

AbaF

Social networking

Social networking is a new way to communicate with your customers and can include tweets, blogs and posts. There are literally thousands of artists and arts organisations taking advantage of social networking. Social media is being employed to create a new type of conversation with existing customers, to gain new ones and to build credibility and reputation among expanding audiences.

A social network site focuses on building communities and connecting like-minded people that share similar hobbies and interests. The groups of contacts are often called friends, and information including text, photos, graphics and videos can be shared with large networks quickly and easily.

A user profile is generally what distinguishes social networking sites from other social media platforms like blog sites or photo sharing sites. The profile helps set the stage for building relationships with people who share the same activities, or personal contacts, as opposed to primarily disseminating or digesting information feeds. This also means social networks can enable you to invite audiences to view your work in a way that traditional forms of marketing or advertising can't.

Types of social networks

Whether it is a micro-blogging service that is limited to 140 characters such as Twitter, or Facebook (the largest global social network site), or a business profile tool like LinkedIn, or industry specific networking sites dedicated to artists such as www.artition.com, www.myartspace.com or www.myartinfo.com; all these medias are able to help connect businesses more meaningfully with large user-bases of potential customers.

There are three main categories of social networking sites with many options within each category to choose from including:

- *Free for all* - general use or commonly known sites such as Facebook and Twitter
- *Professional* – sites that provide places to list employment information such as LinkedIn, Fastpitch and Plaxo
- *Industry Specific* - sites provide dedicated spaces just for artists (or other industries).

TIP: *Research sites in each category then become a fan of someone like a celebrity or particular brand on Facebook, and start a personal Twitter account so that you get a feel for the potential before exposing your art business.*

What is the best use for social networking sites?

Marketing through social networks is not as much about selling your art, as it is about engaging your followers and building relationships. The goal of the community-based environment of social networking sites is to provide a platform for an open, honest conversation.¹

An important avenue of self promotion for artists is the involvement in, and interaction with communities of artists. By networking with other artists you get the benefit of their experiences,

¹ How to Use Social Networking Sites to Drive Business: Social Network Marketing - http://www.inc.com/guides/using-social-networking-sites_page3.html

expertise and contacts within the art market which could lead to opportunities to exhibit your work, sell your work or be represented by a commercial gallery or dealer. The internet, as mentioned, has allowed global communities of artists to come together through online forums and groups to promote their work and enhance their marketing skills.²

Facebook's Fan Page is a great example of how you could be marketing your work through social networking sites. The page acts as an upgraded user profile for you to be just as involved as your fans 'the users' and it has plenty of tools to help you with the interaction. As users become 'fans' of your page, all of your activity appears in their News Feed each time they log on. There is also a useful feature called the 'Insights tool', which allows you to analyse page views, the demographics of your fans, and the number of people who view (or stop viewing) your News Feed posts.³

Which social networking application should I choose?

The internet has opened up endless opportunities for artists to promote and market their work but with so many avenues of exposure it can be difficult knowing which to utilise and which to avoid.

Facebook is a good one for everybody, the Fan Page provides a wonderful format to promote visual work, but you may consider another page on an industry specific art focused social network site. There is a list with short review of some of the many art or artists focused sites available at the end of this document (See Appendix 1).

TIP: *Spend time looking through each site to really understand the benefits and which would be best for your work. Check the number of posts and the style of work and then create a short list for you to join.*

Developing a social networking strategy

Here are some basic questions to help plan your social networking strategy:

What are the needs of my arts business?

- Do I need more customers?
- Do I need more contacts for your database?
- Do I need more to gain media coverage for your artwork?
- Do I need to find gallery space?
- Do I need to attract people to work with?

