

Social media provides a great way to share content and connect with organizations and individuals with an interest or stake in your work. On these social media sites, you create “posts” that are shared with your friends or followers. Sharing interesting content helps you to build up a following. It’s cyclical: the larger your following, the greater the likelihood of your content being viewed and shared; and the more your content gets shared, the bigger your following.

While there are dozens of social media platforms and each has its own practices and rules, we will focus on Facebook and Twitter, two of the most popular. If you are new to social media, there are plenty of great starter resources online to help you get acquainted with [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Here are a few best practices that can improve your use of social media:

Short and sweet. Information shared over social media is most effective when it is direct and brief. Facebook and Twitter are not the mediums for complex explanations or in-depth ruminations. Try to get your point across in one or two sentences. Much longer, and you risk losing your audience to the allure of the next post in their content stream.

Interesting and interactive. Make sure that your content stands out. Try to create a post that hooks readers and uses interactivity to get them involved. Try linking to other content or asking your followers to share with their own networks. Incorporate images to break up the blocks of text that tend to dominate content streams. And try asking a question from time to time, as a way to encourage viewers to pause and engage with your content. Interesting content is the fastest way to build your social media network.

In Twitter, use hashtags and tags. Hashtags are a Twitter concept, using a hash mark (#) to denote words that are quickly searchable within Twitter. As such, this will help you to build up a following of Twitter users interested in your topic. Twitter also allows you to “tag” other users, simply by typing their Twitter “handles” (@First_Focus, for example) in your posts. Tagging partners when appropriate increases the chances that they will share your content, giving you exposure to networks with similar interests.

Use images, especially on Facebook. Facebook’s post chronology “timeline” can be very text-heavy, so take advantage of the opportunity to upload an image or integrate an image from the Web. Using images can make your post stand out, increasing the likelihood that your followers will engage. Try images on Twitter, too.

Mix up posting times. As one would expect, different audiences are engaging on social media at different times of day. Content you post in the morning will likely reach a different crowd than those posted at night. For example, while college students might be more active on Facebook and Twitter in the morning, those working 9-5 may not be accessing social media during the day. Spread posts out throughout the day and consider your audience to get the reach you want.

Don’t be afraid to experiment. If one of the posts you created did not gain much attention, try changing it up. You might want to turn it into a question, pull out a different fact or quote from the content you are linking to, or post it at a different time. Social media and its audiences are constantly in flux and experimenting with posts can help you to make posts more effective, successful, and reach a wider audience.