

Social Media during COVID-19

A Quick Guide for Canadian Museums May 2020

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Introduction:

Museums responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by moving online. Seemingly overnight, social media presence became the museum's presence in its community. Social media is being used to strengthen and build community, to facilitate discussion, and to determine community wants and needs as discussions begin about reopening spaces and places in the post-COVID world.

The purpose of this resource is to provide museums with some suggestions and case studies on managing the museum's social media presence. This is a companion guide to [Supporting Seasonal Staff During COVID-19](#), and as such provides some key recommendations and good practices to consider when assigning social media as part of seasonal staff duties. While not exhaustive, it should help in decision-making and planning.

Any projects, programs, software, websites or other resources mentioned in the document serve as examples only and should not be seen as endorsements.

Strategy

Social media strategies are as varied as museums. Each museum needs to determine what it wants to accomplish, who will be responsible for the work, and how results will be measured. The museum should always have the final oversight as to what is posted on social media and what channels are created. You may want to develop a policy that outlines expectations around posting, conduct and reputation. This includes instructions on how to respond to inquiries. It is important that the museum's responses are well-informed, presented clearly and are framed in a positive light. Consistency is key. You can find a few guides about developing a social media policy here:

- From Hootsuite: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-policy-for-employees/>
- From EveryoneSocial: <https://everyonesocial.com/blog/need-sample-social-media-policies-here-are-7-to-inspire-yours/>

While you do not need multiple goals or complicated evaluation measures, it is important to identify what you want to accomplish and why it is important to your organisation and community. Considering current realities, potential goals could include:

- Keeping the museum open online while your facility is closed to the public
- Being a community cheerleader
- Supporting parents and educators with online resources
- Expanding your audience
- Fundraising

It is also important to look at your organisation's overall strategic plan. If social media can be used in accomplishing those goals, incorporate them into your planning.

Consider what has been successful for other institutions. What messages do they convey? What information are they sharing? How are they engaging their local audience? What popular hashtags are they using? It is important to do your research. Don't be afraid to reach out to others in the museum community and discuss. The key factor is figuring out what your goals are and what your measurements of success will be.

Administrative Management

If your museum has existing social media accounts, ensure that seasonal staff have access to these accounts including current login information, passwords and authorizations. Some social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram just require a username and password to login, while others, such as Facebook, require a current administrator to grant access to allow other users administrator privileges. Read more about the different levels of Facebook admin privileges and how to manage admins: <https://www.facebook.com/help/187316341316631>

If your seasonal staff create social media accounts for your museum, ensure that you have a record of the usernames, emails, passwords and administrative privileges for these accounts. It is very problematic to have social media channels set up for your institution and not have access to them, and also be unable to reset any passwords. You need to have access to these accounts. Social media channels should not be dormant once your seasonal staff have completed their terms.

If the museum is unable to regularly monitor and engage in social media after seasonal staff finish their contracts, ask them to make a final, pinned post with current contact information for the museum. Identify one or two people who can monitor social media channels during the off-season for questions or comments, even if they cannot commit to regular check-ins. Another possible solution to off-season dormant social media channels is to have seasonal staff create posts that could be posted later by other staff. For example, developing weekly themes, or selecting photos or artifacts from the collections to be posted by alternate staff or using a social media scheduling tool. Note that even with pre-scheduled posts, social media channels still need to be monitored for comments and engagement.

After your seasonal staff contracts are completed, change passwords to your social media accounts and remove the employees from administrative roles on any accounts. When making password changes, be sure to keep secure records of the new passwords, ideally in password management software or in a password protected note on your device.

Content

While some social media posts will be in response to trending hashtags and challenges, you may ask staff to develop a social media content plan. This will enable seasonal staff to show the type of content they are planning on posting, which channels they will use, and how frequently content will be shared. A plan can be as detailed or as general as necessary for your institution, but it should link back to your social media strategy and identified goals. Considering the example goals from page 2, here are some questions and considerations for content:

- **Keeping the museum open online while your facility is closed to the public**
Are you able to provide virtual tours and exhibits? Special talks and information sessions about the collection and/or community's history?
- **Being a community cheerleader**
In such an atmosphere of illness and uncertainty, providing morale boosts to your community is very worthwhile. How can you acknowledge frontline workers? How can you boost morale or facilitate some fun in your community?