TIP: *Write a list of your top 3 business needs in their level of priority.*

After you have established your needs, consider the primary goal of your social networking strategy.⁴

² How Artists Can Get Noticed NOW !!! Update 6 (May 08) - artmarketblog.com
<http://www.nowpublic.com/culture/how-artists-can-get-noticed-now-update-6-may-08-artmarketblog-com>

³ How to Use Social Networking Sites to Drive Business: Social Network Marketing
http://www.inc.com/guides/using-social-networking-sites_pagen_3.html

⁴ How to Use Social Networking Sites to Drive Business: Social Network Marketing
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What am I using the site for?

- Do I want to create an artists network for a group exhibition?
- Do I want to educate people further about the details of your work?
- Do I want to connect to more people in your industry?
- Do I want to reach a completely new audience?

Whose attention am I trying to get?

It's always helpful to have a clear idea of your target audience at the start to keep you on track. Pick your audience for your specific product, and with more than 300 million users on Facebook, you'll need to narrow your focus.⁵

Targeting your audience

Markets are used to describe various groupings of customers, such as:

- *Demographics* - age, gender, income, occupation, education, country of origin, family size, and stage in family life-cycle;
- *Products* - artwork, books, and art consultancy services;
- *Geographic* - if people are based in the country, city or different states.

You want to reach new customers and retain existing customers by satisfying their needs.

Who is your target audience?

- Galleries – commercial
- Galleries – public
- Collectors
- Art lovers
- General public
- The media
- Sponsors and supporters
- A combination of all these?

You will need to allocate some daily time to manage your site. In the beginning you could easily spend 2 hours or more a day on social network sites. It is also very easy to get side-tracked when working with real time communications. So the advice is to pick just one or two social network sites to begin with. By spreading yourself too thin you may end up going days without activity. Your followers will notice.

TIP: *Use an on-line diary to plan your communication posts and to time-manage your social networking.*

What is going to be the personality of my page or outposts?

It is important to remember here that this is about the personality of you and your work. It's helpful to list the key traits and figure out what represents you best. Do you already have a 'tone of voice'?

⁵ How to Use Social Networking Sites to Drive Business: Social Network Marketing
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that you use for artist's talks, media releases or your own website etc? People buy from people, so it's important to create a personality before you begin and enrich it as you progress.⁶

For example, are you serious, creative, fun, to the point, political, expressive, colourful, ethnic or mainstream?

Creating good content

Once you have the strategy and personality of your site nailed down you are ready to start with content. First there is your profile. On many sites there are options to fill in your likes and dislikes, list your favourite music and film choices, so build your profile and add your CV and work history.

You may use your own name or your business name to create a page, but think about what potential customers would search for – painter, sculptor, graphic designer etc. Add this to your name so that you can be found more easily, for example, Susan Jones – Contemporary Textiles

TIP: *Create a personal site on Facebook and then search for artists using different search terms and see what comes up.*

Good content creates an appealing story about you and your work, as it will include text and images of you and of your work. Film can be also added and then there are wall posts and the option to create events and invites to your contacts.

In Facebook, you can add a photo album and add a title and caption for each image. If you already have many images make sure you think through and categorize them well. Plus you can time it so a new album of work goes up each month, or hold back from posting all your work until you have more fans and therefore a bigger audience.

You could consider creating a story around the development of your work, include some shots of you actually working on the piece, some sketch work and really enhance to journey from concept to completion.

TIP: *By filling in as much as possible in the 'set up' forms your profile becomes more attractive.*

TIP: *Within Facebook search for 'Matt Bray - Contemporary Artist' – it is an example of an active artist's Facebook page.*

Getting noticed on social network sites

- *Always respond to other users' profile posts* - by responding to what your followers post to your profile, you show them that you appreciate their interaction. If they know they have your attention, they'll keep coming back.⁷
- *Ask questions on your wall* - Facebook users love to be heard. It can be surprising how many responses one question can elicit. Conversations and debates with groups of people are a fantastic way to make your page interesting and fresh.

