

DIGITAL BOOST

power up your business

PRODUCING ENGAGING CONTENT GUIDE

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SECTION 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO CREATING CONTENT

When creating content you need to think about how to communicate and offer value to your audience through a different angle other than just selling and displaying products and services.

You want to deliver information and value through high quality content that interests and engages your audience enough to turn them into new, loyal customers.

Content marketing is a longer process than simply blogging about your products, which doesn't necessarily add value to your audience.

If you dedicate time into creating high quality content then you are creating assets that can be shared across multiple channels. Content should communicate with your customers without selling or pitching your business, but delivering high quality information.

SECTION 2

ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING

The key to creating engaging content is to understand what your customers are looking for, by scanning your environment to assess your competition, audience, platforms, trends and resources.

Competition - Researching exactly what your competition are doing in terms of content will allow you to assess what seems to be working for them, how they engage their audience and identify elements you can replicate, or better, or any gaps you can fill.

Resources - Looking at what is currently being engaged with will also tell you what kind of resources you will need in order to get involved in the conversations - time, money, people, hardware, software etc.

Trends - By assessing current trends you can identify areas you can get involved with as well as spotting opportunities as to where trends maybe heading, to get ahead of the curve.

Audience - Assessing the audience of your competitors and the audience you expect to be your customers. This will further inform which type of content you will need to be producing.

Platforms - Very important once you have assessed all other elements, to really understand which platforms fit both your audience and your content.

SECTION 3

WHO ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS?

Understanding your audience is essential in order to ensure that you are creating digital content that they are going to engage and benefit from.

In order to create content that resonates with your audience you should think about your customers in detail; their demographics including age, gender, location, interests and how they behave online.

To do this, you need to understand your customer and what they are looking for and engaging with- and this requires research.

SECTION 4

RESEARCH

PEER RESEARCH: View the blogs and social channels of your peers, industry leaders, competitors and similar businesses and see what they are posting. Then work out from this group what style of content is being used; what sees high engagement and which styles see low. Also research stakeholders using tools such as You Gov <https://yougov.co.uk>

AUDIENCE RESEARCH: Keep an eye out on your current audiences and see what type of content they are sharing and engaging with.

PLATFORM SPECIFIC RESEARCH: Perform research on the platforms where you want to post your content, the platforms where you have an existing audience or would like to develop one. This research would include looking at what content seems to work well on each platform.

KEYWORD PLANNER is part of Google's advertising platform, but can also be used for research to see how often a search term is being entered into Google, and research related and alternative keywords. This is great for deciding what topics to write about; are customers constantly searching for answers on a specific topic where you are an expert? This would be a perfect topic to blog about.

ANALYTICS: Using analytics from your website and social media channels will give you an in depth understanding of who your audience is and what type of content they engage with.

SOCIAL LISTENING: This is a way to find and assess what is being said about a company throughout social media, blogs, forums etc. Specific words and phrases can be used to search the online world. Social listening also informs the organisation of where your audience is and where they should be online.

GOOGLE ALERTS: Setting up alerts directly to your mailbox allows you to monitor if your business is being talked about in the industry. Additionally, setting alerts for relevant topics within your industry will help you keep informed and up to date. This can then help with the content you create to ensure that it is relevant to your audience.

#HASHTAG RESEARCH: This can be done in a number of ways, by searching for specific hashtags within certain platforms, or setting up #hashtag monitoring screens within management tools such as Hootsuite. This allows you to both research and monitor certain conversations, to help you understand which hashtags are used and engaged with regularly. This research will form the early part of your content strategy.

SECTION 5

SOURCING 3RD PARTY CONTENT

To support your content strategy, sharing third party content is essential. Third party content provides your customers with more trusted information which supports your brand's ideals and personality. Sharing third party content gains attention from your audience as well as engagement. Third party content can be anything from reviews, products you approve, articles that your brand is interested in etc.

Some top tips for sourcing 3rd party content include –

GOOGLE NEWS (<https://news.google.co.uk/>) Feeds you with a regular stream of content based on search terms you type in. Google's algorithm shows us at the top of the listings the most relevant content based on search terms, the content source and many other ranking signals.

GOOGLE ALERTS (<https://www.google.co.uk/alerts>) Allows you to set up alerts for certain search terms. When an article is published that matches that search term, Google will email the content straight to your inbox. You can set Google alerts up to send you the content 'as it happens' 'once a day' or 'once a week' and you can either receive ALL results, or only the best ones.

