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Use of Social Media in the Construction Sector

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Introduction

For an industry built on personal relationships, it is surprising that there is still some reluctance to the use of social media within the construction sector when compared to other sectors. There are, of course, examples of companies in this sector who are making very good use of social media – typically within the Construction Index' top 50 UK construction companies, but there are still large businesses with little or no engagement on some of the main social media channels.

Social media not only builds trust in your brand but will make your brand more accessible. According to the Construction Marketing Association, social media also boosts awareness, increases web traffic, search ranking and more.

Research from Competitive Advantage's Construction Media Index (CMI) however does see a growth in social media use. LinkedIn states that of the 15 million members in the UK there are now over 370,000 engineers using the platform, with construction the second most represented industry. The CMI research confirms the popularity of LinkedIn across the industry, but finds, as did our own research, that construction companies are now also being canner in their choice of network and in what sort of information to share. We saw evidence that the most effective social media campaigns were using fewer platforms with communications strategies tailored to suit them. So, the key message is to work out which platform works best for each area of your business.

We have looked at the Construction Index' Top 100 UK Construction companies for this report; analysing changing trends in social media usage and reviewing which social media channels are the most popular and successful within the industry.

Executive Summary

- LinkedIn remains the most popular social media channel within the construction companies reviewed
- Twitter is the second most popular channel; often used to showcase an organisation's key achievements and show thought leadership
- Facebook is still being used but more-so for organisations that are more infrastructure or community focussed in their construction and developments
- Organisations which have high-end residential or commercial interior sectors to promote are making more use of the largely visual platforms such as Instagram, a channel that has increased in popularity since our last report in 2016
- Committed users of social media are choosing fewer channels but ones which work best for them as part of their social media strategy
- Surprisingly, some companies still do not have links from their website to their social media accounts or link only to their priority channels
- Organisations are becoming more comfortable with employees taking responsibility for social media, with many being trained in-house
- Within the top 50 companies social media was most likely to be managed in-house, with agencies being used by companies with smaller in-house marketing teams
- 94% of the top 100 use LinkedIn with the majority making regular posts
- 86% have Twitter accounts. Of these 86 accounts, 4 were inactive
- 70% manage a YouTube account and 10% a Vimeo account
- 63% use Facebook
- 45% have a Google+ account and only 12 of the 45 accounts make regular posts
- 23% use Instagram and 11% use Pinterest

Methodology

Our research was based on the Construction Index top 100 construction companies in the UK 2018.

The social media channels that we wished to analyse were: Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google+, Vimeo, Pinterest and Flickr.

Initially, each company website was reviewed for links through to each of these social media channels. These links were followed and the level of engagement within each one noted.

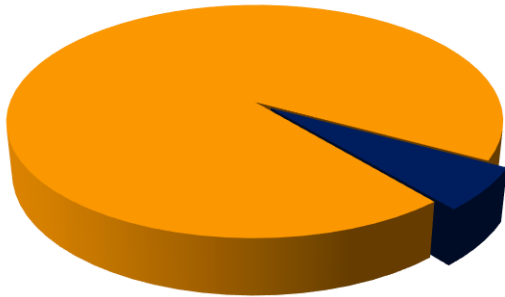
Where no social media links were available, we made individual searches to the various social media platforms and found a significant number of active and inactive accounts that were not linked to the respective website. These too were noted along with their levels of engagement.

Once this data had been collected it was analysed to provide the statistics included within the report.

Further research was carried out via an email survey to Digital Marketing Managers and Executives from the companies on the list. Eighteen per cent answered the question of whether their social media was managed in-house or through a specialist agency and indicated the level of spend on social media per annum. When indicated that it was acceptable to do so, telephone contact was made to discuss in more detail about social media strategy and choice of social media channels.



LinkedIn



Only 6 of the 100 companies do not have a LinkedIn business page and the majority had links to it from their website.

Of those with a business page only 3 had not posted anything within the last 6 months.

Under 16 companies use LinkedIn for recruitment purposes only.

Typically posts will include the following mix of content: Links to company blogs and news stories; Charity news; Recruitment/HR; Company news; Training/H&S. A well-managed business page will post on a daily basis.