⁶ Twitter 101 for Business – Special Guide - <http://business.twitter.com/twitter101>

⁷ How to Use Social Networking Sites to Drive Business: Social Network Marketing
http://www.inc.com/guides/using-social-networking-sites_pagen_3.html

- *Posting links or threads* – something that fan pages allow that web pages don't is viral spread, so if you have any content that you to circulate quickly, the Fan Page is the perfect too. Post links to interesting websites, cool films or art sites. Comment on why you like these sites and start a conversation to find out what other people think of them.⁸
- *Invite people to your events* - you can create events and send out invites you are hosting and people can reply online. This can be a virtual or 'real' event. You could create an event to paint with your left hand for two hours, people then post their work and you all review it – for example!
- *Post a link to external events* - is your local gallery or art college having a show? Post the invite to their event. This way you position yourself as a worthy source of information and create a positive relationship with your local community.

Etiquette and professionalism

The social network sites allow for a less formal and high personality based conversation with your followers or fans, however it is important to remember to be positive and professional at all times.

Do:

- Let people know a bit about yourself, your hobbies, but focus on your inspirations for your work and what you enjoy in the creative process.
- Link to other media sources where relevant or interesting articles have been posted elsewhere on the web and make sure you credit other peoples work.
- Go to other pages and make positive comments about other peoples work.
- Be light hearted and post information that is interesting and relevant. For example did your latest inspiration come from a walk in an autumn park? Post a comment about the walk, how you felt etc. Then in the next post say that you have been inspired to create a new painting, then post some photos of you doing the painting, then post the final piece and include the price. Build up a story.
- Read the privacy settings of your chosen site thoroughly, on Facebook for example there is a gradient level of privacy options; it is worth reading these so you really understand what is possible. It may not be appropriate to allow full access to your site to everyone.
- Be choosy about who is accepted on to your network, a silly comment posted by someone on your page could have far reaching effects. Better to have a separate social page and a work focused page.

Do not:

- Post any hard sell comments, there is a difference between social network and business network. Soft sell only!
- Post negative comments about other peoples work unless you have a strategy. Even if the art exhibition you just attended was awful you may inadvertently upset someone and, as a general rule, it's best to remain positive at all times.
- Be too personal, letting fans know you just had an argument with your partner or mother is too much information.

The importance of third party recommendations

Endorsement by another party can really strengthen your credibility. Did you ever do any charity work or is a buyer connected to a business in some way? Maximise these connections! Ensure that business leaders or individuals that are happy with your service both post on your wall and invite their friends to become 'fans' of your page.

⁸ How to Use Social Networking Sites to Drive Business: Social Network Marketing
http://www.inc.com/guides/using-social-networking-sites_page3.html

Equally when you become a fan of another site and endorse their brand you are automatically creating a commonality with the fans of that page.

TIP: *Donating a piece of work to a local charity for them to auction is a great way to get some good third party endorsement, especially if that charity has a large email list of followers. As part of the exchange ask them to email their database and connect to you via Facebook.*

Dealing with negative comments or posts

Do:

- Check your site regularly to make sure there are no negative postings.
- Respond positively and quickly to any negative posting. Once you have posted a short and positive response if you are happy that this changes the situation you can leave the posting up. However you could remove it after 24 hours. People love to see negative comments and will be drawn to it. Each case is individual so use your own judgment and don't panic. On Facebook it is possible to remove posts from your page immediately.
- Respond to the post privately too, any rebuttal and continued discussion should ideally happen away from your main page.
- 'Ban' anyone that has posted negatively on your page to prevent any re-occurrence.

Do not:

- Respond aggressively to any posting.
- Engage in negative debate on your Facebook page, unless you are very confident that this will enhance your site.

Generate followers and friends on Facebook and Twitter accounts

Facebook.com

- Email your existing contacts list, your friends and family and ask them to join your Fan page. You do this from inside the Facebook application.
- Ask your contacts to suggest your Fan Page to their contacts.
- Join a friend group that is relevant to your topic or industry. As well as joining the group you must be active in the group, write on the wall, comment on topics and regularly visit the group. This way people joining the group will notice your activity, and then add you as a friend when they feel you have value to give.
- Friend Group Building - this strategy is where you start the group and invite your friends to join the group. Encourage your friends to invite their friends to join. As an administrator of the group you are able to promote to the members of that group via Facebook email and also have your profile in the news feed. For example you could create a group that critiques the work of a prominent artist or project, like an online book club.

