

Start Up Loans

The social media toolkit for start up businesses

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Social media toolkit for small businesses

- How to use social media to inform, engage, reach more customers and grow your business and profits.
- Create a winning social media strategy to grow your business cheaply and quickly.
- Choose the best social media platforms for your start up business. Create brilliant, shareable content for different audiences and social media platforms.
- Free tools and techniques to help you create, post and run your social media channels.
- Handy social media jargon-busting guide written in plain English.



Section 1.

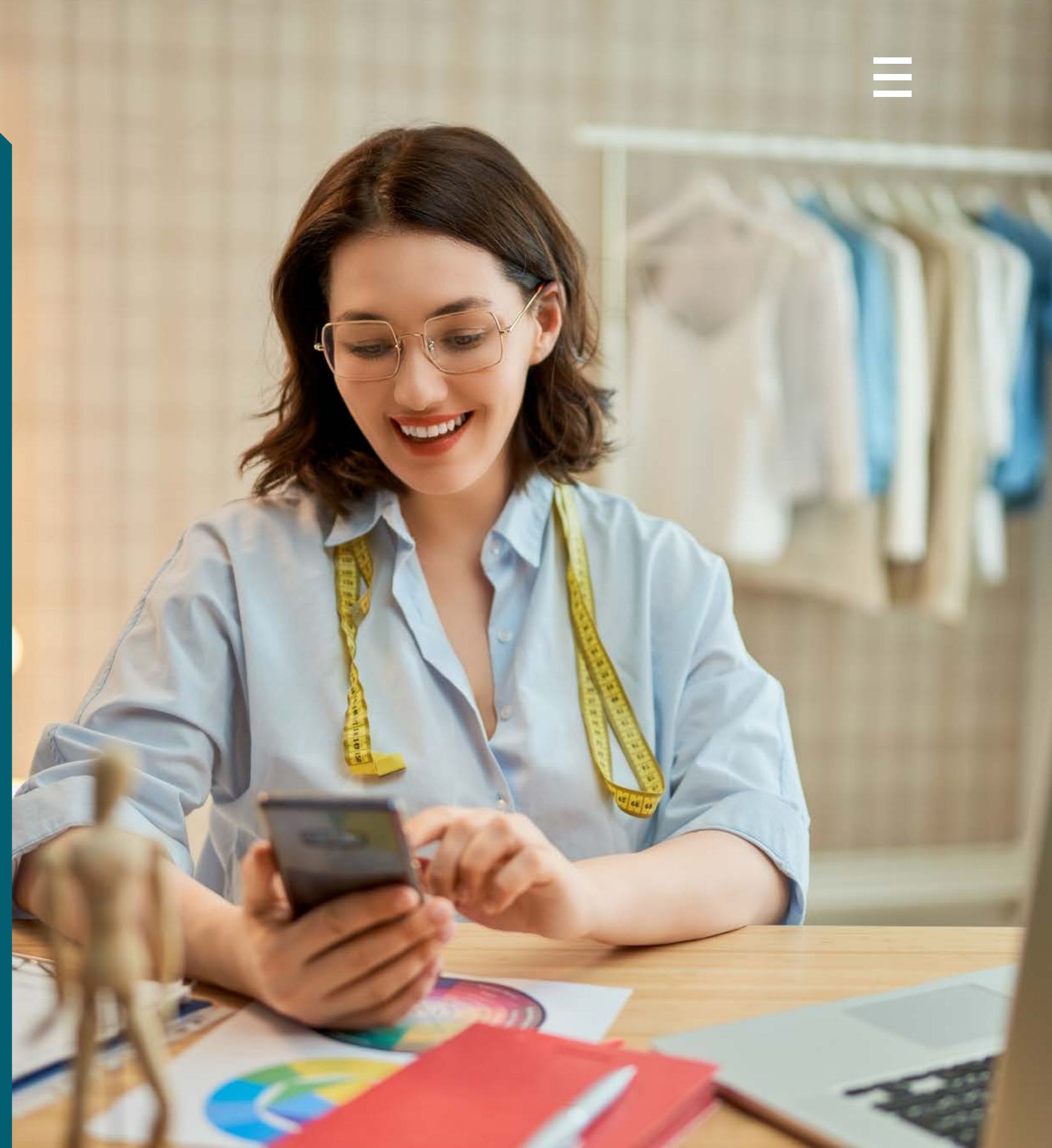
What is social media?

Social media for business

Benefits of social media for small businesses

How small businesses can use social media

Pros and cons of social media





1. What is social media?

Social media can help your business generate leads, lower marketing costs and increase sales.

It has transformed the way businesses and brands connect with customers. From offering sales promotions to monitoring customer feedback, social media is an invaluable way to promote your business and keep in touch with customers.

42%

of the world's population is active on social media

54%

of social media users use it to research products

Social media platforms are free-to-use platforms that connect people, businesses and organisations online. Popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have millions of users, allowing them to share photos, sign up to shared-interest groups, play games together and chat online. Some are geared towards sharing quick updates and opinions, such as Twitter, while others like Facebook offer more in-depth activities such as sharing memories and events.

Social media for business

Businesses use social media to connect with customers. It can be a cheap and effective way to talk directly to customers, build brand awareness and even deliver customer service. Used well, social media can increase customer loyalty and help you find customers who are more likely to buy from you.

Many small business owners believe they lack the time and resource required to keep up with the fast-moving world of social media. But with 80% of all internet users in the UK owning a social media account, it's a market that's difficult to ignore.

The solution is not about 'doing social media'; it's about doing it in a way that delivers the most return for your time and effort. Our guide will help you understand how to use social media, what platforms are most appropriate for your business, and how to create and post content successfully.

Benefits of social media for small businesses

Increase brand awareness

Your customers are probably on social media. If your business isn't, you're missing out on a huge opportunity to raise your brand's profile among relevant audiences.

Build customer relationships

Social media lets businesses get closer to their customers, have real conversations and show their human side. Building trust in your business is vital. 71% of consumers who've had a good social media experience with a brand are likely to recommend it to others.

Increase website traffic

Social media can provide **social media platforms to consider** links to your website. An active social media presence helps increase your company's visibility on search engines, and customers can share links to products and services with friends more easily.

Generate leads

Social media can drive leads. Potential customers can ask questions about your products and services or ask friends on social platforms for recommendations.



Increase sales

Transforming leads into sales is important for any business. Social media provides a great way to find customers and – ultimately – drive sales. 37% of all consumers have been inspired to make a purchase based on social media activity.

Customer service

Customers are quick to post problems on social media, ask questions or provide feedback. Being able to respond quickly and publicly is an advantage of social media and helps build trust.

Monitoring market and competitors

Social media isn't just about posting – it's also about listening. Use it to keep tabs on competitors, stay up to date on market trends and see what your customers are talking about or interested in.



How small businesses can use social media

Brand building and customer service are all well and good but what types of activities can small businesses actually do on social media? Even if you lack a promotional budget, there are some easy activities that are quick to do that can help spread the word about your business.

