

Social media in health promotion and tobacco control

Tips and Tricks, March 2018



Why use social media?

Research has found online social networks can empower individuals and strengthen vulnerable communities¹. Online conversations which avoid the expert-client power relationship can work well for those who are disenfranchised including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. It can also be effective for people with low literacy. Considering the high uptake of Facebook amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the area is worthy of further exploration by health promoters working in Indigenous health.

The benefits of using social media for health communication:

- Make health information more available and shareable
- Health information can provide peer, social and emotional support
- Influence health policy²
- Be part of your community

A Basic Social Media Strategy

Social Media Basics:

- Facebook first. Make it engaging.
- Twitter is used by professionals, politicians, activists and journalists. Make it about advocacy.
- Instagram allows users to use compelling pictures or short videos to share a catchy message. Make it personal.
- Snapchat is a fun way of connecting with younger social media users. Make it youthful.

Select employees from each department to be [administrators or moderators](#) of the organisations Facebook page. Choose employees who are active social media users and already understand how social media works. Social media is social, it is important to allow numerous employees access to the page or site. Public health organisations need to invest resources into managing their Facebook page so that “quality content is given the best chance of success”².

Create social media guidelines to ensure your message is consistent and credible.

These guidelines can often be adapted from an existing communications or business plan. Guidelines can ensure employees are clear about the tone and style of communication. Consult your legal and human resources team about how best to engage with the public online¹.

Online health related content should be written at the 6th grade (11 to 12 yrs) reading level³. Avoid jargon, acronyms, long sentences and complicated graphics.

Videos can easily be made and there is a high chance some employees already use the video function on their smart phone. Start by making short videos which can be filmed with no editing required. Ask employees to share their story about why they work for your organisation. Employees can film themselves “selfie” style so the product fits easily into the Facebook feed. Personalise the Facebook page by sharing personal stories. Keep the videos short: 30 seconds to 1 minute. Post videos directly on the Facebook page. Users tend not to click on links. Subtitle or caption the video. Most users watch videos without sound.

Friendly Facebook. The Facebook algorithm favours personal posts over organisation or business posts. Content from health organisations may not show up on follower’s feeds. Health organisations should try to develop a personal way of communicating which does not impinge on the private lives of content makers or social media users. However, if you create content with a personal slant there is a higher chance friends and family of employees will share the content or tag people they know. This generates interactivity (sharing, likes, and comments) and increases the chance of knowledge translation which may impact on health policies.

Don’t use the health message crafted for Facebook also on Twitter, Instagram or Snapchat. They are different platforms which require different ways of communicating. Linking accounts and sharing the same message across platforms can be perceived as spam.

Positive and Unique Facebook posts

- **Posts that appealed to positive emotions** received “on average 18% more likes than call-to-action posts but 27% fewer shares”². In fact, research in commercial marketing on Facebook has found that eliciting positive emotions increases user engagement².
- **Create unique content.** Facebook users like to share new information. Informative posts which includes new information were shared twice as often as call-to-action posts². Facebook users share information when they believe the information is beneficial to others². Our research supports this finding.

Make health messages “stick”. This requires:

- A dedicated and skilled workforce
- Regular posts which maintain page currency

A “sticky” health message is “understandable, memorable, and effective in changing thought or behaviour”⁴. Researchers have found that both the SUCCESSs and STEPPS framework can be used for knowledge translation between health practitioners and the wider community. In health, knowledge translation is crucial as it can a “improve health, provide more effective health services and products, and strengthen the health care system”⁴.

Sticky [SUCCESSs](#): Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Emotional, Stories

Sticky [STEPPS](#): Social currency, Triggers, Emotion, Public, Practical value, Stories

Provide content people want to share. Create content which:

- Adds value (“How to...” or “Did you know...”). Produce content which “provides something of value to your audience”⁷.
- Entertains
- Encourages online engagement and real world action
- The 70/20/10 rule. 70 per cent of everything you post is original content, 20 per cent is shared content and 10 per cent is promotional⁵
- Visually appealing. A study which examined how Facebook is used to promote tobacco smoking cessation to Indigenous people found video works best⁴

Engage with your community. Reply to every comment on your page. Share content from other reputable organisations and groups. Show that your organisation is engaged with the community by sharing content which aligns with your values and mission statement.

Use Facebook promotional features. Pay for a few promoted posts and see if they increase engagement. Target specific users. Visit Facebook’s [Audience Optimization](#) guide for more information on how to target and engage your desired audience. Google “Facebook Audience Optimization” if the link above does not work.

5 top tips on how to “[Make Facebook work for your health service](#)”. Sydney University researcher Becky Freeman shares 5 tips on how to make Facebook work for you. Google “Freeman Facebook Menzies Vimeo” if the link above does not work.

How Australians use social media:

- 8 out of 10 Australians are on social media.
- Facebook dominates the social media landscape followed by Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter.
- 81% access social media on their smartphone.
- FB users are logging on less. “The average number of times people access Facebook has fallen from 32 times per week to 25, while the amount of time spent on each occasion has not really changed at just over 23 minutes”.
- Most popular time to check Facebook is in the evening and first thing in the morning. Men are more likely to check Facebook on the toilet.
- 88% of small, medium and large organisations post content daily on their FB page.
- Visual platforms continue to grow in popularity. Instagram use increased from 31% to 46%.
- Snapchat saw the biggest growth; usage almost doubled from 22% to 40%.
- Twitter has seen a surge in usage, up from 19% to 32%.
- Users are more likely to trust a brand if they interact with consumers in a positive way on social media.

Why Australians use social media:

- 1) connect with family and friends
- 2) share photos or videos
- 3) watch videos.

Source: Sensis (22 June 2017) Social Media Report 2017: Chapter 1 Australians and social media. Available at: <https://www.sensis.com.au/asset/PDFdirectory/Sensis-Social-Media-Report-2017.pdf>

Best Practice Examples:

[R U OK Day](#) FB page

- Primary goal is information sharing and online support.
- Majority of content is created by the R U OK team.
- Links are sometimes used to encourage users back to the R U OK website.
- Language is Facebook friendly. Not formal. Use emoticons and emoji's.
- Positive interaction with users is high. It can be simple or highly sensitive.

Ask A Mate | RUOK

RUOK is a suicide prevention charity organisation that encourages Australians to ask a mate the simple, life-changing question, "are you ok?"

RUOK.ORG.AU

Like Comment Share

189 reactions Top comments ▾

48 shares

Write a comment...

so simple,yet so important-be there,care,&,above all,just listen

Like · Reply · 2 · 13 hrs

R U OK Day Lovely words 😊 **Use the name of the person you are replying to.**

Like · Reply · 1 · 4 hrs

I always try to be there for my friends 😊❤️

Like · Reply · 3 · 21 hrs

R U OK Day That's fantastic 😊

Like · Reply · 1 · 21 hrs

What's your story, Cape York? FB

- Regular posts
- Posts have a local flavour and feel community connected.
- Shares content which encourages followers to participate in real world activities.
- Page is administered by Tackling Indigenous Smoking team at [Apunipima Cape York Health Council](#).
- Uses a Social Determinants of Health approach to choosing content.
- Uses national Department of Health campaign templates and adapts content for the local client base.



Further reading links:

[Menzies School of Health Research: Social Media to Enhance Indigenous Tobacco Control](#)
(Google “Menzies social media tobacco” if the link above does not work.)

[What Facebook’s News Feed Changes Means for Nonprofits](#) (Google “facebook news feed action sprout”)

[How to make a simple video on a phone or tablet](#) (Google “ABC open simple video”)

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