- **Supporting parents and educators with online resources**

Are you able to post artifacts and collections or history-related content online? Can you share resources or activities to engage students while they are learning from home?

- **Expanding your audience**

Do you want to grow your online audience and increase your number of followers? Do you want to broaden your marketing reach in preparation for re-opening? Do you want to increase the number of people who subscribe to your e-newsletter list?

- **Fundraising**

Can you sell items from your gift shop via social media? Is there a particular project or program that would make a good crowdfunding campaign? If this is new territory for the museum, are there nearby museums who have conducted online fundraising who you can reach out to for guidance or tips?

Using your identified goals and associated questions as a guide, create a list of relevant content, stories, photographs, and artifacts. Where possible, attach these to calendar dates. You should also monitor trending hashtags and topics for inspiration. Examples of this are shared at the end of this resource.

There are many templates for social media content plans available online. You can explore some to find out what might work best for your museum. You may want to combine different aspects of content calendar templates to suit your needs.

- Social Media Content Calendar Template from Hootsuite:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/129en-jvm9q7RVkbakQc_xteyyCd_GJMJbeRCJbx-sSgQ/edit#gid=0
- Social Media Content Calendar Template from Hubspot:
<https://offers.hubspot.com/social-media-content-calendar>
- Social Media Editorial Calendar Template from CoSchedule:
<https://coschedule.com/blog/social-media-editorial-calendar-template/>

There are also a number of free and/or low-cost tools that can assist in social media efforts. Experimenting with the different tools will help the museum to identify which ones work best in accomplishing goals and managing the social media workload.

Graphic Design & Content Creation Tools:

- Adobe Spark (app): <https://spark.adobe.com/>
- Apache OpenOffice: <https://www.openoffice.org/>
- BeFunky: <https://www.befunky.com/>
- Biteable: <https://biteable.com/>
- Canva: <https://www.canva.com/>
- Draw.io: <https://www.draw.io/>
- Visme: <https://www.visme.co/>

Scheduling Tools:

- Buffer: <https://buffer.com/>
- Facebook's Built-In Scheduling Tool: <https://www.facebook.com/help/389849807718635>
- Hootsuite: <https://hootsuite.com/>

Other tips and tools can be found at: <https://biteable.com/blog/tips/social-media-marketing-tools/>

Comments and Complaints

While it is hoped that the museum's social media presence is a welcoming and positive space, it is possible that questions or negative comments will be received from time to time. Be sure to respond promptly to questions and comments left by visitors. Do not delete these comments. It is very probable that someone else noticed and is watching for the museum's response. If someone is critical of the museum or its activities, always take the high road when responding and remember the following:

- Do not take it personally
- Never argue, regardless of the situation
- Focus on solving the problem rather than defending or placing blame
- If a mistake was made, admit it and correct it, with thanks
- If you do not have the answer, seek help and follow-up

Facebook Advertising

If you are interested in reaching more people on Facebook beyond who sees your content organically, or even people who don't already "like" your page, a great way of doing this is with Facebook advertising. The process is fairly straightforward. You create an ad, you pay Facebook to show the ad, and the right people will see it and hopefully interact with it.

Facebook advertising is also extremely flexible. It works well on both small and large budgets, so it's definitely worth exploring.

When you create an ad on Facebook, decide what it is you want to achieve - increase traffic to your website, promote a post to increase engagement, increase views to your Facebook page, or promote an event - and who it is you want to target.

The easiest way to start experimenting with Facebook ads is through "Boosting Posts", although this is not the only way to advertise. You can also advertise using the Facebook Ads Manager. Ads through Ads Manager offer more advanced customization and options. [This resource from Facebook](#) explains the difference between boosting posts and Facebook ads in more detail. Essentially, boosting posts offers access to Facebook advertising in a simplified dashboard.

You can learn more about all types of Facebook advertising in the [Facebook for Business Help Centre](#).

