SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE
HOSPITALITY

NFU Mutual
BUSINESS INSURANCE
Social Media is changing, with an increasing desire from consumers to engage in a two-way conversation, giving hospitality businesses an opportunity to further develop a relationship with both existing and potential new customers. Doing this requires businesses in this sector to move from one-way broadcasts to personalised conversations. Done successfully there is an opportunity to develop rapport, trust and loyalty with your customers.

At no time has this been more important than in the current environment, as we transition to re-opening businesses and re-engaging customers.

This guide, written in conjunction with Pete Doyle of the Social Retail Group, provides straightforward, practical advice and examples of best practice for hospitality businesses of all types to benefit from.

5 STEPS TO SOCIAL SUCCESS FOR LOCAL HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES
1. REACH OUT AND WELCOME YOUR FOLLOWERS

A warm welcome with an open question allows you to strike up a conversation with any new followers. This can help you find out why they have connected with your business and give you valuable feedback or possibly even some new business.

FOCUS ON THE QUALITY OF THE CONVERSATION

Often, in the search for social media success, we focus on ‘vanity metrics’ such as the number of followers we have. In reality, whether it’s public or through private message, it’s in the quality of the conversation that you’ll find the return on investment of social media. You have an opportunity to start a new business relationship every time someone follows your business. Remember, every follower is a potential future visitor to your business (or an influencer of others).

THINK TWICE, TWEET ONCE

We recommend a philosophy of ‘Think Twice, Tweet Once’. It always pays to look at the profile of your new follower and consider what sort of person or business it is and why they might be following you. Look at their last few posts on their social media timelines and consider the language they’re using and if they’re engaging with others. Is it just a robot-like spam behaviour? Are they local?

Remember ‘Think Twice, Tweet Once’ and you can protect the reputation of your business on social media.
UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS

When you start to invest more time on social media, you’ll naturally start to gauge how your customers feel about your business. Some customers will tag you into their conversations and some may be talking about you, but not directly to you. By checking your notifications regularly, (preferably daily) you can start to get real time insight into how you’re performing through your customers’ eyes. You can reply to specific feedback and nurture the relationship with your customers for the long-term benefit of your business.

RESPOND TO FEEDBACK

Remember to ‘Think Twice, Tweet Once’ before you reply. If the feedback is negative, then it’s very tempting to reply straight away and defend your business. By pausing for just a few minutes, breathing and reflecting on the feedback, this could help turn a negative situation into a golden opportunity for change. Never reply to a social media feedback post in the heat of the moment. Your sentiment can be mis-interpreted by your customers and your reputation damaged very quickly.

If the feedback is positive, you can be confident that you’re winning loyalty from your customers. Unprompted and positive feedback will travel further in people’s timelines.

KNOW WHEN TO ENGAGE WITH A FOLLOWER

The other thing to consider is the context of the mention on social media before you reply, as not all mentions need a response. If the customer is talking to their friend and they mention your business (positive or negative) but don’t tag your username/account name into the conversation, it may be damaging to the reputation of your brand if you intrude and start talking to them.

If the customer has used your username (and tagged) you in the conversation, then it may be because they want to engage you in the conversation, and they’re inviting you to talk. Again, a lot depends here on the context of each mention so there’s not a ‘one size fits all’ response.

2. MONITOR THE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS AND REPLY WITH CARE
Direct Messaging (DM) can effortlessly embed itself into your private, operational customer conversations. In comparison to the telephone, it’s more efficient, allows you to send documents and audio messages, attach images and do this with multiple customers instantly.

DM allows you to dip in and out of multiple conversations in a single minute. Customers may prefer to send a message over picking up the telephone to ask simple questions like ‘can I book a table?’, ‘what time do you close?’ or even ‘what is your room availability like?’.

Public tweets are restricted to 280 characters, but Twitter DM, for example, has 32,000 character so you can really start to serve customers through this channel, especially when more information needs to be shared when they’re searching for a product or you want to provide a personal service.