Key issues and tips

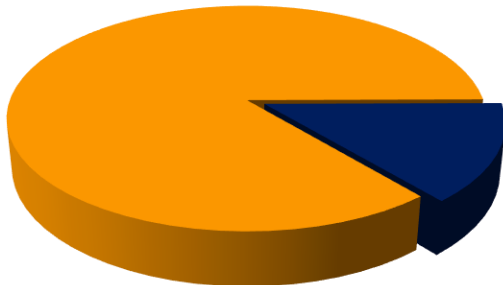
Overall the organisations that we looked at are successfully using LinkedIn to promote their business and enjoy good follower engagement. Companies of the size on this list should have their employees correctly linked to their company page so that their connections can easily click through to the company from the personal profile; aiding sharing of information and increasing traffic to the page.

A LinkedIn company page is always public and will be trawled by search engines with posts appearing high in searches and should not be overlooked as an important part of SEO strategy. Posts with images and videos receive more attention with links included whenever possible.

LinkedIn connections will grow with regular and interesting industry related posts and articles. Custom buttons can be added to drive business actions through your LinkedIn page. Content suggestions are a new feature for LinkedIn. Sponsoring updates, creating groups and adding career and showcase pages for specific service areas are options to grow this channel.



Twitter



Only 14 of the 100 companies did not have Twitter accounts. Of those with Twitter accounts, 4 were inactive.

A good example of a company twitter account typically posted an update around 60-80 times per month with engagement and few retweets. These were mostly to be found in the top 50 companies.

Sir Robert McAlpine illustrates this well: Around 80 tweets per month which include: Project updates, Case studies, Industry news and events – comments and retweets; Company news and Awards.

Key issues and tips

Twitter should have a fair mix of the following types of content: communication involving comment or sharing industry information, interaction with your followers and comments made and proportion of content for self-promotion.

The well-managed accounts we reviewed for this report were tweeting a mixture of project news, key wins, key milestones, community/charity news and experience-led tweets. These act as a showcase for achievements.

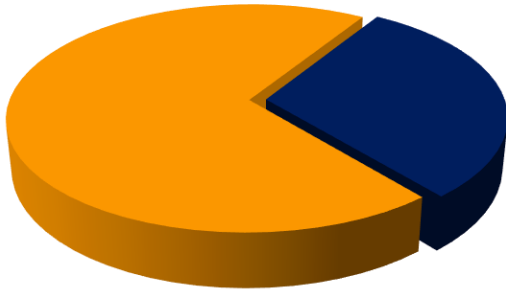
A concise tweet makes the most impact. Use visuals in your tweets- you can use up to four photos to a single tweet. Hashtags are a powerful tool that allow you to expand your reach and tap into relevant conversations. Asking questions is an effective way to interact with your audience, bring readers into the conversation and understand people's opinions.

Be sure to use analytics to measure success and be prepared to adjust a strategy as necessary. "All our decisions are evidence based and our mantra is 'test and learn'" says Paul Fryer of Kier Group.

The key thing is not to overlook social media – it requires daily attention - "we allocate two hours per day and make sure it happens" says the social media team at ISG plc. ISG make Twitter a priority and see it as a means of driving visitors to their website



YouTube



70 of the top companies have YouTube accounts with 34 of those linked to their company website.

Substantially more videos are posted by the top 50 companies which may well be to do with budget. With some companies categorising their videos by subject area.

Video content is popular for all marketing purposes and videos from construction projects can be particularly compelling. The use of drone videos is increasing – they are a cost effective and successful way to record and share construction project progress. Time lapse software is also popular within the industry.

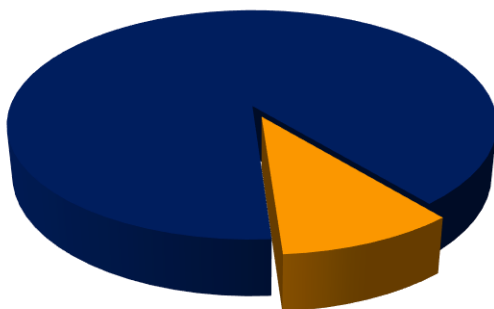
YouTube is the most popular video sharing platform. It is keen to keep you on its site and to take you to related videos rather than back to the company website.

A monthly fee can be paid in order to keep your account free of ads.

Some frustration was voiced over the difficulty of acquiring a bespoke URL for a company YouTube account.



Vimeo

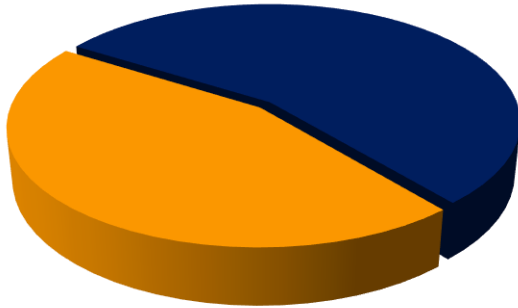


We only found 10 Vimeo accounts out of the 100 companies we reviewed.

