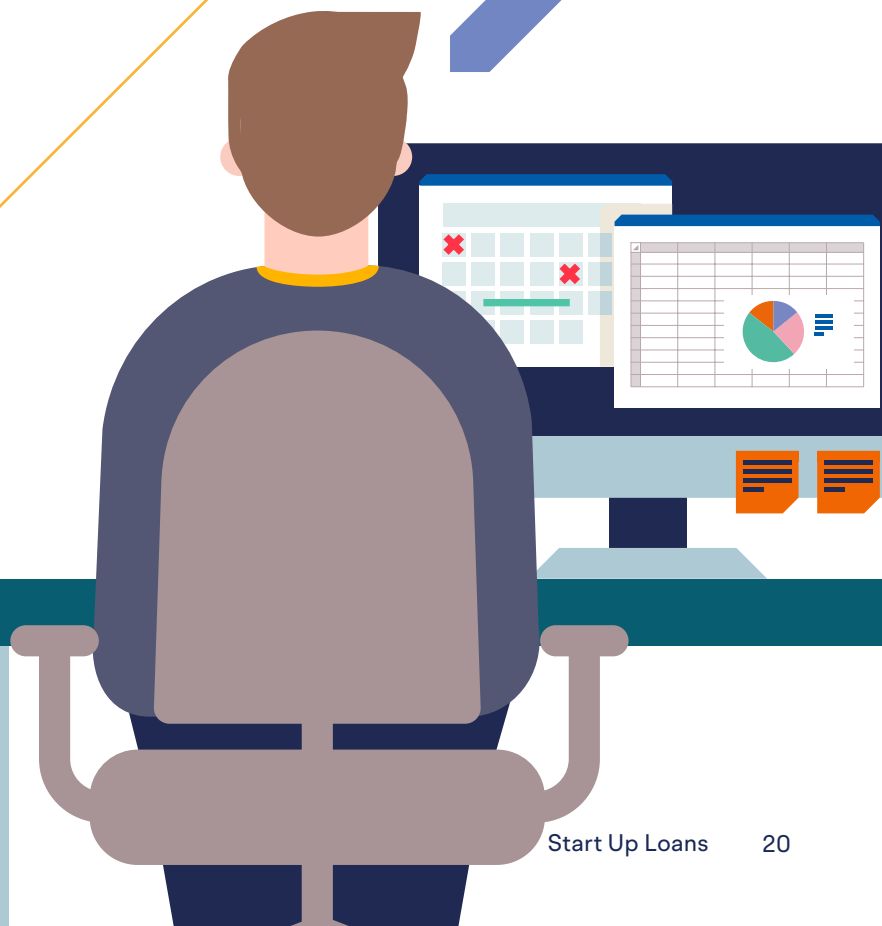
Video editing

Video content does well on all social media platforms, with some websites, such as TikTok and YouTube, focusing solely on it.

Editing tools allow you to create video content in the formats appropriate for each social media platform. Using an editing tool ensures that you create it in the right size.

Free options include [wave.video](#), [Adobe Express](#), [Canva](#), [Unfold](#), and [Mojo](#).

Good quality images and graphics are important on social media if you want to maximise your engagement.



Artificial intelligence (AI) tools and social media

Artificial intelligence (AI) is “a type of computer technology concerned with making machines work in an intelligent way, similar to the way that the human mind works”.



AI can be [dated back to the 1950s](#) and a team of researchers at Dartmouth University in the US, but the use of AI tools by businesses and individuals has rocketed since the arrival of ChatGPT in 2022.

The platform, which [became the fastest app to reach 100 million monthly active users](#), is a type of [generative AI](#). These are tools that can generate high-quality text, video, images, and audio in response to prompts by humans.