WhatsApp for Business is a separate app from the normal WhatsApp. It’s still fairly new, but it has been built especially with small businesses in mind. As a business you can set up a profile, and connect the WhatsApp to your landline. You can also create a catalogue to showcase your range of products and services, as well as use it to reply instantly to customer queries.
4. NEWS UPDATES – TELL ME SOMETHING I DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS

NEWS UPDATES
News updates can be used to give your customers regular updates about your business, for example, how you’re making your premises safe during the easing of the Coronavirus lockdown restrictions.

Make sure you invest time to do daily updates and try to keep this upbeat and practical for your customers. Include an image or a short video (no more than 10-20 seconds) to bring your message to life but keep it brief and single topic focused – so you don’t confuse or cause customers to disengage.

The best news updates are when you can share some behind the scenes moments of what’s happening in your business.

Here are some ideas for posts:

a) What measures are you taking to keep customers safe while they’re on your premises?

b) Pictures of the inside of your premises with the appropriate signage on the floor to illustrate to customers what they might expect when they next visit you

c) Daily updates on how you busy you are and when is the right time to visit your restaurant or stay in your hotel

d) It’s good to get your customers to talk authentically about what they like about their experience with you and to also reinforce your commitment to the local community. This could be a short video interview with them or maybe just a picture of them with a quote, remembering to always get permission to share this first. Try not to make it look like an advert as this will put people off.

Keep it a natural interview style and don’t forget to tag in people on your post too

e) Share your enthusiasm for your business and feature some of your work colleagues on your news update too. Behind the scenes stories are effective updates on your timeline as people like to connect with others, so try and humanise them as much as possible.

Plan your news updates into a daily, weekly and monthly calendar structure.

Daily
What I can say about my business daily (avoid politics – keep it positive and upbeat).

Weekly
This could be a “flash back Friday” or a “throwback Thursday” moment when you’re reflecting about your local area and how you’ve been serving customers throughout the year. It could also be something about your team i.e. “meet the team Monday”, featuring a member of your staff.

Monthly
Say something more substantial about your business – maybe you’re considering a new menu and you want to gauge feedback from your customers over social media to see what the demand would be?

To sum up, this approach is to ‘think like a journalist’. Keep your timeline active with interesting and relevant news about your business, your staff and feature the customers you serve. Your timeline will start to look human and local. You’ll know if it’s working if people are responding or engaging with your news stories.
WHAT IS IT YOU’RE OFFERING?
Finally, the most important tip for social media success is offers and services. Most local businesses just post pictures of products and use it as a direct selling tool. There’s no harm in doing this, but eventually it will appear to be a robot-like social media account so start to humanise the offer posts. For example, consider introducing your team and what they like about your business. If you’re a restaurant, for example, you could make this a team exercise and each week get a member of your team to pick their favourite item on your menu and make this a theme such as “staff picks of the week.” You could be creative here and promote offers just for your followers and post them on your channel.

USE CHECK-IN FEATURES TO PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS ORGANICALLY
The ‘check in’ feature is a simple way of letting customers know your business is open and ready to welcome people. Not many businesses take full use of the ‘check in’ features that exist on most social networks. You could use this as a promotion tool, for example offering freebies or vouchers for customers who check in.

Step 5 – Offers and Services

Pete Doyle has worked in Retail since 1986 for large retailers such as Waitrose, Toys R US, Marks & Spencer and Hamleys of London. He launched Waitrose.com in 1999 and then went on to set up the online departments for Toys R Us and Hamleys in the early 2000s. Having been successful in many online projects for these companies, he founded Social Retail Group to empower his clients to use social media as an operational customer engagement channel on their shop floors and in their call centres. Over the last 12 years, Pete has trained over 3,500 people on operational use of social media from small start-ups to large scale national retailers and service companies. He is a guest Lecturer at Henley Business School on Social Media.