HOOTSUITE (<http://www.hootsuite.com/>) This platform has a great publishing feature which will feed you content based on up to 3 topics.

BUZZSUMO (<http://buzzsumo.com/>) is a search tool that tracks content on all social media sites and ranks them based on the number of shares on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, and Pinterest. It monitors content by topic or user and uses an advanced search engine to deliver accurate results

LINKEDIN PULSE (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse>) is a great place to find high quality content written by industry thought leaders from around the world

SECTION 6

BUILDING A CONTENT STRATEGY

Building and creating a content strategy is necessary to ensure you are achieving objectives through your content.

Key points to consider include –

What is your message?

Where is your content going to go?

Do you understand who your customers are?

Creating a 6-12 month plan will ensure your content is relevant to your audience; you will have a clear plan to follow and your content is more likely to be impactful.

There are many 'trigger points' to consider, including your product cycle, new product launches, seasonal content, and upcoming events.

Knowing what you have planned within your business ensures that your audience is constantly informed. Good practice is to always segment your audiences within your strategy as not all of your planned content will suit all of your audiences. Likewise, not all of your audiences are on the same platforms so it's crucial to ensure you post your content in the right places.

Whilst thinking about your content strategy, it's also worth thinking about your business's key performance indicators and how developing great content can help achieve your chosen KPI's.

SECTION 7

WHAT MAKES GOOD ONLINE CONTENT?

In order to write good copy that engages with your audience, consider the following points –

USE YOUR TITLE TO BUILD CURIOSITY - Compel your readers to click and engage with your content by using numbered lists like '5 simple tips to improve your Twitter profile' or use phrases like '10 things about Facebook reach you don't already know' suggesting you are filling a knowledge gap.

USE YOUR TITLE TO PROMISE VALUE TO THE READER- Your copy must add value to your reader's time, and you can use this value by highlighting it in your title. Hook the reader in with a promise of value with titles. A good example of this are titles such as '16 tricks and Features You Didn't Know About...' which suggests the reader will learn something they didn't know, and encourages the reader to engage with the content and find out more.

BE READER FOCUSED - Use the copy to explain what impact your message will have on the reader.

TELL STORIES - One of the easiest ways to connect with your reader is to tell them a story and or include them in the story, to get your message across by using words like 'You' 'we' and 'our'.

BE CONSISTENT - Your readers will become accustomed to a certain tone and writing style, so by being consistent with your style, you will keep your audience engaged. Major deviations from your current style may put your readers off.

USE A FORMULA - There are many writing formulas out there that offer a cohesive structure for both the writer and reader. A really simple but effective one is the 'Before - After - How to get there' formula. In the before section you describe the reader's current scenario, in the after section you describe the ideal outcome for the reader and in the 'how to get there' section you bridge the gap between the before and after. This is a really effective way to write about what you can offer your readers by putting into context their current situation and how you can get them to where they want to be.

ASK QUESTIONS - One of the biggest goals of any of our digital communications whether they be Facebook posts or blog posts, is starting conversations with our audience. Great ways to do this through blogging is by asking questions of readers, prompt responses and ask them to comment and reply with their own opinions in the comments section. This can have a number of benefits beyond just engaging with your audience through the current blog post. Through the interactions it can become apparent what other subjects your audience are hungry for, therefore giving you further subjects to blog about and engage with your audience over.

LINK TO OTHER ARTICLES AND SOURCES - Throughout your article, include any relevant links to other articles or resources, which add further context to the subject you are writing about.

EASILY SHAREABLE - After you have created some fantastic engaging content that has your reader really enthused, the ideal action now would be for them to share your content to their own network, increasing your exposure. Make this easy to do by including 1 click share buttons to your blog and website in order to make the process as simple as possible for your reader.

SECTION 8

WHAT MAKES A GOOD IMAGE?

RELEVANCY - We look at relevancy from two angles.

Firstly, if you are using an image on its own, (to a platform like Instagram or maybe Facebook) we must consider if your image is relevant to your audience. Does it fit in with your posts? Secondly, if you are using images as cover photos for blog posts and articles, it's important to consider if the image is relevant to the overall tone and message of the blog post.

ENGAGING - It is vitally important to consider the quality of the images you choose to share. The image should be striking and aim to grab the attention of the reader.