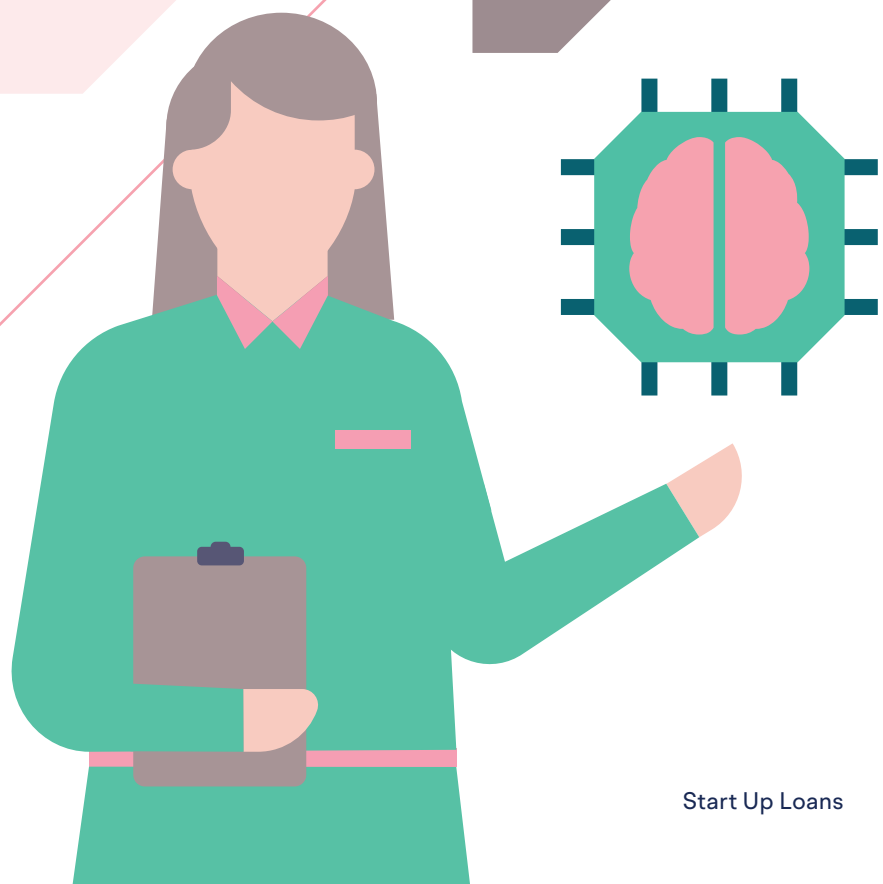
Tools such as ChatGPT have the potential to transform and streamline the way small businesses manage and measure their social media activity. Actions such as researching ideas, creating content, and generating images can now be performed in seconds using AI tools.

While AI undoubtedly has many benefits, you should be careful about relying on these tools due to concerns about accuracy, plagiarism, bias, and privacy. Some AI services can also be costly to access and difficult to understand without expert knowledge.

Examples of AI tools that can be used by start-ups for social media include:

- **Content creation**
[Google Bard](#), [ChatGPT](#), [Copy.ai](#), [Hootsuite OwllyWriter AI](#), [Semrush AI Writing Assistant](#), and [Jasper](#).
- **Research and data analysis**
[Google Bard](#), [ChatGPT](#), [Brandwatch](#), [Tableau](#), and [Microsoft Power BI](#).
- **Image creation**
[Canva](#), [DALL-E](#), [Microsoft Bing Image Creator](#), [Adobe Firefly](#), and [Jasper](#).

Actions such as researching ideas, creating content, and generating images can now be performed in seconds using AI tools.



Community management

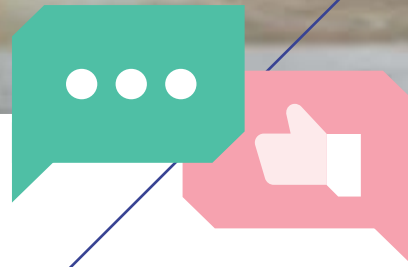
Community management covers what you do after your social media content has been published.

It includes how you engage, monitor, and moderate your online community.



Building an authentic social media community around your business is a powerful way to grow your brand. Proactively interacting with people who follow you (or the people you want to follow you) helps to create a loyal and engaged fanbase.

You must also monitor social media for negative comments, deal with them effectively, and ensure they don't damage your brand's reputation.



If you run social media groups, such as on Facebook, publish clear guidelines for what is allowed in the group.

Engage with your community

To make the most of social media, you should monitor the conversation regularly and engage with your community.

Interacting with your audience by liking their posts, asking questions, and acknowledging comments helps to build trust and can lead to sales.

It's a good idea to take a human approach and tone of voice, avoiding repeating the same template responses. Have a natural and organic conversation but be careful not to engage too much because it could be intrusive.

Start-ups and small companies have an advantage over bigger brands in that the founder or founders are still very much part of the business' operations. Use this to your benefit by telling your story and showing your followers who is running the business. Get them involved in your entrepreneurial journey.

Customer service

Social media is a great place to manage your customer service, but with that comes the potential for public negativity about your products or services. If you promote your presence on social media platforms, customers might contact you to ask questions, give feedback, or make complaints.

You should set expectations when using social media for customer service. Outline in your profile the hours you deal with customer service-related questions and how quickly you will respond. On some platforms, such as Facebook Messenger, you can set up automated messages to inform users that your customer service is offline.

