

ERASMUS

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE UK ACROSS EUROPE



Digital toolkit: tips for Erasmus+ projects

Smart social media

Introduction

Erasmus+ projects provide life-changing opportunities for participants across the UK and sharing the stories and experiences of the organisations and people involved is a great way to raise awareness of Erasmus+ and encourage others to get involved.

We've put together some expert advice, hints and tips on how organisations can showcase the inspirational achievements of participants using the latest new media platforms and, most importantly, how they can use their own voices to tell their life-changing stories.

The expert's view: digital storytelling

It has never been easier to self-publish onto the Internet. Thanks to content communities (such as YouTube) anybody can become a creator, producing media and sharing it with their own personal audience. Digital storytelling is the umbrella term that we can use to describe this process of using digital tools to tell stories.

Using video, audio, writing, blogging and social media there are unlimited ways in which we can tell our own story, or represent the stories of the participants in our projects.

By capturing the planning, key moments, behind-the-scenes activities, etc. of our projects we are able to build up an ongoing picture of what is happening whilst it is happening, rather than waiting to produce a final report or video at the end of the project.

This is known as process media and could include blog posts and reflections, tweeting at events, taking photos, behind-the-scenes video interviews with participants and facilitators and much more.

When we produce process media, we should be operating under the principle that it is good to go as is, even if it is not quite perfect. You should be creating content that is ready to go online. Therefore, it is worth thinking about what you do in terms of making it look and sound good. Ensure that you have the best quality sound, that the images are clear and that all relevant details (such as account information and related links or hashtags) are included.

Importantly, process media tells the ongoing story of your project in context and, when the project is completed, provides a rich record of your participants' journeys.

Using an overall hashtag for your project will help you to track and search for content easily while social media curation tools such as Twitter Moments allow you to back up and archive the material, which can be used at a later date to compile reports and evaluations, presentations, case studies, etc.

By Jennifer Jones, digital media expert



Why use social media?

Promotion and dissemination is an important theme and part of the Erasmus+ project experience. It is all about sharing your project outputs to raise awareness among key stakeholders and target audiences, as well as providing a platform to leave a lasting legacy and create future opportunities, making an impact in the field of education and training at local, national and EU level.

With 63% of people across the UK actively using social media, it is a great low-cost way to share your Erasmus+ stories and experiences. Various social media, like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram offer you a smart way to get your project news out to a wide range of audiences. You can plan your activities to suit your project and the people you want to reach using a wide range of content including photos, videos, statistics and infographics.

Creating and posting content, not to mention responding to enquiries and engaging your audiences in conversations online, takes time and skill. Being focused and working smartly are the best ways to use social media successfully.

Be focused

The temptation with social media can be to be on all platforms at once so you don't miss out. That can be a lot of work, however, and it might be that your key audiences can be better reached by focusing in one or two places. The platforms most commonly used by Erasmus+ projects are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Which ones you choose depends on who you want to reach and why.



Be smart

There are many ways to reduce the time you spend creating and posting content on social media simply by being smart and making use of the many online tools available to help.

Scheduling tools

You can make life easier by using free online tools to manage your social media accounts. Many of them allow you to manage all your accounts in one place and to schedule posts in advance and send them out at a time of your choosing. Services such as Hootsuite and Buffer work across multiple platforms – search online for free social media management tools to see the full range of what is available.

Reusing content

Your content doesn't always have to be new. Reposting the same information regularly over a period of time (providing you don't do it too often) can be a good way of making sure your news reaches your audience.

Involve others

Don't be afraid to get other people involved. Perhaps one of your partner organisations is really good at using Facebook and would be happy to run a page for you? There may be people in your organisation who blog or use Twitter in a personal capacity and can show you the ropes? Or why not ask another Erasmus+ project for some ideas? UK National Agency events such as Learning Networks, the annual conference or project start up seminars can be a great way of meeting people facing the same problems, some of whom will have the right solution!

Online help

You can find all sorts of information and tutorials online to help you improve your social media skills. We particularly like the courses below though others are available:

Hootsuite: <https://education.hootsuite.com/collections/courses>

Google Digital Garage: <https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalgarage/topic-library>

Finding your audience

In order to maximise your reach and impact on social media, you should first consider who your target audience (or audiences) are.