Twitter.com

- Use your Facebook and existing contacts list to announce that you will be on Twitter and then people can then choose to follow you.
- Build up a number of people that you follow.
- You can search for conversations that happen and include for example: 'fine art buyers Sydney' or 'art Melbourne' etc. You can jump into these conversations at any point and if you have valuable input there is a good chance that people will add you to their Tweet (Twitter posts) list.

TIP: *Join Twitter for personal use first before creating a professional site*

Incorporate social media networks into your overall marketing strategy

If for example, your marketing strategy includes a website, a yearly exhibition and a newsletter, you can easily work in a social networking element to compliment your existing activity. On your existing website you can insert a widget (graphic button) for both Facebook Fan Page and for Twitter (most web designers will know how to do this). This allows visitors to your site to become your 'Friend' or 'Follower' at the touch of a button.

One definite outcome of social networking should be an increase in traffic to your website. Make sure that your profile page has your web address and that it is also embedded to your e-signature for when you participate in forums or Tweets.

Announce your Facebook Fan Page and Twitter account in your next newsletter and ask people to join.

If you have an exhibition ensure to take photos of the event, not just the work but the set up of the exhibition, the guests, and the general ambience of the event. Then post this with a review onto your Facebook page.

Use the logos of your chosen social media on your business card so people know you are active.

Get used to gathering email contacts and inviting people to your Facebook Fan Page as soon as you meet them.

It is also easy to link your Tweets to your Facebook site. They will show up as wall posts on your Facebook page. It's straight-forward to do this: from your Facebook account visit <http://apps.facebook.com/twitter/> and you will be given step by step instructions to link the two platforms.

Further Reading

Laura Fitton, Michael Gruen & Leslie Poston, *Twitter For Dummies*, For Dummies UK, 2009.

Shiv Singh, *Social Media Marketing For Dummies*, For Dummies UK, 2009.

Neal Schaffer, *Windmill Networking: Understanding, Leveraging & Maximizing LinkedIn: An Unofficial, Step-by-Step Guide to Creating & Implementing Your LinkedIn Brand - Social Networking in a Web 2.0 World*. BookSurge Publishing, UK, 2009.

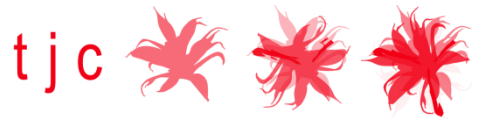
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Appendix 1 – Social Networking sites

Free for all sites

- *Facebook* – www.facebook.com
Most popular global social networking site, it allows you keep up with friends, colleagues, or classmates and features a stream-lined, easy-to-use interface.
- *Twitter* – twitter.com
A communication platform that helps businesses stay connected to their customers. As a business, you can use it to quickly share information with people interested in you, gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and build relationships with customers, partners and other people who care about your business.
- *MySpace* – www.myspace.com
An interactive site lets you connect with friends and tweak your profile with extras such as themes and music playlists.
- *Bebo* – www.bebo.com
Geared towards young people, Bebo is a primarily social site for friends that allows users to express themselves through media and interactive environments.
- *Friendster* – www.friendster.com
A social networking site for friends that promotes connections between international users and also boasts 'Fan Profiles' similar to Facebook's.