Promotions

Use tactics such as flash sales and discount codes to encourage potential customers to buy.

Competitions

Encourage people to follow or like your social media channel using competitions. Small prize draws for people who sign up and follow your channel means anything you post will appear in their newsfeed and can be seen by their connections.

Service updates

Keep customers in the know, such as when new items arrive in stock or if you're available for a job, for example emergency fence repairs following a storm.

Talk directly

Respond to customer posts and questions, and comment on posts from others, especially if they can influence potential customers. Be seen to be active and engaging online.

Get content

Encourage your customers to post their stories, product photos, reviews and thoughts. Reward with discounts or special offers the best customer posts, helping build loyalty and generating word of mouth. 50% of consumers say that seeing user-generated content would increase their chances of buying products through a business' social media.

50%

of consumers say that seeing user-generated content would increase their chances of buying products through a business' social media

Pros and cons of social media

Used well, social media can build leads, sales and loyalty. Used poorly, however, social media can actually harm your business' reputation, make you look unprofessional and drive customers away.

Pros

Cost-effective
Cheap to set up and use, social media is cheaper than other marketing channels and can increase sales.

Increased traffic
Social media can link traffic to your website and help improve your search engine ranking.

Reach
It can help you reach the right customers on a global scale and link you to other businesses and brands.

Feedback
Social media is an easy way for customers to get in touch, leave comments or tell you what they think. You can ask them their thoughts – a cheap way to conduct customer research.

Cons

Time-intensive
While cheap to run, it takes time to write, post and respond on social media. You need to continually engage and actively post and respond.

Public posts
Social media is public which means customer complaints are visible to everyone, making it important to respond quickly and positively.

Long haul
Building a successful social media marketing channel takes time. You may not see real results or an return on investment for months, which is why it's important to start early and plan in advance.

Security risks
Social media accounts can be hacked, with untrue and damaging posts made to your customers that look like they are from your business.



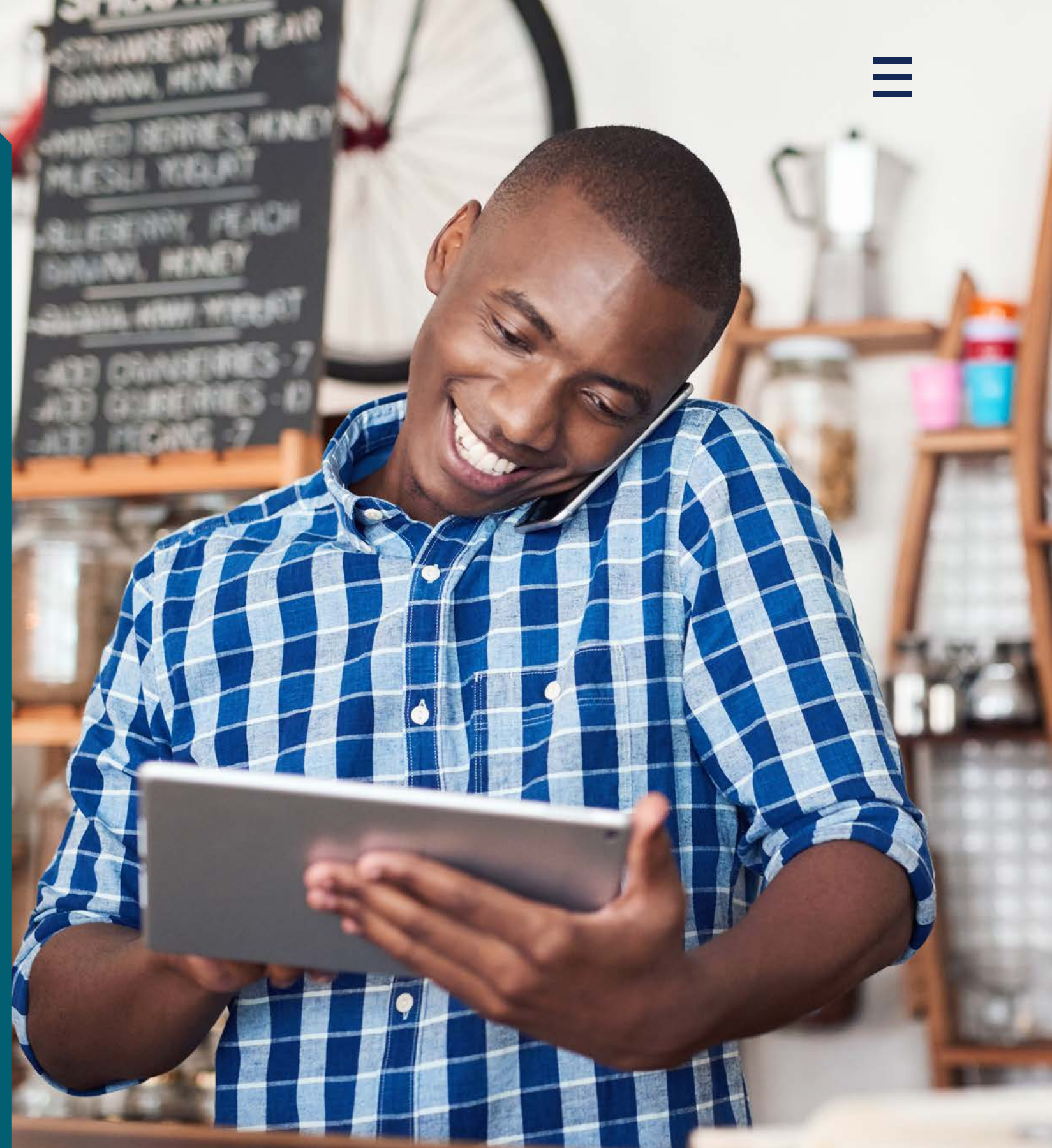
Section 2.

Social media basics

Elements of social media

Social media features

Key terminology





2. Social media basics

We've looked at the pros and cons of social media and how it can help you grow your business, but there are different ways you can do that. We cover some of the basics below.

Elements of social media

Social media revolves around sharing content and engaging with users. Content can come in the form of your thoughts and opinions, website articles and graphics polls and surveys for your audience. But it's also a good opportunity to share other people's posts, links and content if they're likely to be of interest for your audience.

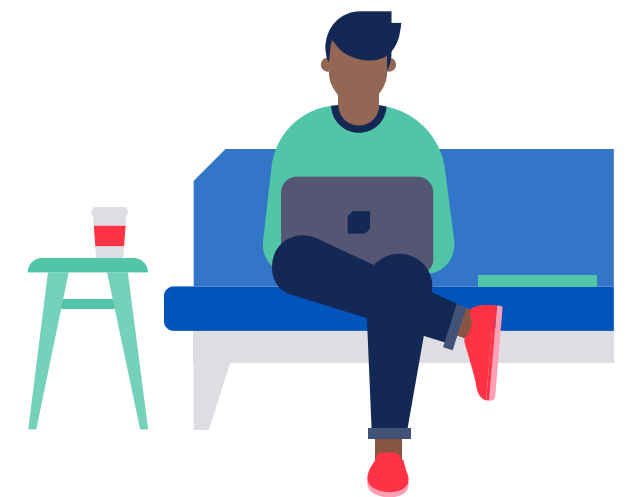
The main social media activities are:

- **Posting:** upload content on your social media channels and share with others.
- **Listening:** listen to customers and conversations about your brand, industry or region.
- **Interacting:** answer customer questions, respond to comments (both good and bad) and join in relevant conversations.
- **Monitoring:** monitor your competitors and see what lessons you can learn. Assess your social media activity and presence against your marketing objectives.
- **Sharing:** share posts, links and content from other social media profiles that are relevant to your audience.

