

Using Social Media to Engage Audiences

Whether it is getting them through the door or deepening your engagement, social media is as important as your website or brochure in communicating to your audience and for them to communicate with you.

In a recent national survey it was revealed that “Australians are increasingly engaging with the arts online (88%, up from 82% in 2019)”. (Creating Value: The National Arts Participation Survey, Creative Australia, Sep 19, 2023).

Facebook and Instagram are the most commonly used social media sites for museums and galleries each with its own slightly different focus and audiences.

Facebook



Facebook is the most popular social media in Australia, not only for personal use but business as well. For galleries and museums Facebook is a

place to share photos, updates, and general news with those who follow or ‘like’ you. Audiences come to your Facebook page to find out what’s on, or to explore events. If you don’t have the capacity to host your own website, Facebook can be a great alternative web presence and act as your website with details of your organisation, opening hours and location.

Instagram



Instagram is primarily a visual social media platform which lets users upload photos, videos and ‘stories’. The image-dominant medium means it is very popular

with visual arts and crafts sector and audiences. You can apply various digital filters to images, and add locations and hashtags to your posts linking the photos with other content on Instagram featuring the same topic or interest. You can drive an audience to your website on Instagram by directing them to a website link on your profile page.

Follow and be followed

To start you need to follow or ‘like’ other organisations who are similar to you or that you partner or work with. Follow organisations who have similar audiences to your current or target audiences. Look at who these entities are following and being followed by for additional ideas for who to follow. Once you start to follow others they will follow you back and their followers will begin to know about you and follow you also. Tag and post about local businesses or partners that you work with, schools, caterers, community groups etc. They will appreciate the support and their followers will recognise you as part of their community.

Create great content

Especially for museums and galleries visual content in social media is very important – pictures are key.

Decide if there is a ‘style’ or any branding rules that you would like to adhere to in your posts – it can be as simple as posting fun or quirky rather than scholarly or serious, but make sure that you keep the tone relatively even especially if you are allowing multiple staff to contribute posts for the one account.

You might decide to create light hearted context for one platform, say Instagram, and then use Facebook for more meaningful information. Alternatively you might want to keep a consistency across the social platforms in line with your organisation’s communications plan or branding.

As each social media platform has a different format and varying audience demographics you can re-use your content across platforms – also you can re-use news items from your blog or e-newsletter and post these as separate items on social media.

Engage your audience to create content

One way to get an audience to engage is to ask your audience to show you (and their followers) how they see or experience your exhibitions or projects. Consider allowing photography inside a gallery or at an event but ask visitors to tag the pictures with your chosen hashtag or location. Encourage audiences to do this by creating competitions or showcase posted pictures on your website or social media site around a theme or activity (for example many galleries encourage their audiences to take photos of themselves with works or objects that look like them or match their clothes etc.) and have a weekly announcement of the 'winner'. Consider giveaways or free tickets to events as prizes.

Create unique and beautiful photo opportunities that both audiences and the media will want to share. Invite an artist, curator, celebrity or staff member to do an Instagram 'takeover' for a period, curating a new take on what you do and potentially bringing a new audience. Ask a staff member or local personality to pick their favourite item or work from your collection explaining 'why' and post this to start a conversation – ask followers to do the same next time they visit you and tag you or use a specific hashtag.

Make sure you encourage your followers to be social with you and make comments (even not so nice ones) on all platforms. Ensure that you 'like' or respond to all comments, thanking the positive ones and dispassionately addressing those few negatives. This is the 'social' obligation of social media and encourages engagement. Connect the audience with exhibitions or projects by featuring curators/artists/collection items in the development phase, or even ask the public to help with research (such as social history or local knowledge) or ideas for projects.

Give them the inside scoop

Social media followers love feeling part of what is going on or having exclusive access – behind the scenes pictures and posts about the set up or pack down of a show or event, conservation of a collection item, or school workshop. Action shots and time-lapse video are always a hit as are historical photos of a museum or organisation.

Social media dos and don'ts

DO

- Have a social media content calendar and consider saving images or post ideas ahead of time to tweet or post regularly. These can augment organic posting opportunities.
- Consider using a social media management platform to schedule posts across social media platforms at once
- Tag artists, makers, authors etc. featured in your post or that you have worked with on a project using their social media account names (for example @mgnsw) – it is polite and they may repost or retweet your post to their networks!
- Engage your audience by posting your presence at community or other events and show support for what others in your sector are doing.
- Engage influencers with a strong voice for your target market – find people who have lots of followers and ask them to post about you, you might need to offer them some free tickets, merchandise or a nice lunch

DON'T

- Don't advertise overtly on social media, but share your enthusiasm for what you do
- Don't use images of children without their parents or carer's permission – more information on the legalities of this can be found here: <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/resource-sheets/images-children-and-young-people-online>
- Don't forget to attribute work to the artist (and tag them if possible) or if reusing a photo or image the original copyright owner. More information about copyright and social media can be found here: <https://www.artslaw.com.au/information-sheet/social-media-for-artists/>
- Don't forget that anything posted can 'go viral', so think before you post anything controversial, rude or insensitive.
- Don't post content when no one is looking. Posts have a limited lifespan for example a post only lasts about eight hours, or a second if your followers don't scroll down. During weekdays peak times for social media are between 7–9 am when people are travelling to work, during lunchtime between 12–1pm, or early evenings from 5–7pm when people are commuting home.