The benefit of Vimeo over YouTube is the lack of advertising. Vimeo will also retain your stats if you wish to upload a new version of a particular video.



Google+



45 of the top firms have a validated Google+ account but with only 12 of them actively posting comments.

Posts will typically be project news or new homes developments where the organisation is involved in residential construction. BAM Construction is posting more than actively than some and has an impressive 700 followers.

Key issues

Feedback from participants suggested that Google+ was used to aid SEO. The account set-up is confusing and the idea of circles of friends has not taken off as expected. With a lack of clarity on how to use Google+ as a visitor and also how to manage it as the owner it has largely been relegated to a box to tick to keep Google on your side.

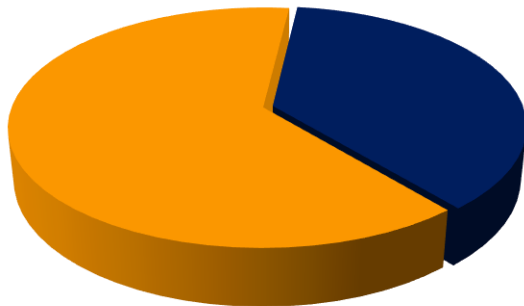
In addition, Google+ requires evidence of regular posting and growing visitor numbers before creating a bespoke URL which seems another hoop to jump through for something that comes as standard on other social media networks.

We use Google+ for SEO purposes. We believe it helps our visibility in Google searches and drives visitors to our website.

Digital Marketing Manager, ISG



Facebook



63 of the top 100 construction companies in the UK are using Facebook, with only 34 of those accounts linked to the company website.

A well-managed account has at least 10 or 12 posts per month which are likely to be project, charity or recruitment focussed.

Key issues

Facebook can have its advantages and disadvantages for business.

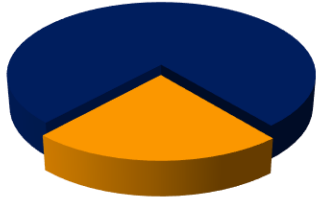
As a channel it can help with brand awareness, drive traffic to your website and allow for targeted advertising.

Being a more business to consumer focussed channel, it is used far less by the construction industry than other social media channels. Where used well it helps companies to engage with their audience regarding community initiatives and projects. Or it can work well for customer service issues where appropriate.

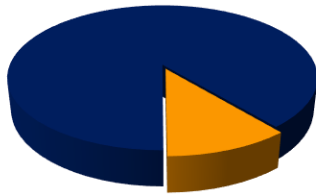
The downsides of using Facebook for business include the time and resource to manage this channel based on ROI for the business. It can invite negative comment that needs to be carefully managed and if partaking in Facebook advertising you need to have a certain amount of budget to manage these campaigns effectively.



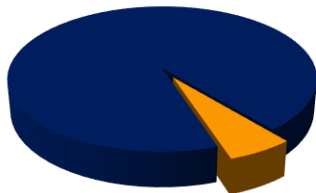
Instagram, Pinterest & Flickr



Instagram is a now growing channel for the construction industry with 23 of the companies now maintaining an Instagram account. Instagram is most frequently for companies involved in high-end residential or commercial interior sectors looking to visualise their work. Several companies use Instagram to showcase employee initiatives such as charity fundraising, learning and teambuilding activities.



11 Pinterest accounts were discovered with BAM Construction being a particularly good example. Pinterest boards allow for sensible organisation of images from different service area e.g. in BAM's case - boards for Education, Health, Sustainability, Charity, Community, Behind the Scenes.



Only 6 Flickr accounts amongst the top 100 but those 6 are well populated.

Case Study - Kier Group

The social media for Kier is managed in-house, two content officers in the PR team who gather and publish content with one Digital Marketing Manager to set strategy and measure analytics.



SOCIAL MEDIA USED:



Strategy

Kier uses Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube, with planned posts and the agility to include breaking news.

The Kier Group have carried out extensive research reviewing their social media channels and have recently set a new strategy with a series of smart objectives; prioritising the social media channels that deliver return on investment for the company.