Social media features

Most social media platforms offer a similar set of features that let you share, connect and interact with others online. Features include:

- **User account:** create a user account and login when you want to use your social media channel.
- **Profile page:** update your profile with basic information about your company, including your website, logo and high-quality images. It's here users will be able to see any activity that's taken place.
- **Upload content:** upload posts, photographs, graphics, audio or video. These will be viewable on your profile and in your followers' news feeds or timelines.
- **Friends, followers and groups:** users can connect, follow, like and join groups. If they do, they'll be able to see what you post in their news feed or timeline.
- **Notifications:** get notifications when users interact with you or your posts to stay on top of engagement.
- **Response tools:** users can engage with your business in lots of different ways, from liking your posts to commenting and more. Turn on notifications to keep on top of how users are engaging with your business on social media.





Key terminology

Lots of terms are used when talking about social media. Below we cover the essential terms – there's more detail in the glossary at the end of the guide.

- **Chat or direct message:** a private way for users to talk to each other on social media platforms.
- **Comment:** a reaction or response to your content, which appears in a thread beneath the individual post.
- **Follower/friend/connection:** a user who subscribes to your content.
- **Hashtag (#):** a word or phrase, without spaces, preceded by a hash sign to indicate a keyword or topic. Users can search and view posts using a hashtag. They're a good way of piggybacking on relevant news or trends.
- **Newsfeed:** newsfeeds show a stream of content from the people and businesses you follow.
- **Post:** content that you upload to your profile or newsfeed to share with others.
- **Profile:** personal or company information publicly available for your social media account.
- **Tag:** tag other users and profiles by including @ before a user's username.
- **Trending:** a trending topic is one that's currently popular on social media. Predominantly on Twitter, it's based on how many users have posted a topic with a specific hashtag.



Section 3.

Social media: paid vs organic

What's the difference between organic and paid social media marketing?





3. Social media: paid vs organic

By mixing paid-for advertising and organic content, small businesses can use social media to cost-effectively acquire and retain customers.

What’s the difference between organic and paid social media marketing?

Organic marketing is any form of activity that promotes your business without having to pay for it. On social media, that means posting and sharing content on your own profile with a view to generating engagement and website traffic.

Paid marketing is any activity where you pay to reach people or amplify your reach. It usually allows you to target users more specifically. Payment is generally based on Cost Per Click (CPC), Cost Per Acquisition (CPA) or Cost Per Mille (CPM). CPM means cost per thousand.

Using organic social media

Depending on your budget and appetite for social media, organic marketing is likely to make up the bulk of what you do on social media.

It’s essentially the act of publishing content on your profile which is relevant to your business and its audience.

Your organic posts will generally only be seen by your followers or your connections. That’s why it’s important to actively engage with other users by using hashtags, commenting on trends and engaging with other profiles to expand your reach.

If you do that well, other users will share, comment and engage with your business, in turn increasing your reach and exposure among potential customers. This will require some thought behind it and the most effective businesses on social media have an organic social strategy.

Pros

Inexpensive
Posts, tweets and photos can be produced at little or no cost.

Authentic
Customers consider organic content more credible than promoted content.

Cons

Time
It takes time to create content and build a sizeable social media following.

Effort
Relying on organic content can make it hard for your brand to get visibility against competitors who are using paid-for marketing.



Paid-for social media marketing

Social media platforms are pushing their paid-for marketing options. Compared to traditional advertising, paid ads on social media are relatively cost-effective and allow you to target specifically, which can make them a good option for start up businesses.

Paid ads vary from one social media platform to another. They all allow you to target and promote or boost posts. They also provide comprehensive ad management platforms and analytics tools that enable you to measure the effectiveness of your ads.

Pros	
Cost-effective In most cases, you only pay for ads which people click on or view.	Targeted Define and target specific audiences relevant to your business.
Cons	
Budget They have a cost.	Conversion Compared to organic channels, paid ads typically have lower conversion rates.



Section 4.

Social media platforms to consider

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest





4. Social media platforms to consider

Building an engaged, loyal customer base via social media takes time and effort, so it’s important to understand how each platform works and what it offers, to help you choose the right ones for your business.

40 million

Facebook users in the UK – nearly half of the UK population has a Facebook account.

With more than two billion users, Facebook is the world’s largest social media platform.

Facebook



Users

Nearly a third of Facebook users are aged between 25 and 34. There are marginally more females (53%) than males (47%) on Facebook.

Facebook is good for older customers: 55-65-year-olds are the second largest demographic. Numbers for those aged 24 and under, on the other hand, have been steadily in decline, so if you’re targeting younger customers, you may want to consider other social media platforms before Facebook.



How to use?

Small businesses can create a free Facebook page to share information, pictures and videos directly with customers. Facebook’s ‘Create a Page’ sets up a page by asking questions about your business. Content you add to your Facebook page is known as a post and appears in your followers’ newsfeeds.



How to reach customers

There are two ways to promote your business on Facebook – using either paid-for advertising or organic reach.

- **Paid-for advertising**
You can pay to advertise posts to specific demographics or ‘boost’ your posts so they get more exposure. You can pay per thousand impressions (CPM), where you pay a fee each time your ad is viewed 1,000 times, or pay per click (PPC) where you pay when someone clicks on your ad. Facebook’s business page shows how to identify your audience and create an effective advert.
- **Organic reach**
This refers to the number of people who come across your post without any form of paid boost or distribution – effectively online word-of-mouth. Followers can like, comment or share your posts with their friends, leading to more exposure for your business.



Content type and frequency

Update your Facebook page regularly with useful content such as new products, special offers and competitions. Post ‘how-to’ videos and tips that help customers and encourage sharing. While posting frequency depends on your business and audience type, aim for one or two posts per day.

4 million

likes every minute

20 min

the average time a user spends on Facebook per day



Facebook



Advantages

- **Size:** Facebook provides one of the largest potential audiences online.
- **Cost-effective:** it's free to use while its paid-for advertising can be cost-effective, so you can ramp up activity as your business grows.
- **Business showcase:** Facebook handles a range of content, ideal for showcasing products and services.
- **Measurement:** Facebook has free analytics tools that can help you understand how customers use your business page.