Building up as detailed a picture as possible of their social demographics, jobs, interests, hobbies, etc. will enable you to more effectively create content which is likely to appeal to them.

Also remember that you may want to connect with different types of audiences on the same platform. You might want to connect with key stakeholders in your sector but also young people who might be interested in participating in your projects. Think about the type of content that appeals to each audience – you don't need to have a 'one size fits all' approach. Just a simple paper exercise where you write down your audiences and then list the sorts of things that you think will appeal to each can help, e.g. national stakeholders may like statistics, testimonials and reflections on impact.

It is important to get an idea of each target audience's online habits, where and when they are online and what social media channels they are using themselves, who are they following, whose content do they like and share with their followers?

When sharing content on your project or organisation accounts, make sure that it is relevant to those who chose to follow you. Choosing the right platform and tailoring content helps to engage the different audiences and makes the posts or updates feel relevant to them.

As with all promotion and dissemination, it's important to ask yourself, what is my end goal? Perhaps you are looking to reach out to young people to take part in upcoming projects? Or maybe you are looking to target local employers?

Finding and following similar users and accounts is a great way to start building your online community and reach. Many may follow you back and you can begin engaging with and sharing each other's posts, thereby expanding your potential audience.

It's important to make sure you are reaching the right people so that all your hard work in creating interesting and relevant content isn't wasted.

Choosing the right social media platforms

In order to choose the right platform to use, you should first consider who your target audience (or audiences) are and how they access the internet. Here are the major channels which we think would be most useful and effective for Erasmus+ projects and participants:

Facebook

More than 75% of users spend at least 20 minutes per day on Facebook and it can be a powerful way to reach out to **individuals** via their own personal accounts, often based on a genuine personal connection. Facebook is most likely to display engaging photos and videos from their friends and family on users' feeds. Therefore, think about how you can reach out through video and imagery when you post. Facebook can be a great way to reach people who are already familiar with your project and communicate news and updates such as tips and advice for participants, as opposed to Twitter, which can help broaden your organisation's reach.

Facebook has typically been the place where younger people spend most time online. However, its demographics are changing, with more older users on the channel. This makes Facebook a good platform to reach a wide audience.

Content on Facebook has a longer 'life', meaning it will appear in people's Newsfeeds longer than posts on other platforms such as Twitter. As a result, you don't need to post as frequently to share your information.

Twitter

Twitter is a hub for networking and promotion which gives users the opportunity to share their moments, quotes, pictures and videos. It is a great tool for Erasmus+ beneficiaries and participants to share information on their activities and achievements.

This is a very fast-moving, interactive platform and with the right content you can get your stories and news out to a wide audience. It is also arguably the most saturated social channel, though, so you will need to work hard to make your Tweets stand out.

Using hashtags is a great way to get your content out to a wider audience on Twitter. Useful Erasmus+ related examples in common use include #ErasmusPlus, #erasmuslife, #ErasmusPlusEffect and #epluspeople. General and trending topics related to your projects and activities may also have hashtags, so keep an eye out for them and use them to join the conversation. Useful for this are national, European and international 'days' or 'weeks' like #NationalApprenticeshipWeek. Why not start a calendar of useful days and topics and plan your content around this in advance?

Twitter works best when you check it regularly. You don't have to be glued to your phone, just a few minutes each day to check your messages and respond to any questions or enquiries can help.

Instagram

Instagram is a platform for sharing **photos** and **videos** accompanied by a brief description or caption. Users can apply various digital filters to their images, and add locations through geotags. You can also add hashtags in the same way as on Twitter to link your photos to other content on Instagram featuring the same subject or overall topic, for instance #erasmusplus, #ErasmusPlusEffect, #erasmuslife. Users can connect their Instagram account to other social media profiles too, enabling them to share photos to those profiles as well.

LinkedIn

If you are looking to reach **professionals**, particularly adults above the age of 30, LinkedIn is particularly effective. In contrast to other digital channels, the platform also has more male users than female.

Snapchat

A younger, rapidly growing channel for **young people**. More and more users are joining Snapchat and enjoying the interactive filters and other ways to engage using the platform. Although Snapchat doesn't share full gender demographics, it's suggested that at least 70% of active users are young women, so it's worth considering if your target group is young females.

Creating engaging content

Think about how you want to use your social media channels. Are you going to deliver project news and information, participant stories, opinions? What do you think your audience will want? Your content doesn't have to be complicated – our advice is to keep it simple, authentic and positive.