If you have the resources, you can create dedicated customer service accounts where all related comments are directed. If you do this, make sure you respond. Users will get frustrated if their questions or complaints go unanswered.

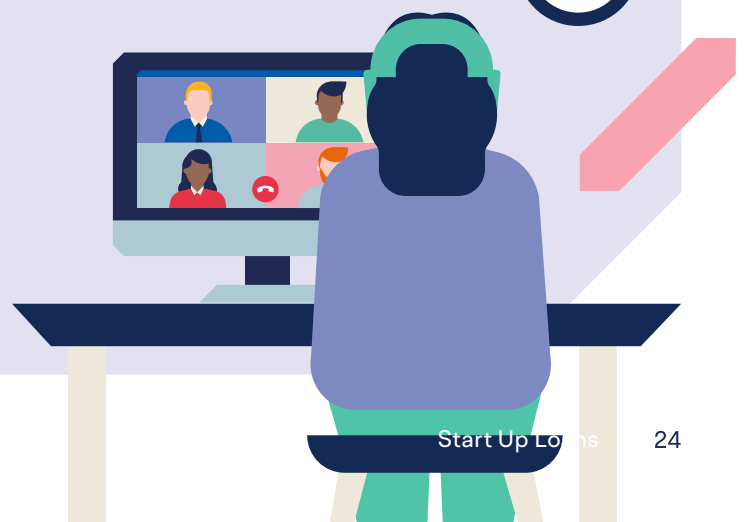
Although many users will tag you in a comment so you get a notification, that's not always the case. You need to monitor the conversation for mentions of your brand. You can do this by searching the platforms or using management tools (see the 'free social media tools' section for examples).

When responding to comments, be calm and polite. Thank users for positive feedback and praise and acknowledge complaints. Comments are sometimes best dealt with discreetly, such as when personal information must be shared, so encourage the user to private message you.

If you find you are getting lots of the same questions, create a frequently asked questions page on your website that you can direct users to.

If you receive abusive comments from trolls, it is usually best not to respond as it can encourage more trolling. You can also block users. It's okay to delete spam comments but be wary of removing genuine complaints because you could be accused of censorship.

If you run social media groups, such as on Facebook, publish clear guidelines for what is allowed in the group, what isn't permitted, and how you moderate the group and deal with content that goes against the guidelines.



Accessible social media

When producing social media content, you should ensure that it's accessible to everyone.



As the [Royal National Institute of Blind People \(RNIB\)](#) says:

“Making your social media content accessible helps to maximise engagement. But most importantly, it's the right thing to do.”

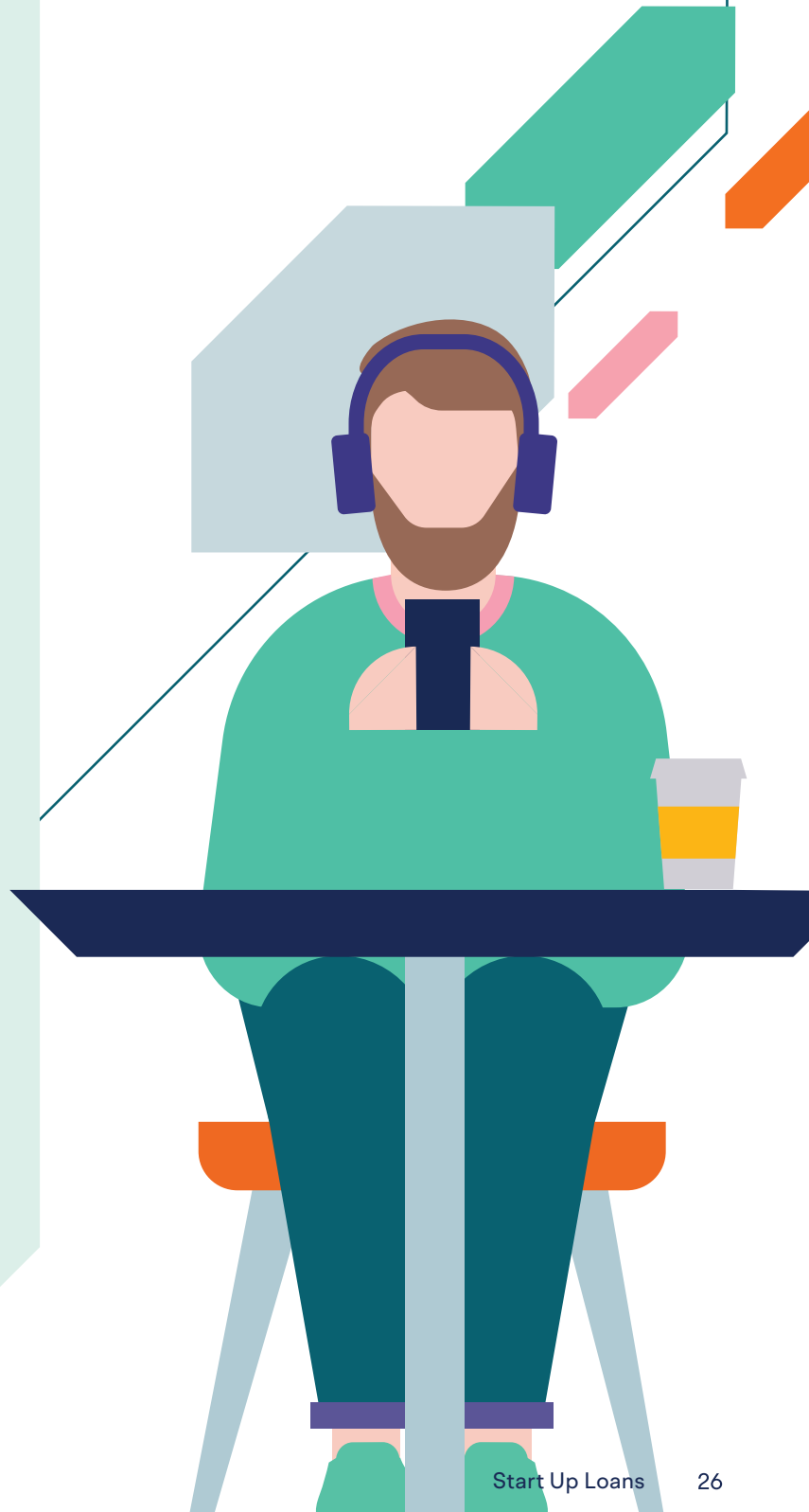
Many blind and partially sighted people use screen readers that read text aloud or other tools to magnify it. These tools can't read images unless you provide descriptions. This can be done using the alternative text ('alt text') function on social media platforms.