Disadvantages

- **Effort:** maintaining a Facebook page by regularly uploading content and monitoring and responding to posts takes a lot of time and resources.
- **Reputation:** damage to your brand reputation is a potential threat if you don't look after your Facebook page. Deal with customer complaints posted to your page swiftly, positively and take difficult issues offline. If you're running paid ads, remember that users can comment on these too, giving you something else to monitor.
- **Budget:** although ads are cheap, you'll need a reasonable advertising budget. Relying on organic reach alone makes it hard to build a following if you're trying to reach a large audience.





Twitter

Twitter lets businesses and individuals send short messages to other users who follow them. Companies use Twitter to share news, promote special offers and handle customer questions.



Users

There are more than 14 million Twitter users in the UK who log into the platform at least once a month. According to a report by the London School of Economics, the largest demographic group of Twitter users are aged between 18 and 29 (37%).



How to use?

Businesses can post updates – called tweets – of up to 280 characters (although most users stick to the previous character limit of 140). These are received by other Twitter users, known as followers, who have subscribed to your account. Updates appear on your followers’ Twitter timeline.

It’s free to create a business profile and you can link to your website. All your tweets are listed in your profile and are viewable by anyone searching for information about a particular topic.



How to reach customers

It’s free to post and Twitter offers a range of advertising options for small businesses.

- **Paid-for advertising**

There are different paid advertising options on Twitter. You can boost individual posts, create Twitter Ads or create full Twitter Campaigns, which can be made up of lots of different ads. This is all available via Twitter for Business, where you can learn more about the paid-for advertising options.

- **Organic reach**

This is about posting highly relevant content in tune with popular topics and your business. Creating content that’s relevant to that trend, including the same hashtag, means it will appear in the Twitter feeds of anyone following or searching for that topic.



Content type and frequency

With just 280 characters, businesses have to work hard to create a short, engaging post that other people will want to share. You should tweet every day, to stimulate regular engagement from your audience. Within the character limit, a tweet can include:

- **Hashtags:** hashtags summarise a topic or subject and users can search or click on hashtags to see tweets that include them. Choose one that your target customer is likely to be interested in, for example if you’re a plumber in London, #londonplumber is a good choice.
- **@Mention:** Twitter accounts have a username, such as your business name. Reference other users by including the ‘@’ symbol and their username, then anything you post will appear to them. Look to mention key influencers in your industry, such as journalists or trade magazines, and they may ‘retweet’ your post to their audience.
- **Web links:** a link to your company website or product in a tweet.
- **Video or photo:** attaching a video, animation or photo can help boost sharing. Pictures of new store openings, products or funny images relating to your business can encourage shares.



Advantages

- **Traffic-driving:** Twitter is good at providing a link that users can click, driving traffic to your website.
- **Cost-effective:** Twitter ads are typically cheaper than other digital advertising channels. Boosting posts is a cheap way to continually promote your business.
- **Targeted:** Twitter campaigns help you target the right audience, ensuring you tweet to relevant customers.
- **Global audience:** tweets can go global in moments, making it attractive for businesses that want to attract customers worldwide.



Disadvantages

- **Analytics:** Twitter’s analytics aren’t comprehensive and will provide only simple insights.
- **Time:** it takes time to build a substantial following, especially without advertising.
- **Noisy:** with over 500 million tweets per day, it can be hard for single tweets to get visibility.
- **Lifespan:** tweets have the shortest lifespan of any social media posts at just 18 minutes. After that, your post will get buried further down users’ feeds.



Instagram

Instagram is a social media platform that lets users take photos and videos and share them with their followers either on their profile or via Stories.

When adding a post to your profile, you can add a description and hashtag, while with Stories you can add stickers and messages.



Users

Instagram has 1 billion active monthly users worldwide, with half of that number using the platform every day. It’s typically viewed as a platform for a younger audience with 59% of its users under the age of 30. And according to Instagram, 80% of users follow a business or brand.



How to use?

Posting to Instagram involves taking a photo or video and uploading it via a mobile phone app. You can add a caption and hashtags to describe it, then post it. Other Instagram users find your content by searching for the hashtag and they may follow you if they like what they see. When you start your business you’ll need to switch your account to a business account – look for Switch to Business Account in Settings.

In addition to posting directly to your profile, users can also publish Stories. Essentially these are video or photo slideshows where the user can add text and stickers to content.



How to reach customers

Instagram has many ways to reach an audience – from organic posting and buying promotional posts, through to working with Instagram influencers.

• Influencers

A relatively new way to reach audiences, this involves paying people who have a large number of followers to promote your product. UK advertising rules mean that the post must be clearly labelled promotional but for the right price your product will be seen by a massive audience. 49% of consumers claim that they depend on influencer recommendations on social media to inform their purchasing decision.

• Instagram ads

There are eight types of advertisement on Instagram: Photo, Sponsored, Mapped, Story, Video, IGTV, Carousel and Instant Experience. Ads include call-to-actions (CTAs) like ‘Book Now’ which take users to your website or landing page where they can take an action. To get started, you’ll need to connect your Instagram account using your Facebook Business Page – Instagram ads are controlled through Facebook Ad Manager.

• Organic reach

While it’s typically less effective than paid-for promotional activity, with the right content strategy it’s possible to develop an audience and grow customers. You can’t include links to your business website within posts, but you can add a link in the profile part of your Instagram page.



Content type and frequency

Instagram allows for more creativity than most other social media platforms. It’s less about information and more about visual quality, captioning and trends. Brands which possess good creative and imagery tend to be more effective on Instagram.

To be successful, make sure your photos have a consistent visual identity and a clearly defined subject matter. Use a branded hashtag in every post, as reposts by followers will start to increase visibility. Add captions to every photo and video, and investigate Instagram Stories, which are viewed by 500 million users per day.



Advantages

- **Younger audience:** if your business needs to target younger audiences via social media, then Instagram is likely to be your best option.
- **Discoverability:** Instagram users are highly engaged and willing to explore new brands, fashions and products.
- **Influencers:** with the right influencer support, your brand can reach millions of people quickly.



Disadvantages

- **Direct links:** there’s no ability to add links to non-promoted posts, which makes it harder to drive traffic to your website.
- **Low response:** Instagram is characterised by highly engaged users who are hard to convert into customers. You need lots of volume to increase sales.
- **Quality demands:** the best Instagram posts require creativity, high production values and decent photography, which takes time and can be expensive.



LinkedIn

Unlike most social media platforms, LinkedIn is focused exclusively on business, recruitment and professional networking. Owned by Microsoft, it’s used by small businesses to recruit staff, generate sales leads and make connections with suppliers, companies and other business owners.



Users

LinkedIn is almost exclusively used by businesses and professionals, with a bias to those looking to recruit staff or apply for jobs. Globally, it has over 610 million accounts, with 27 million accounts in the UK. Almost 25% of LinkedIn users are aged 18-29 while 61% of all users are aged between 30 and 64.



How to use?

After creating a personal profile, you’ll need to create a ‘Company Page’. You can add posts, images and longer articles with information and news about your business. Post job opportunities using the dedicated recruitment tools.