BRAND PERSONALITY - The image should aim to portray your brand in a positive light and fit in with the message you are trying to convey.

BEHIND THE SCENES - Use these types of images to show your your readers / followers 'behind the scenes'. These could be how your products are made or what goes on in the office when you are out and about on business. Use images to add a human element to your brand.

CONSISTENCY - Again, like all types of content, be consistent with how you create, share and brand your images. Your readers / followers will become accustomed to your style and will look out for your unique style on their feeds.

BRANDING - Using images that include your logo and other branding is a great opportunity to drive brand awareness. Tools such as Canva can be used to subtly overlay your logo onto your images to keep your brand constant throughout.

QUALITY - The above points will mean you have a quality image from a marketing perspective, but before you begin with these things it's important to start with a good quality image. Most smartphones today have a good enough camera to capture a high enough resolution image for social media.

COLOUR PALETTE - Some companies use images that closely match their brand colours. This is not a technique for everyone but it can be successfully utilised on image based platforms like Instagram.

SECTION 9

SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGES

Each platform has optimum image sizes. In order for images to display correctly they should be optimised for the viewer to get the full impact of message.

Social platforms change their optimum sizes so this should be kept updated.

Currently a good rule of thumb is:

Facebook 940 x 788 pixels

Twitter post 1024 x 512 pixels

Instagram post 1080 x 1080 pixels

Pinterest graphic 735 x 1102 pixels

YouTube 1600 x 1800 pixels

LinkedIn 700 x 400 pixels

SECTION 10

IMAGE PRODUCTION

There are many free cloud based platforms and design apps which can be used in order to produce optimized images together with branded overlays. These can be used across various platforms.

One of the most popular, Canva, has a variety of different pre-loaded document sizes to select from.

Canva can be used to select preloaded sizes and design layouts to edit from. It's also possible to select custom dimensions.

There are many image creation platforms to choose from, some further examples include:

<https://pablo.buffer.com/>

<https://snappa.io/>

SECTION 11

BLOGGING

Blogging is an opportunity to showcase your knowledge and expertise, as well as driving traffic to your site.

It is a relatively easy and inexpensive way to enhance your inbound marketing efforts, position yourself as a thought leader and attract more prospective customers.

Blog posts can be hosted on your website, as well as being used for social channels and newsletter emails.

PLANNING BLOG CONTENT

Key factors to consider when planning your blog content are creating a source of information for your customers, adding value to their time and offering up knowledge and expertise. This in turn contributes to long term engagement and affinity between your audience / readers and your brand. Converting customers is not a quick process but something that should be built up over a long period of time through engaging content.

When writing content it is important to include relevant and necessary Calls To Action (CTA). A call to action is an image or line of text, and often displayed as a clickable button or link in the online marketing world. The aim is to prompt your visitors, leads, and customers to take action. For example 'buy now' button is a very common and basic use of a CTA. These CTA's go towards converting your audience from readers to long term subscribers, and customers.

How often you should blog is specific to your type of business and your resource. It is more important to post a well created blog post than constantly update with posts which lack value for the reader. Good practice is posting 1-2 times per week with a focus on your posts being consistent and well crafted.

LENGTH OF BLOG POST

Many people say blog posts should be short as our attention spans are becoming shorter, however statistics show that longer posts actually perform better. The ideal length of a blog post is 7 minutes, 1,600 words.

Further blogging tips and insight can be found here:

<https://econsultancy.com/blog/63267-30-powerful-adjectives-and-verbs-for-eye-catching-headlines>

<https://econsultancy.com/blog/10887-30-tips-for-promoting-your-blog-content-infographic>

<https://econsultancy.com/blog/11169-15-tips-to-help-you-become-a-brilliant-guest-blogger>

<http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/content-marketing-tips-boring-industries#sm.0000itxw56xj9frbwsq2jykan4c9x>

<https://econsultancy.com/blog/65518-six-examples-of-interesting-content-from-boring-businesses/>

SECTION 12

WHAT SHOULD YOU WRITE ABOUT?

This is subjective to your industry and area of business, but common types of popular blog posts include:

- 'How to Guides'
- Numbered step type guides - Talk your readers through a process of achieving a goal.
- Behind the scenes - Gives your readers more context about what goes on in your organization.
- Inside the Business - Further to behind the scenes with a focus on personalities and company culture.

