**Social Media Management Tools**

When a business or organisation’s needs in managing social media have grown from manually handling postings, content and audience, it is time to consider one of the management tools available for this area of technology.

When selecting the SMM tool most suited for an organisation, the following issues need to be considered and reviewed against the organisation’s needs and capabilities:

## Understanding your social media management needs

What is it that your business does on social media? Do you share original content on Facebook and LinkedIn? Do you run contests and competitions to build lists? Do you engage with your audience on visual platforms only such as Instagram and Pinterest? Do you sell products through Facebook, nurturing the sale with ongoing engagement? There’s a long list of the ways in which businesses interact with and use social media to promote their brand, tell their story and talk to their audience. You need to know exactly what you want to achieve with your social engagement before considering the other factors in our list below.

## Know your budget

Every business has a budget and it is one of the most important factors to keep in mind. There is no point in looking at a top-end product if you simply can’t afford it. The flip side of this is that it is just as pointless looking at a product that is either free or very cheap purely because it is free or cheap.  If you want to get bang for your buck look at products that offer discounts for paying annually, offer free trials and products that allow you to combine features or add-on capabilities so that you can manage more whilst keeping within your budget.

TIP:  When evaluating the different product tiers using a free trial make sure to sign up for the tier that you can afford.  There is no point in evaluating the top tier if it is out of your price range!

## What features are required?

SMM tools usually provide several pricing tiers based on the number of features available. Whether you are an agency managing your client’s social media activities or a small business looking to streamline your own efforts, you will need to define some of the following:

* How many users will manage your communication?
* How many social networks do you need to connect?
* What level of analytics do you require?
* Do you need any additional features?

## Which social networks will your business use?

This consideration will essentially weed out tools you won’t use from ones you will further evaluate. It is unlikely you will find one tool that caters for ALL your social media networks, though as this is a rapidly changing space, I’m sure such a tool is not far away. More points for consideration in this regard are whether the tool allows access to all areas of a network such as company pages, groups and whether you can like, reply, comment etc. directly from the tool.

## What are your content publishing and scheduling needs?

Serving up interesting and useful content to your audience is probably one of the most time-consuming tasks businesses now face. Look at whether the SMM tool offers scheduling of content as this feature will help reduce the stress of making sure you post regularly and at the optimal times. It’s ideal if you can create or curate content in advance, queue it up and leave it to be published at your chosen time. Some tools even create a posting schedule for you based on analytics of the best time to serve content to your audience. You should endeavour to find a tool that makes content publishing and scheduling easy.

## Content publishing vs social interaction

Decide whether it is important for your business to purely publish content or is it a priority to interact and engage with your audience.  Some tools push notifications from networks making it easy to see mentions, likes etc. as they happen, affording your business the opportunity to respond.  If this is one of your primary aims or your social strategy, select a tool that will meet this need.

## Measure your success

It is a well-known fact that you won’t know what you are doing well or what you are doing badly if you are not measuring it. Look for tools that give you insights and that integrate with Google Analytics or similar.  If you like hard copy reports, make sure that the reports are exportable and printable.

## Apps and browser extensions

Many tools have apps that you can add-on and integrate with the existing product to give you added functionality. For any tool that you are evaluating you should look at all the integrations available and the cost of these. Browser extensions are an invaluable time saver – by utilising these you can quickly curate content on the go as you find it on the web.

## Being innovative & adapting to change

Look for a tool that adds new features or capabilities to make the overall package better for the user, as well as tools that continually adapt to the rapidly changing social media landscape. As technology advances, SMM tools should endeavour to keep up and provide their user base with significant reasons to stay loyal.

## Putting it all to work

The SMM tool should streamline your processes and improve their execution. It should reduce time; help organise all your efforts and you shouldn’t need a degree to use it! When you have a clear understanding of your business’ social media needs, you will be able to make an informed decision as to which social media management tool you would like to employ.  If you do not know where to start, compare your ‘needs list’ to what the current major industry players offer.  The list below shows some of the current industry leaders in this area:

Hootsuite

Sprout Social

Buffer

AgoraPulse

Sendible

*Source: Project[…], as at https://projectsquarebrackets.com.au/practical-guide-social-media-management-tools/, as on 12 December 2020.*