Be sure to include a link to your website and add keywords to your company profile so that others can find your business. You can also follow other companies, join networking groups and associations, and chat with others using messaging.



How to reach customers

LinkedIn’s audience is different from other social media platforms included in this guide. Rather than promoting your products and services, LinkedIn focuses on paid-for recruitment services as well as promoting useful content or sending messages to specific target customers.

• Passive marketing

It’s possible to build a useful network with regular updates, taking part in networking groups, posting useful articles and connecting with others. Ensure you use relevant keywords and get recommendations from others, so that potential business customers can discover your company.

• Paid-for marketing

This can be posting a job opportunity or using paid-for advertising such as sponsored content. Recruitment can be more targeted, immediate and cost-effective than traditional recruitment services; you specify a budget per lead, write an ad, insert keywords and then vet candidates as they apply. Sponsored content ensures your company posts are seen by target customers and you can send them a direct message about your service.

• InMail

InMail is a paid-for option on LinkedIn which allows you to directly message other LinkedIn members that you’re not connected to. It’s a subscription service and the number of InMail messages you can send depends on your subscription. There are character limits for the subject line and message you can send.



Content type and frequency

Content tends to be more professional and industry focused, covering leadership advice, recruitment tips, marketing help and HR support. This is useful if your small business is business-to-business (B2B) or service focused. It’s also a great place for thought-leadership content.

For best results, include images with everything you post and aim for longer articles of around 2,000 words. ‘How-to’ and list-style articles work best – share your knowledge so others can benefit. While it demands lots of time, around 20 posts per month is ideal.



Advantages

- **Business-focused:** for B2B businesses, LinkedIn offers a great way to connect with potential leads and decision-makers.
- **Networking:** from finding suppliers to fellow professionals, building a network can be quick.
- **Cheap recruitment:** you control the budget and only pay when people apply for a role.



Disadvantages

- **Time:** getting the best from LinkedIn requires time, from writing lengthy posts to messaging and connecting with others.
- **Spam:** you may have to deal with lots of unsolicited messages and promotions.
- **Expertise:** it can be hard to verify the expertise and job history of job applicants – check for genuine recommendations or posts they have made.



YouTube

YouTube is a video hosting and sharing platform, allowing businesses to upload video and also embed it into their own website. It’s an easy way to add video to your website, as well as create useful content that potential customers search for. As it’s owned by Google, adding and hosting YouTube videos related to your business can help improve where your videos rank in Google search results.



Users

It’s one of the biggest social media platforms with 2 billion active monthly users and in the UK nearly 80% of adults use YouTube, equating to an estimated 35.6 million UK visitors each month. In terms of gender, YouTube is one of few social media platforms where gender split is fairly even. Typically it’s a platform more suited to younger demographics.

Businesses of all sizes use YouTube to promote their business, share their expertise and build awareness of their brand.



How to use?

You’ll need a Google account – either a dedicated business account or an existing personal account. In YouTube, click My Channel from the upper-right account menu. Click ‘Use a business or other name’ and follow the prompts, adding customised logos and artwork to complete your business channel. Once set up, simply upload the videos you want to share, paying attention to keywords and the title. You can use ‘embed’ codes from the video page and add them to your web pages so the video appears on your own website.



How to reach customers

YouTube is entirely focused on video. You need to invest time and resources in creating videos that your target customers will watch. As with most social platforms, you can create organic content or opt for paid-for advertising:

- **Organic marketing**
Create videos that reflect your brand while offering answers to the types of problems people search for. Videos are especially useful for service businesses, allowing car mechanics to teach people about maintenance, or plumbers to show viewers how to fix a leaky tap, for example.

- **Paid-for marketing**
YouTube’s TrueView promotes your videos and advertising campaigns to targeted customers. The promotions can appear when people search for specific keywords or are from a target demographic.

You are only charged if the target customer watches at least 30 seconds of the video or clicks on the TrueView ad.



Content type and frequency

Your videos must reflect your brand, so invest time in defining the message, style and what your videos are about. Ensure they look professional – pay attention to poor sound and lighting as they can make videos look amateurish. Focus on creating how-to, informative and instructional videos that help customers and showcase your expertise. Create short, helpful videos – such as planting guides if you run a gardening business – while short, diary-style videos add brand personality. It’s worth uploading client testimonials and embedding them in your website. Ensure you add a call to action in videos and add relevant keywords so potential customers can find them and your website.



Advantages

- **Hosting:** YouTube is a free and easy way to add and embed video onto your business website.
- **Go viral:** successful videos can be shared, rapidly reaching a wide audience and new customers.



Disadvantages

- **Cost:** well-produced videos require time and money, including a lot of planning.
- **Competition:** 300 hours of video are uploaded every minute to YouTube, so getting your video seen can be a challenge.
- **Response:** it can be difficult to convert people watching a video on YouTube into traffic to your website and, ultimately, into paying customers.
- **SEO considerations:** Hosting videos on YouTube means SEO credit goes to YouTube rather than your website. For purely SEO, it’s arguably better to host your videos on other providers.



Pinterest

Pinterest is similar to a digital scrapbook – users pin images, videos and websites into collections known as pinboards, which they then share with others. Pinterest has a dedicated business section, allowing small businesses to create pinboards that promote products and services. Pinterest’s demographic and self-selecting audience means customers referred to a business website via the platform can spend more time and money on the site.



Users

Pinterest has around 250 million active monthly users worldwide. It has a strong female bias in the UK, with 45% of UK women using the platform compared to just 27% of UK men (according to Flint Research). **90% of weekly Pinterest users use the platform to make purchase decisions and 72% use the platform to inspire future purchases. It can drive more referral traffic than Facebook and Twitter.**



How to use?

Pinterest uses pins and boards. Pins are content items, such as images, web pages and videos. Pins are collected onto boards, and pinners can then follow an account or a board or simply search across Pinterest.

To get started, you’ll need to create a Pinterest business account, or convert a personal account into a business one. Add your business details to build a profile and confirm your business website address. Once set up, create a Board with keywords and start adding pins, such as photos from your product range.



How to reach customers

You can reach relevant Pinterest users in a variety of ways – organically on Pinterest, on your website, and using paid-for advertising:

- **Organic marketing**
Create and add items to pin to your business’ Pinterest board, along with relevant links to your website. Add a keyword-focused description field so users can find your pinned content, and consider following other, related boards and accounts, engaging with users across the platform.

- **On your website**
Pinterest lets you add Save buttons to your website, so users can easily pin your content to their Boards. This can spread your content across Pinterest to potential customers.
- **Paid advertising**
Pinterest offers ‘Promoted Pins’ as its advertising format, promoting pins to potential customers.



Content type and frequency

Pinterest has an active community and recommends pinning items to your business board on a daily basis, with more successful pins placed in the evenings and weekends. The key to success is to focus on brilliant visuals. Invest time in getting image composition, lighting and staging right – consider getting images professionally shot. Lifestyle images perform better than plain product shots and you should look to optimise images for mobile devices.