Professional sites

- *LinkedIn* – www.linkedin.com
A site to connect with other professionals and where you can keep up with colleagues, find employees, and network with others in your field.
- *FastPitch* – www.fastpitchnetworking.com
This site is a great platform for growing businesses to market themselves, allowing you to post events, press, and submit keywords to increase your profile's strength.
- *I-Meet* – www.i-meet.com
A site where you can establish valuable contacts and potentially save money on event planning.
- *Plaxo* - www.plaxo.com
Plaxo provides a site where you can access your entire address book with all your contacts, anywhere. Plaxo tracks feeds from Twitter, Facebook, and dozens of other sites, so you're already in the loop when you need to get in touch.

Industry Specific sites:

Below is a list of sites posted on Artistablog.com by Niki Fears⁹:

- *Art Slant* - www.artslant.com
A platform to showcase your latest artistic creations, write reviews of art work, announce an exhibition or mingle with other artists.
- *ArtistSites* - www.artistsites.org
Describing itself as a 'virtual community of online portfolios', Artist Sites is another great place to let the world see your talents.

⁹ Visit <http://artistablog.com/news/10-great-social-network-sites-artists>

- *Art Break* - www.artbreak.com
This is a site that claims it is for artists looking to network with potential buyers as well as other artists. You are able to make sales directly through the site and it is commission free.
- *My Art Info* - www.myaartinfo.com
Give prospective collectors a chance to check your art work at My Art Info.
- *Artition* - www.artition.com
This is a community for the creative types. You can upload a gallery of your art work, music, videos, or even written works so it offers a little something for everyone in the creative world.
- *Voodoo Chili* - www.voodoochilli.net
This site offers a spot for you to upload your portfolio, participate in forums, and get inspired by other artists.

Below is list edited from artmarketguru¹⁰

- *Artist Rising* - www.artistrising.com
This site invites you to mingle with emerging and established artists from around the world and browse their fine art and photography. It also offers original artwork, fine art prints and limited edition works for immediate sale.
- *Art Crazy* - www.artcrazed.com
A network site for photographers, collectors, artists, models and friends.
- *Pieronymus Art Network* - pieronymuskosch.ning.com
A social network site for artists globally.
- Worldwide Artists Facebook Group - www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2258055248
A Facebook group that provides a global network for artists
- *Art Break* - www.artbreak.com
A community market place for artists and art lovers. It's a place for artists to share and sell their stuff, tell the world about themselves, get feedback and make connections with other artists and people who like their work. It's a place for art lovers to find incredible work from emerging artists from all over the world.
- *Art Log* - www.artlog.com
Artlog is about connecting people through art.
- *Art Review Digital* - www.artreview.com
The members are artists, galleries, collectors, critics, curators and the curious. As a member of artreview.com, you can post artwork, blogs, videos or audio on the site and have members rate and comment on it.
- *Wet Canvas* - www.wetcanvas.com
This site is the largest community for visual artists on the Internet and was founded in 1998 in an effort to better leverage technology to assist visual artists in sharing information and making new contacts and friends
- *Saatchi Online Gallery* - www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk
Saatchi Online at The Saatchi Gallery allows artists to showcase their work for thousands of visitors to this site to view
- *Artists Network* - www.artistsnetwork.com
An online network and resource centre that provides artists videos, links to blogs and tips and instructions on fine art techniques.

¹⁰ How Artists Can Get Noticed NOW !!! Update 6 (May 08) Visit <http://www.nowpublic.com/culture/how-artists-can-get-noticed-now-update-6-may-08-artmarketblog-com>

- *Art Span* - www.artspan.com
Artspan provides websites designed for creative persons, and is also a major art destination with content of import to anyone interested in contemporary art.
- *Online Visual Artists* - www.onlinevisualartists.com
The Online Visual Artist's Independent Community was established to promote, support and serve the online marketing efforts of serious and professional visual artists.
- *Art Forums UK* - www.artforums.co.uk
A social networking site for artists to discuss issues through forums. Works of art can also be purchased through this site.
- *Deviant Art Forum* - www.deviantart.com
Users can explore millions original works of art, artists can exhibit your artwork to an audience of over 12 million members for free, artists can set up a profile, create galleries, and build a fan base. Works of art can also be purchased through this site.