You should give a broad description of the image with the key details you think are important. The way you add alt text varies depending on the social media platform. RNIB has a [guide to adding alt text](#) on X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

Other tips from RNIB on making your social media posts accessible include:

- **Capitalising hashtags:** the first letter of each word in a hashtag should be capitalised so that it is more easily understood by screen readers. For example, use #SmallBusinessTips instead of #smallbusinesstips.
- **use of emojis:** screen readers read each emoji in a post individually, so posting several of them can be time-consuming and frustrating for blind or partially sighted users. RNIB recommends limiting your use of emojis.
- **including captions with all videos:** the best format is white text on a black background, as that's the easiest for visually impaired people to read. Some social media platforms provide automatic captioning, but it isn't always accurate, so you should edit where possible. Tools that allow you to edit your captions include [Kapwing](#), [Happy Scribe](#), and [Veed.io](#).
- **disabling autoplay:** videos that auto-play, animations, and content with flashing or excessive movement can be problematic for users with vestibular conditions.

RNIB recommends limiting your use of emojis.



Jargon buster

The world of social media has lots of jargon that some business owners might find tricky to understand.

A meme is usually a humorous video, image, or other type of content copied and shared extensively on social media.





See below for a plain English descriptions of common terms related to social media.

Analytics: Data that illustrates the performance of your social media content.

Clickthrough rate (CTR): A term used in online and social media advertising to indicate the ratio of clicks an advert has received to the number of people who have seen it.

Direct message: Messages sent privately on a social media platform that only the sender and recipient can see.

Engagement rate: The number of people who engage with social media content compared to the number of people who saw it. Metrics include clicks, comments, and shares.

Follower: Individuals who have liked a social media account and chosen to follow it to see that account's content.

Hashtag: A word or phrase that's preceded by the hash (#) symbol. It's designed to bring together social media conversations and comments on a particular topic.

Meme: Based on the Greek word 'mimema', which means "imitated", a meme is usually a humorous video, image, or other type of content copied and shared extensively on social media. Memes are often captioned videos or images.

Pay-per-click (PPC): A model used in digital advertising that means the advertiser only pays when a user clicks their advert.

Retargeting: A method used in online and social media advertising to display an advert to an individual who has already visited a brand's website or social media profile.

Trending topic: A word, phrase, or topic that is particularly popular on a social media platform at a particular time.

User-generated content (UGC): Content created and posted on social media by an unpaid individual rather than a brand.

Viral: Content that spreads quickly among users on social media and becomes very popular with lots of engagement such as clicks, likes, and shares.

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