Advantages

- **Female audience:** if your business targets women aged 18-49, then Pinterest might be of particular relevance.
- **Referral traffic:** each pin includes a website address, allowing users to access your website.
- **Lifespan:** pins have longevity and can continue to deliver traffic for years.



Disadvantages

- Pinterest can be time-consuming to get right and it may not give you a return on investment. Monitor the quality of traffic you get to your site. If it’s low-quality, Pinterest may not be the right social media channel for your business.



Section 5.

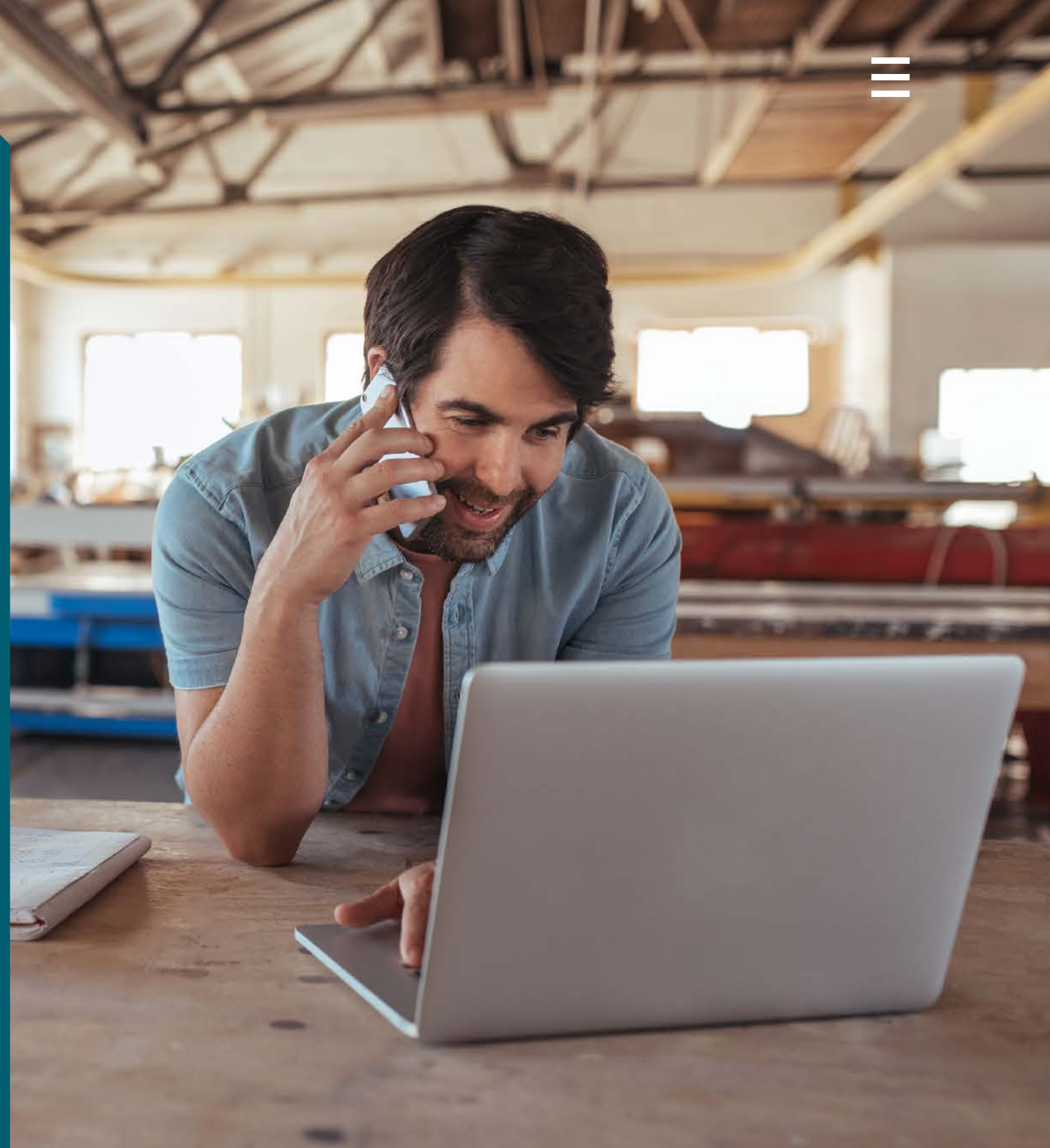
Create a social media strategy

Define your social media audience

Choose the right social network

Create a content plan

Respond and measure social engagement





5. Create a social media strategy

Make social media work smarter for your business by creating the right social media strategy.

Even small businesses need a social media strategy. Being active on social media platforms without a strategy can be ineffective and may harm your business if customers reach out to you via social media and you're unresponsive.

When creating your social media strategy, consider using the SMART system as defined by Paul Meyer in his book Attitude is Everything:

Specific

Make social media goals clear and specific, such as attracting 500 new followers on Facebook within three months.

Measurable

Set targets for the number of social media engagements, such as how often your posts are shared.

Achievable

Goals must be realistic. Avoid the temptation to think you can attract millions of followers overnight. The reality is social media takes time to build.

Relevant

Ensure all your activity on your chosen social media platform supports your business objectives.

Timeframe

Put a realistic target date or timeframe in place to help you monitor the performance and progress of your social media activity.



Define your social media audience

Start by defining your target audience, as this will dictate what you post, your brand position and what social media platforms you should use.

Create a profile of your target audience. A good place to start are competitors' social media accounts. Look at who follows them and what content competitors post. Brainstorm an audience profile that lists location, details like age and gender, and types of interests and questions they have. Knowing your audience means you can plan what content to write, tweet, post or pin to get the response you want.



Choose the right social network

While it's quick to get started, building an engaged social following takes time and effort, which makes choosing a social platform highly strategic. It's better to spend time and effort on just one or two social networks than use them all half-heartedly. For example, a restaurant that relies on customer reviews may be better off concentrating on the location-based social network FourSquare, while a fashion brand could get more mileage from posting images of its clothes on Instagram.



Create a content plan

Social media posts should deliver relevant content to your target audience, rather than just a sales pitch for your business. Decide what type of content you'll use, such as written blog posts, images, video clips, quotes, quick tips, Q&As and infographics. Plan a calendar of content ahead of posting, then establish a regular routine for updating your social media networks – it's better to have a regular drumbeat of updates than a random flurry of updates every now and again.



Respond and measure social engagement

Respond to comments to show that your business is listening to what customers have to say. It's important to measure your social media involvement. Tracking the impact of your content will help you understand what works and what doesn't, letting you adjust and improve your social media strategy. Most social media platforms have tools you can use to track and measure your performance such as Google Analytics and Twitter Analytics.

Section 6.

Create great social media content

Choosing the right content

Social media content that works

How often to post on social media

Free content creation tools

Using automation tools





6. Create great social media content

Use the tips and tools outlined here to avoid your business’ social media activity becoming a chore.

Choosing the right content

You won’t turn your audience into paying customers by using social media to just broadcast sales and marketing messages. Successful small businesses use social media to engage with their customers, gaining likes, shares, followers and retweets that spread the word and increase brand visibility.