E-Newsletters

Although social media channels are essential and effective ways to reach audiences, one of the most important tools you can have in your digital marketing toolbox is an E-Newsletter. Algorithms determine how your social media content is shown to people but there are no guarantees that audiences are going to see your content, even when you use paid advertising. As such, E-Newsletters are a great way to maintain a connection to stakeholders online; they are your direct line to people who want to hear from you.

There are many advantages to using an HTML based E-Newsletter service such as Mailchimp or Constant Contact instead of just emailing your content out to a contact group through regular email. These include being able to manage subscribers and send content out to a large number of subscribers, professional looking email templates, and detailed analytics about who is opening your emails and what content they are clicking on.

[MailChimp](#) is easy to use and free for up to 2,000 contacts. You can check out this [overview of how to get started with MailChimp for beginners](#) on YouTube.

There are many other options for E-Newsletter platforms as well. [This blog post](#) from HubSpot explores the top Email Marketing tools in 2020 so you can review your options and decide what software might meet your needs.

Evaluation

Social media and e-newsletter platforms have built-in analytics tools and allow you to see how many people are reached by and/or engage with your content, as well as demographic information. There are also third-party free or paid analytics services that can help you understand the effectiveness of your social media efforts.

Monitor real-time analytics for your social media channels and review weekly reports. If social media work is assigned to seasonal staff, ask them to share a weekly analytics report with their supervisor. Pay attention to posts that resulted in engagement (comments, likes and shares), and try to identify commonalities so that you can build on this interest.

For an overview of analytics options: <https://buffer.com/library/social-media-analytics-tools>

Further Resources

Social media can be a huge job and it is important to remember that it is often a full-time position within an organization. Scale your expectations of social media, and provide the person in charge of social media efforts for your museum with the amount of resources (both human and financial) that are available to be put into social media.

There is also so much to learn about social media. The items that we have touched on are just starting points and there are many other important aspects that we have not covered. The good news is that the internet is a great way to learn about social media!

Here are a few resources if you are interested in learning more:

- The Hootsuite Social Media Resource Library: <https://hootsuite.com/resources>
- A Strategic Guide to Social Media for Nonprofits from SproutSocial: <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/guides/nonprofit-social-media-guide/>
- The Ultimate Guide to Nonprofit Marketing in 2020 from HubSpot: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-run-a-lean-mean-nonprofit-marketing-machine>
- The Ultimate Social Media for Museums Guide from SproutSocial (2017): <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-for-museums/>
- When learning about social media, Google is your friend. If there is something that you are interested in learning, Google it. It is likely that someone has wondered how to do the same thing and made a resource or a YouTube video about how to do it. Also, look to other museums and institutions and see what they are doing. What is working well? Can their ideas and strategies be adapted to your museum? The following section contains some examples of how museums of various sizes, across Canada are engaging in social media during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Examples of Social Media Engagement during COVID-19

Canadian museums are doing some inspiring work on social media. Here are some examples from across the country, organized by the five aforementioned goals.

Keeping the museum open online while your facility is closed to the public

- The Royal Saskatchewan Museum has shifted their normal story time programming online. “Storytime with Gail”, which normally happens in person is now happening online via video: <https://www.facebook.com/Royal.Saskatchewan.Museum/>
- The Yukon Arts Centre Gallery modified their kids art programming to take place more frequently and online. “Kids Kreate,” which normally runs once per month at the centre during the school year, is being presented twice per week online. Art projects are designed to use materials that families will already have in their homes: <https://www.facebook.com/YukonArtsCentre/>

Being a community cheerleader

- The Army Museum did a week-long salute to Medical Care Professionals by showcasing Canadian Army medical staff and volunteer related items from their collection. <https://www.facebook.com/TheArmyMuseum/>
- The Hangar Flight Museum is using their social media channels to share short, informative posts in the form of Two Truths and a Lie games or Fast Facts stories. Some topics are chosen based on audience votes to gauge interest for the following weeks. <https://www.facebook.com/TheHangarMuseum/>