If you use content from another blog/article you must include the original. You can add your own comments and opinions but you must credit the source and provide a link to the source blog/article on your site. Don't pass it off as your own.

GOOD VS BAD BLOGS

GOOD BLOGS:

- Use a mix of content types to engage readers
- Have snappy, attention grabbing, relevant headlines
- Have useful, value add content
- Use easy to read language
- Get to the point

EXAMPLES

1. The Innocent smoothie company blog uses a great mix of video and multimedia content, company news, humour, interesting product info and 'real-time' blogging on popular current affairs.
<http://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/blog>

2. Tesco Living delivers excellent quality advice and 'how to' content via a clean, contemporary image-driven design. The site has a large picture carousel at the top with easy to navigate large image thumbnail images underneath linking to articles. <https://www.tescoliving.com/>

BAD BLOGS:

- Content has no substance
- Too much focus on you and your business
- Too much focus on hard selling
- Overly long without giving much value
- Only includes text
- Copy other user's content and pass it off as their own—this is a violation of copyright. If you would like to use a quote/an image from another blog best practice is to either ask for permission or give credit and link back to the original author/content owner.

WHERE SHOULD YOUR BLOG BE

There are numerous platforms to post your blog, but ideally your blog should be posted on your website.

Firstly, create an engaging title for your blog, then add categories to your posts in order to organise your blog so readers can quickly source the content they are interested in. Deciding whether you are going to invite comments to posts is specific to the business and if there is adequate resource to monitor and respond.

LINKEDIN: A second option if not blogging on your website is to consider sharing blogs via LinkedIn post publishing. This is specific to your industry, but it can help reach new and existing readers.

EMAIL MARKETING: Including your blog posts within your email marketing makes good use of content and is often successful as your audience currently have some affiliation with your company.

Embed your blog posts within your email marketing content or provide snippets of your blogs with links to your blog. This can increase your reach and drive traffic to your website.

GOOD VS BAD BLOG TITLES

Blog title posts are important as this is what will attract a reader to your content. The use of relevant keywords within your blog title will also help with search engine optimization.

When writing a blog title aim to keep it short and snappy, promise value to the reader and use verbs/adjectives in order to tell the reader what they will get from the article.

See below example –



GOOD VS BAD EXAMPLES OF BLOG TITLES:

- '10 reasons to use Facebook for business today' vs 'Find out why you should use Facebook for business'
- 'The 5 minute guide to creating stunning images in Canva' vs 'How to use Canva to make images for social media'
- 'Shave 20 hours off your work week with this email template' vs 'Using this email template can save you time'

OPTIMISING BLOG POSTS

When in doubt, follow this 'blog essentials' tick list:

- Use high quality, relevant imagery
- Include keywords
- Use snappy titles that include keywords
- Use of headers
- Posts should be at least 300 words
- Include links to external sources
- Include links to existing content
- Use plugins such as Yoast to assist with SEO
- Include CTA's

It is important to methodically optimise your blog posts using the points above, however the optimisation process comes at the end of the creation process. As a writer, your focus should always be on the quality of your content, before optimisation begins.

There are many SEO plugins out there to give us a helping hand from the technical perspective, each have different compatibility with different CMS's, for example, Yoast SEO for Wordpress.

The bullet points above are essential areas that should be optimised from both an SEO and a reader's perspective.

Before you hit the publish button, it is always a good idea to get another person to read over your content. A fresh pair of eyes can always pick up little mistakes or point out small tweaks you may have missed.

GUEST BLOGGING

Posting and guest blogging on other websites, and then asking others to guest blog for you, is a great way to gain a bigger following on your own social media accounts and websites. It can also assist in gaining credibility and with networking opportunities.

Many online users visit the same social networks and related blogs in their industry. Seeing the same author in multiple places reinforces the idea that this person is an expert in their field. At the same time, getting your brand name in multiple, high credibility places will only serve to increase your brand credibility. Further benefits include adding variety to your content, collaborating with peers and increasing backlinks.

SECTION 13

COPY FOR PRODUCTS

The flow of your copy, style and use of keywords is essential. Product copy should clearly and concisely explain to your customer what the product is, what it does and any options they may have.

Quality product descriptions can transform e-commerce conversion rates by up to 30-100%.

Copy should convince visitors that your product is right for them and establish trust.

Use bullet points, avoid long sentences and speak simply within your copy to see results.