In 2018 the Kier Group had seen social media success in terms of brand building and awareness with a 25% increase in engagement on LinkedIn and 18% increase in posts mentioning the company. The Kier Group would post three times more often on Twitter and this saw a 24% increase in engagement for the company.

Kier wanted to build on this brand building success through their social media and are next introducing smart objectives such as increasing referrals to the website by 5% by June 2019.

To improve all channels the Kier Group believe that channel specific strategies are essential. By concentrating on fewer channels this means they can create content that is right for each channel.

Paul Fryer, Head of Digital Marketing at Kier has provided clear guidance for contributors, created templates for consistency of brand and is using various workflow and planning tools to gain new content for the channels.

Training is done in-house.

We now want to build on the brand building success with our social media with smart business objectives.

Paul Fryer, Head of Digital Marketing, The Kier Group

Case Study – Sir Robert McAlpine

Sir Robert McAlpine uses Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram. There are links from their website to all of their social media channels except for YouTube.



SOCIAL MEDIA USED:



Strategy

Sir Robert McAlpine use their LinkedIn account to demonstrate thought leadership and take part in industry conversations such as apprenticeships and young women in the construction industry. The company currently have approx. 40,000 followers to this channel.

With less followers than their Linked In presence, Sir Robert McAlpine use Twitter to share more project updates, participation with industry events and awards and share their involvement within the community. Sir Robert McAlpine currently have approx. 1400 followers to their Twitter channel.

Instagram has the next best following in terms of their channels adopted and Sir Robert McAlpine are able to showcase inspirational and professional photography from their projects successfully through the use of this channel.

YouTube has the least subscribers, their website links to all other social media platforms except this one so this is potentially a developing social media channel for Sir Robert McAlpine.

Case Study - ISG Plc

The social media for ISG is managed in-house from the London office where the team devote a 2 hours per day to research and posting of appropriate content. This time is strictly adhered to.



SOCIAL MEDIA
USED:



Strategy

ISG use Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Google+ to publish project news, career information, award and conference news as well as topical posts with the aim of driving visitors to their website.

LinkedIn and Twitter are seen as priority channels with around 100 posts per month on Twitter and around 40 posts per month on LinkedIn. Google+ has fewer posts and is used as part of an SEO strategy.

Training is carried out in-house and is offered at foundation and advanced level.

About Handmade Marketing

Handmade Marketing specialises in social media marketing in the construction sector and we help our clients leverage this valuable communications resource to promote their brand, raise awareness and develop their network of contacts.

We can manage any part or all of your social media communications from strategy, choice of social media channels, sourcing and writing content, developing followers and reviewing analytics. Our in-depth understanding of the construction industry means that you can rely on us to know who to follow and what to say to achieve maximum impact from your activity.

Strategy

When starting work with a new client we establish the key messages that the company wishes to disseminate which will inform the content, tone and frequency of all social media comms. The type of content will influence the channels we recommend – sometimes focussing on just two or three - to ensure that posts reach the widest and most relevant audiences.

Channels

Depending upon your social media strategy we will recommend accounts from the following channels:



LinkedIn The most widely used channel in the construction industry. Used for company updates, project- based posts, charity and community news, and recruitment.



Twitter A very popular way to promote any positive company news and project updates. It provides the opportunity to become involved in relevant conversations in target groups, as well as for drawing visitors to your website.



Facebook Provides an opportunity to link with other Facebook users in the construction sector and post slightly longer updates. Very good for sharing charity news and more light-hearted content.



Google+ For posting company news updates to your circles. Good for search engine optimization.



Instagram User friendly platform to post project images with limited requirement for text.



Vimeo Video posting platform without the intrusion of ads or being taken on to related video content.



YouTube The most popular video sharing channel.



Pinterest Another image led channel which allows whole projects to be uploaded on pin boards.

Content

The availability of suitable content is vital to the success of a social media strategy and we maintain open lines of communication with our social media clients for information on project progress, completion, new announcements and industry views. Our copywriting team compose posts in a tone that best connects with your target audience and we understand the importance of good photography and video for successful posting. Our experience in the construction/property sectors allows us to understand the relevance of posts by third parties and value of engaging with them to develop the contacts network.

Analytics

Handmade Marketing measures engagement using analytics available within chosen social media channels and assesses the quality of these engagements. The success of specific campaigns can be measured in this way and by measuring clicks through to your website from specific posts.

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Tel: 01279 213 609

Email: enquiries@handmademarketing.co.uk
Web: www.handmademarketing.co.uk