- The Museum of Ontario Archaeology has been offering a MadLibs series every week on Facebook, using the #MOAFridayMadlibs <https://www.facebook.com/ArchaeologyMuseum/>
- The Nova Scotia Museum is offering an activity for those who like to collect, inviting people to share what they collect with the hashtag #MuseumMaker. <https://www.facebook.com/novascotiamuseum/>
- The Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum organized an #ArchosaurAprilAbsurdity bracket with multiple daily posts outlining hypothetical encounters between prehistoric creatures. The audience was invited to share their bracket and follow along regularly to keep score and see how well their picks did. <https://dinomuseum.ca/events/archosaur-april-absurdity/>
- Randall House Museum has offered a [virtual puzzle](#) that they created from an image in their archival collection <https://www.facebook.com/WolfvilleHistoricalSociety/>
- Restigouche Regional Museum has created Nostalgia Bingo, inviting the community to mark the images that bring back memories. Images are all photographs from the collection. <https://www.facebook.com/restigoucheregionalmuseum/>
- The Yukon Transportation Museum is celebrating 100 years of aviation in the Yukon with a summer photo challenge, which also acknowledges the challenges currently facing the industry. The public is invited to “keep Yukon aviation close to [their] hearts during this time” by photographing planes, hangars, etc. and sharing them online with YTM’s social media accounts. Prize draws are held weekly. <https://goytm.ca/yukon-aviation-photo-challenge/>

Supporting parents and educators with online resources

- The Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum offers a children’s [activity book](#) and [this video](#) of Billy Mink’s adventures at the museum. <https://www.facebook.com/ACAMuseum/>
- The Biggar Museum & Gallery is posting mini-history lessons that relate to artifacts in their collection and photos of those artifacts. <https://www.facebook.com/BiggarMuseum>
- The Canadian Museum of Immigration invites the public to explore culture with their kids, and turn the world into their classroom with #CultureConversation questions, created by the museum’s heritage interpreters. Different themes each week. #MuseumFromHome #HomeSchool <https://www.facebook.com/CanadianMuseumofImmigration/>
- The Humboldt and District Museum and Gallery is posting short videos on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter about artifacts, local history and the stories behind the artifacts. <https://www.facebook.com/Humboldtmuseumandgallery/>
- The MacBride Museum of Yukon Heritage created a weekly program on their Facebook page called #MacBrideMinutes that has been running since January. Every Wednesday for 150 weeks they are sharing stories and artifacts, and there is a different theme each month: <https://www.facebook.com/MacBrideMuseum/>
https://twitter.com/hashtag/MacBrideMinutes?src=hashtag_click
- The Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame offers a Future Hall of Famers activity booklet. <https://www.facebook.com/nsshf/>

- The Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre has an initiative called #MySciMonday. They post videos to their Facebook page every Monday on different science topics related to the Centre's subject matter. The public is invited to submit questions on Facebook to be answered in the videos: <https://www.facebook.com/yukonberingia/>
- The Yukon Wildlife Preserve is inviting video submissions of childrens' questions about the Preserve and their animals, and responding to them in videos posted on social media.
 - <https://yukonwildlife.ca/>
 - <https://www.facebook.com/yukonwildlife/>
 - <https://twitter.com/YukonWildlife>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAAGp4kGDjDePucRTCil-RQ?>

Expanding Your Audience

- NovaMuse, the provincial website that shares 50+ museums' collections with the public, has been promoting #whatsnewonNovaMuse to show how museums are active even while closed, and boosted its #MuseumWeek post to garner more Facebook followers. <https://www.facebook.com/NovaMuse>
- The Western Development Museum is using weekly prompts to generate content such as Memory Mondays, Tidbit Tuesdays, What's It Wednesday. <https://www.facebook.com/wdm.museum/>
- The Museum of Surrey came up with #MuseumsEh! Each month will bring a new theme. The theme for May is Spring. Simply post something from your museum related to the theme and hashtag it #MuseumsEh!. <https://www.instagram.com/museumofsurrey/>

Fundraising

- The Barrington Museum Complex is sharing new stock available in their gift shop on Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/barringtonmuseumcomplex/>
- The Mahone Bay Museum has issued a call for support on their social media channels and is offering to mail gift shop purchases to customers. <https://www.facebook.com/MahoneBayMuseum/>
- The Dänojà Zho Cultural Centre posted a variety of Mother's Day gift bags for sale on their Facebook page and offered safe options for payment and pick-up. <https://www.facebook.com/DanojaZhoCulturalCentre/>

Many thanks to our contributing partners:



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