SECTION 14

PHOTOS & VIDEOS

Although sharing is encouraged on social media posts with images, these images share the same copyright laws as any other image. If you have not taken the photo yourself, make sure to ask the owner for permission to use it. If permission is granted then ensure you the correct license for the image.

Often the photographer will give you guidelines on how they would like their pictures credited.

Purchasing royalty free images ensures you are not breaching copyright.

RISKS

Copyright laws are strict and should be abided by. There is technology which allows the copyright owner to identify and track unlicensed use of images. It is a serious crime which can involve large fines.

STOCK IMAGE SITES

Recommended stock image sites include –

- Pexels
- Alamy
- iStock
- Shutterstock
- BigStock

NB: Think around what kind of images suit your article, and how the imagery will fit in with your brand.

SECTION 15

VIDEO CONTENT

There has been a recent rise in live video sharing apps which have become popular amongst a variety of audiences. Examples include specialist live video app Periscope to live broadcasting from mobile devices using Facebook Live.

Two of the most popular library sites for video content are YouTube and Vimeo.

INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS

Inline with the principles of content marketing, businesses can produce videos that give something free to their audience, and add value to their time. Common examples include instructional videos and how-to guides.

Although businesses are giving away their expertise for free, they are displaying themselves to their audience as the authority in their field.

CREATING YOUR OWN VIDEO CONTENT

Now more than ever, attention spans on social have decreased with stats showing us we have only 10 seconds to capture an audience! Video content is becoming increasingly popular for brands to tell their stories and drive engagement through short videos.

Video content can be created on various devices, from professional video cameras to mobile phones and shared through various digital marketing channels.

Hosting in a central location where it may be found organically, and easily shared, like YouTube is usually the best tactic for businesses.

Depending on where your video is hosted, you will need to consider the bandwidth of your viewers. Making your video the highest quality possible will stream stunning video, but your users maybe waiting a very long time for the video to buffer.

SECTION 16

SCHEDULING & MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTENT

SOCIAL MEDIA SCHEDULING

Scheduling posts to Facebook can be done within the Facebook platform. For most other platforms you will find more functionality and value in using one of the various social media management platforms that allow you to schedule content to go out at various times, based on when your audience is most likely to engage.

Some Social Media Management Tools examples include:

- Hootsuite
- Buffer
- Tweetdeck
- Sprout Social

These platforms offer various analytics functionality and allow you to build up a structured schedule of content to reach your audience on a regular basis.

SECTION 17

MONITORING ENGAGEMENT

ANALYTICS

There are numerous ways to analyse whether your content is successful in terms of both reach and engagement.

FACEBOOK

Facebook provides business pages with a host of in depth analytics. Some topline stats include data on who your audience is, when your audience is online, and what time of day is best to post to reach high levels of engagement. This is useful to know to inform when to post and what types of content your audience is most interested in. Looking at individual post analytics also allows us to analyse whether or not content is engaging.

TWITTER

Twitter also provides its users with analytics in 'view tweet activity', which shows the number of impressions or clicks your tweet has created. This again provides you with an understanding of the types of content your audience engages with, and using the time it was posted you can build up a picture of when your audience is online and likely to engage.

GOOGLE ANALYTICS

Google Analytics provides analytics from your website, including most clicked pages, including times of day the people landed on your page. This further informs your content strategy in terms of what to post and when.

WHEN ARE YOU CUSTOMERS ONLINE?

The time you schedule your content to be delivered to your network will usually be determined by a mixture of two things:

- The nature of your business and operating hours
- When your audience are online

If you are more business to business focused, you may tend to post during Monday - Friday 9-5pm. This is because:

- That is when your audience is likely to be online and engaging with you
- That is when you will be in the office in order to respond to any inbound responses to your content

If you are more business to customer focused, and selling products 24/7 on an e-commerce platform, your audience may be most engaged with you and your products on an evening whilst browsing or shopping online. Therefore your content schedule may be focused more around the evening for peak engagement.

SECTION 18

EVERGREEN & TOPICAL CONTENT

EVERGREEN content is the type of content that will remain useful for an extended period of time.

TOPICAL content is content that is relevant for a relatively short period of time.

All content will need refreshing and updating at some point.

SECTION 19

SELECTING YOUR MARKETING CHANNELS

While we may aspire to have a presence on a wide variety of platforms, our time would be better spent focusing on the platforms and methods of communication where our target audience is receptive to and engaging with content.