The secret is to create valuable content that’s relevant to your customers. Aim for content that helps solve their problems and inspires, entertains or connects with them emotionally. This builds engagement and brand loyalty and keeps them coming back for more. Look at competitors’ social media accounts for ideas. You can even poll your audience on topics to start a conversation and initiate debate.

Social media content that works

Images

Photos of products, lifestyle shots and inspirational images can stimulate likes and comments.

Video

An essential social media staple, video can range from helpful ‘how-to’ advice videos, product reveals and reviews, through to client testimonials.

Infographics

Informative and eye-catching infographics can explain complex topics or present statistics in a highly engaging way and get lots of shares.

Competitions, quizzes and giveaways

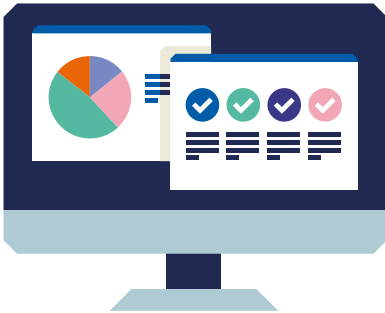
A great way to engage your audience. You can ask users to like or share a post you make to be entered into a prize draw. Consider using flash sales or time-limited discounts, such as 10% off a range of products for that day.

Polls

Post quick polls on your social media platforms to build engagement. These can be serious requests for feedback or fun polls. Keep them topical by including a relevant trending hashtag.

User generated content (UGC)

The need to continually create high-quality, original content for social media can be a big ask for small businesses. Encouraging customers to create shareable content about your product is a winning strategy. Invite customers to post testimonials, reviews, photos and recommendations of your products.



How often to post on social media

How often you should post depends on the social media platform you’re targeting: for example, with Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn aim to post once or twice a day. With fast-moving Twitter, 5-10 tweets a day is a good idea, while 20 pins or repins a day is recommended to keep you visible on Pinterest.

Text and image posts are less time-consuming to create than videos and custom graphics. Build up a bank of content ahead of posting, then establish a regular routine for posting. It’s better to post little and often than do so in intense bursts followed by long stretches of inactivity.

Social media is not a one-way street. Remember to find time to respond to queries and comments, retweet or engage with content and share customer feedback.



Using automation tools

There are lots of social media management tools that make it easier for you to create, schedule and boost posts across all your social media platforms. Some of the most popular tools are:

Hootsuite

One of the most widely used social media management tools, it offers a one-stop solution to your social media marketing.

sproutsocial

Makes it easy for anyone to publish content, monitor their social presence, engage with their audience and analyse social media efforts.

buffer

Offers a full suite of products for social media publishing, engagement, analytics, and team collaboration.

TweetDeck

Powerful Twitter tool for organising, scheduling and monitoring your tweets.

socialoomph

Straightforward social media scheduling and publishing tool.

Combines social media monitoring and publishing, blogging, contacts, SEO, email marketing, marketing automation and analytics.

Section 7.

Social media monitoring

What is social media monitoring?

Tools for monitoring social media

Listening to and dealing with customers





7. Social media monitoring

Social media is about more than posting content – it's your chance to listen to customers, respond to questions and monitor business trends and competitors.

What is social media monitoring?

Social media communication is a two-way street. Rather than just broadcasting messages, social media can be used to listen and respond to customers, as well as monitor what people are saying about topics that affect your business. You can use social media to monitor:

- **Customer feedback**

Customers are likely to post comments, questions and complaints on your social media channels, effectively making it a public forum for customer comments. It's a cheap way to deal directly with customers. You can also monitor social media platforms for mentions of your company.

- **Industry trends**

Keep tabs on social media for valuable insight into trends that could impact your market. This can be a good source of content for your website as well as social media.

- **Competitors**

Follow and monitor your competitors online. Note what activity of theirs works well, along with instances of good and bad customer service.

Tools for monitoring social media

Social media monitoring tools take the effort out of checking social media platforms to see what customers are saying about you. While you should directly monitor customer posts made on your company profile pages, there are plenty of free tools that will scour social media platforms to see if people are talking about your business, competitors or trends.

Social media monitoring tools broadly work the same way, actively searching social media platforms for:

- hashtags mentions
- web addresses
- company names and keywords that you define.



While many are free, most services offer paid-for features to suit your business as it grows. Here are some to get you started:

Hootsuite

Hootsuite lets you create unlimited streams of social media channels to monitor, searchable by keyword, hashtag, location and more, so you can see what people are saying about your brand, competitor or trend. The free version is limited to three social media profiles and basic analytics.

Zoho social

Zoho social monitors specific keywords and hashtags, and also shows you details about the person making the post such as the number of followers they have and if they have interacted with the brand before. It includes tools to schedule posts and content, analytics and allows you to respond in real-time to customer posts.

socialmention

This no-frills search engine lets you enter keywords, tags and hashtags to instantly create a dashboard of mentions, posts and comments related to your search term. It searches across the web and social media channels and provides some analytics, such as reach and sentiment, about that keyword or brand.

TweetDeck

If your business uses Twitter, then TweetDeck is a must. It allows you to create a customised dashboard, schedule and monitor tweets, and manage multiple accounts from one place.



Listening to and dealing with customers

One of the most important uses of social media is responding to customer comments and questions, ensuring that your business appears professional and willing to listen. While it can seem painful to manage, customer comments about your business are usually public on social media so you need to be on top of responding to any issues that arise.

Listening and responding to customers requires planning:

- **Don't ignore posts**

If a customer posts a question or complaint on your social media page, then make it a priority to respond. If you ignore a post, it makes your company seem distant.

- **Thank customers**

If a customer posts something nice about your business, say 'thanks' in return. Customers love to feel valued.

- **Prioritise posts**

Using social media monitoring tools, use keywords such as 'angry', 'poor' and 'service' along with your company name to see if anyone is talking negatively about your business. Focus on responding to these posts.

- **Be professional**

Business social media is not the same as a personal account. Responses and posts need to be relevant, appropriate and professional.

- **Take it offline**

Customers can be angry and irrational. Rather than enter into a virtual shouting match online, take difficult conversations offline, all the while acting professionally.



Section 8.

Advanced social media techniques

Add social media to your website





8. Advanced social media techniques

Take social media further by using it as a staff communication and collaboration tool, adding it to your website and automating your posts.

Beyond allowing you to post content and talk to customers, social media platforms have useful features that can help your business grow. They provide tools that your teams can use to collaborate on projects, social media newsfeeds you can add to your company website, and ways to automate your social media activity so you can save time.

Add social media to your website

Businesses that integrate social media into their websites and embrace it as an ecommerce strategy can be more successful. Around three-quarters of online purchases are influenced by social media. Companies using social media are up to six times more likely to get a customer to buy compared to a company that doesn't use social media.



One of the best ways to use social media is to build it into your company website. You can add social media as a content feed, add social share buttons to pages and encourage customers to use specific hashtags.

- **Content feeds**

These are live newsfeeds from your social media channels that appear on your website. Most content management systems, such as WordPress or Magento, offer plug-ins and extensions that do this automatically. Simply install the relevant plug-in, enter your social media credentials, and your social media posts will appear on your website.

- **Share buttons**

Social media is all about sharing. Most content management systems support plug-ins that add share buttons. These are icons for social media sites, such as Pinterest or Facebook that when clicked by a customer create a post or like in their newsfeed which is then seen by their social network.

- **Hashtags**

Decide on a company, brand or campaign hashtag, such as '#summeroffer', and include it in all your marketing. If enough customers use it, it can become a trend allowing more people to discover your business. You can also search social media platforms for the hashtag to see what people are posting about your business.

Section 9.

Social media glossary





9. Social media glossary

Get to grips with social media terminology with our helpful jargon-busting glossary.

Algorithms	Social media platforms use algorithms to alert users to the most relevant content using demographic data modelling.
Boosted posts	Boosting posts on Facebook increases the visibility of your post to a targeted audience. This is a paid-for option.
Canvas ads	Canvas ads are Facebook’s most immersive form of advertising, designed to help businesses show products on mobile devices.
Facebook Live	Lets you share live video with your followers on Facebook.
Follow/Follower	When you follow someone on social media you subscribe to their updates, tweets and posts, making you a follower.
Hashtag	The name you choose to represent yourself on Twitter. It starts with an ‘@’ symbol, such as @ yourname.
Influencer	A social media user who can reach a relevant audience and create awareness about a trend, topic, company, or product.
Native advertising	Promoted content that appears within the flow of editorial content.
Newsfeed	A list of news posted on a particular platform.
Notification	An alert that tells you of new social media activity.
Pay-per-click (PPC)	The amount of money an advertiser pays a social media platform each time a digital ad is clicked on.

Pinned tweet	A tweet that has been pinned to the top of a Twitter profile page. Pinning a tweet is a great way to feature an important announcement or update.
Post	Generic term for content added to your social media’s company page, which is then seen by your followers.
Reach/Impression	The number of users that see your social media content.
Retargeting	Retargeting sends marketing content to the users who have already visited your website.
Shopping tags	Instagram shopping tags let businesses put information and price tags on their images.
Tag	Users can identify people or businesses in social media posts and ‘tag’ them, allowing others to click and visit that profile.
Trending	When a topic is popular on social media at a given moment.
Tweet	The name given to messages posted on Twitter. Tweets are messages that can be a maximum of 280 characters in length.
User-generated content	Any content created by a person that’s added to your social media channel, such as a comment, photo or review.
Viral	When a piece of content gets shared across social channels on a massive scale, being seen and interacted with by millions of people.



Success stories

“

The support and funding we received from Start Up Loans undoubtably helped us turn our passion into a business reality. We are excited to continue to grow our business in the future.

”

Mitch Lee Founder, Mitch's Kitchen

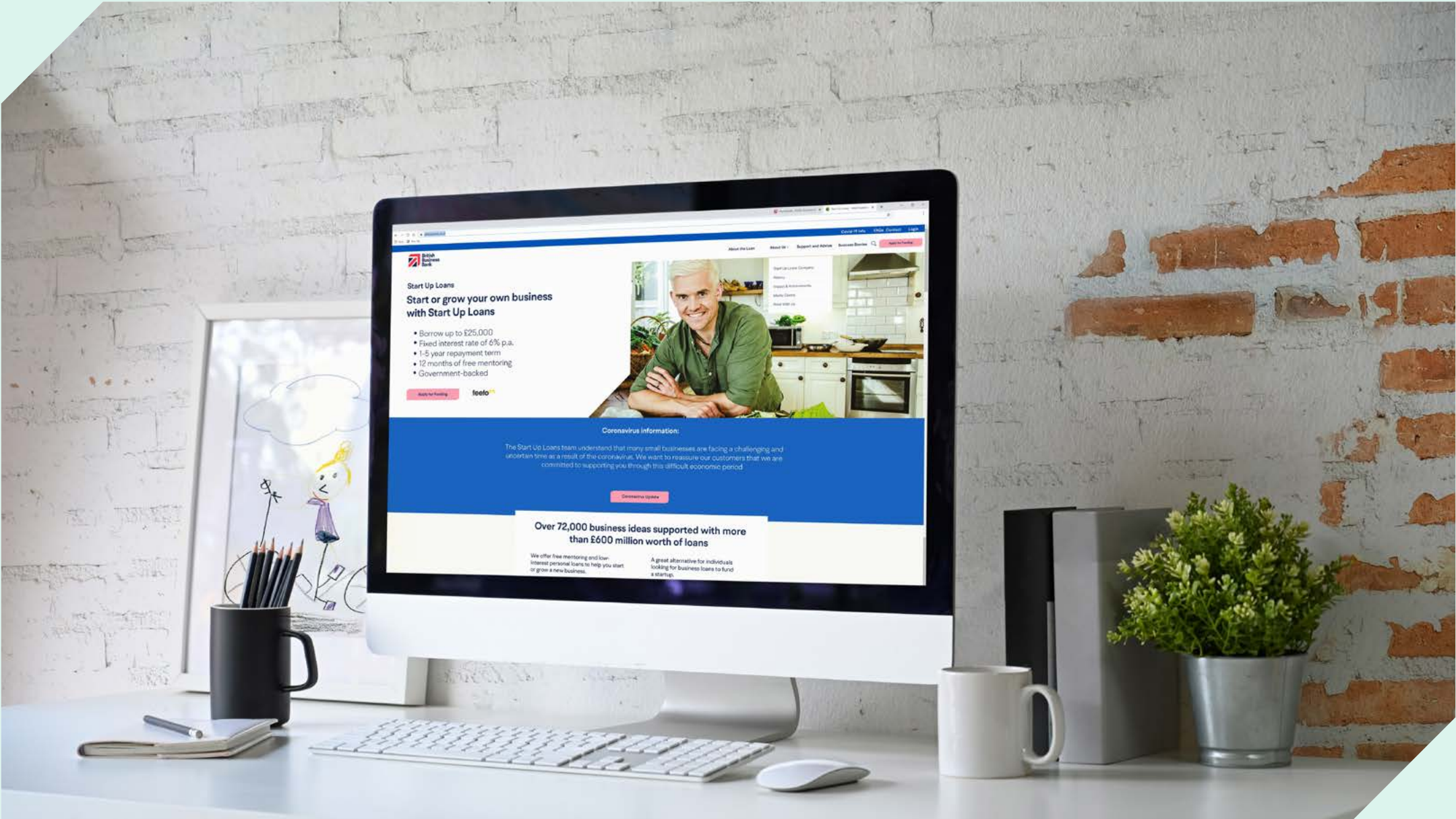




Other free toolkits

We've created free toolkits, covering some of the most important topics for start ups like yours, including:

- The essential guide to starting a business >
- PR toolkit >
- Marketing toolkit >
- SEO toolkit >






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