You may already have grown a large twitter following, but now want to harness the power of a platform like Instagram. The type of content that works on Twitter and Instagram respectively is very different, but you may have a potential crossover audience, which is positive.

Firstly, understand your goals and decide which audiences you want to engage with and grow. This will influence the type of content you create and focus on, and in turn will dictate the makeup of your overall marketing mix.

Your marketing mix will include a mix of owned and borrowed assets.

OWNED ASSETS - Your website, blog and e-mail newsletter.

BORROWED ASSETS - Your audiences on external platforms such as Facebook, Twitter etc.

It is important to not be relying on 'borrowed assets' too heavily. For example Facebook or Twitter could at any given time decide to change their functionality of their platforms in terms of how businesses use them. These platforms can be very powerful, however the over all aim is to direct our audience from these platforms towards owned assets.

SECTION 20

YOUR DIGITAL MARKETING MIX

The digital marketing mix is made up of a mix of digital channels used to push our content to your audience. This strategic mix should be tailored to your own business and link back to your marketing objectives and core business objectives.

Examples of common core business objectives include:

- Break even
- Make profit

In order to achieve these goals, marketing objectives may include:

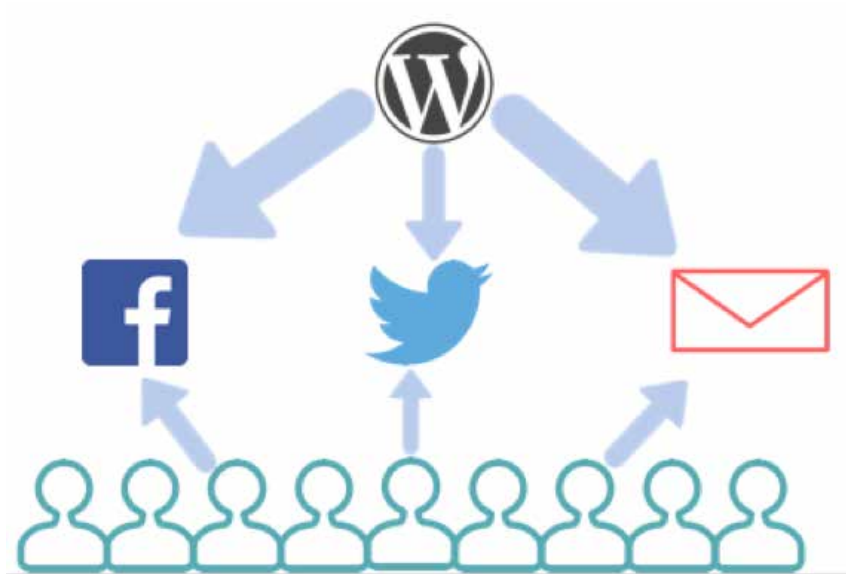
- Increase Reach
- Increase Conversions
- Increase Retention
- Increase Credibility
- Maintain Visibility
- Develop Stronger Relationships with Stakeholders

Putting these in to the Digital perspective, examples of common digital marketing objectives include:

- Build an online community
- Increase conversions from visitors to buyers (or donors, or volunteers, etc)
- Demonstrate thought leadership
- Become a media resource
- Increase online visibility

SECTION 21

EXAMPLE OF A DIGITAL MARKETING MIX



The diagram above shows a simple example of how a businesses' content marketing may look.

Their blog will be hosted on their WordPress website, discoverable by regular visitors and those who may find the website using search engines.

The blog posts on the WordPress site will have share buttons to allow users to share on the content they like.

The blog article also contains links to other relevant articles and also has links to all the companies social media accounts, encouraging their audiences to follow on all relevant platforms.

The business have chosen to share the blogs from their website through 3 main digital marketing channels; Facebook, Twitter and Email Marketing.

The business shares their blog posts through Facebook using an image and the blog title as text.

The business shares their blog posts through twitter to reach a different audience to the one on Facebook.

The business sends out a weekly / monthly marketing email with links and previews to all blogs written in that period, to members who have signed up to a mailing list.

The above examples should be used for guidance, but as noted your digital marketing mix and strategy should be tailored to your own business and it's core objectives.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL BUSINESS GATEWAY OFFICE

Get expert advice on this and a wide range of topics for free at your local Business Gateway office.

bgateway.com/local-offices