Photo and video: On all social media channels statistics show that posts including photos and graphics perform much better than those which don't, with those featuring video content proving even more popular. Indeed, some channels, such as Instagram and Pinterest, are designed specifically for image-led content. Creating posts with engaging visual content is, therefore, a much more effective way of reaching and engaging with your audience. This could include photos or videos of Erasmus+ project participants during their activities or infographics with hard-hitting project statistics or inspiring quotes from your participants.

Quality over quantity: Content on Facebook has a longer 'life', meaning it will appear in people's Newsfeeds longer than posts on other platforms, such as Twitter. As a result, you don't need to post as frequently to share your information, aim for maximum three posts a day.

Go Live: A new phenomenon in the social media world is live content. Tools such as Facebook Live allow you to post live videos that automatically notify everyone who has liked your page that you are currently broadcasting. You can use live streaming for behind the scenes information, at events, for a Q&A session – the options are endless. Live streaming lends itself to audience involvement and helps to develop a 'personality' for your organisation.

Engage with your audience: Creating engaging content is important in building your social following, but you also need to think about how to maintain this following. Remember that social media is a two-way conversation. By liking, sharing, commenting and replying to posts and followers you can build a relationship with your audience. Joining in conversations can help you reach new audiences. Equally you can start a conversation. Asking a question of your audience can be a great way to get them engaged with your content.

Erasmus+ participant stories are always popular and can deliver real impact on social media. Why not use participant photos, quotes and videos to bring your project to life and enable those who benefit from your project to tell their own story? **Always** make sure you get their permission before using any images or quotes (or their guardian's permission if they are under 18). We recommend following as many Erasmus+ projects as you can on the various platforms – they will give you great ideas on how to disseminate your information, what sort of content you can produce, and how to engage with your audience. You can also ask questions, share your project news and join the active community of #erasmusplusUK projects.

For Erasmus+ projects it can be helpful to link in with European Commission campaigns and initiatives to reach a more European audience. Follow the Commission's Erasmus+ Twitter account at @EUErasmusPlus and join in with their conversations to increase your reach. Don't forget to look out for other European level organisations and associations who would be interested in your area of work in order to help your dissemination at European level.

And finally: Remember that what goes on social media is there for the world to see and is a reflection of you and/or your organisation. Always check content before publishing for accuracy, tone of voice, etc. And always think before you post – it could save potential problems later!

There are lots of free resources on the internet to help you get more out of social media. See the 'Useful links' section.



Top tips

Use a hashtag: Creating a hashtag which participants can easily engage with to share updates and testimonies themselves, along with photos and videos to tell their story, is an effective way to increase reach and engagement.

Social media should be social to be effective: Remember to tag relevant organisations or individuals to broaden the reach of your posts (for example, participants shown in a photograph or organisations involved in the project) and engage with your followers.

Plan your posts in advance: There are many free tools to help you schedule your social media when you have time to do so. Hootsuite is considered one of the most comprehensive tools across channels. Facebook and Twitter also have their own scheduling services in the form of 'scheduled posts' for Facebook and Tweetdeck for Twitter.

Promotion, promotion, promotion: By adding links to your social media posts you can quickly increase visits to your blog posts and websites. This also allows you to draw attention to specific project priorities, whether that is an open call for participants or encouraging your audience to share project results.

Measuring success

Analysing your social media statistics is the best way to check whether you're getting it right. You can look at simple data such as the number of people that follow your account but it's also worth looking at how well you're engaging people. Are people interacting with the content you're producing i.e. liking it, sharing it or responding to it in another way? Each platform has its own set of analytics which you can use. It's worth looking at these every so often to review your activity. Analytics will help you to assess the type of content that is most effective and you should aim to replicate this as much as possible. Many Erasmus+ projects use social media as a way of linking people through to their websites to access further information. Photos, short videos and participant testimonials can work really well for this purpose.

Blogging

A blog can help you record your project activities, best practices and participant experiences and is an effective way to allow colleagues, friends, partner organisations and stakeholders to follow your Erasmus+ journey.

Perhaps more importantly, a blog can also provide you with a record of your activities – a bit like a diary – and allow you to refer back and reflect on what you have achieved.

By recording highlights, lessons learnt and your thoughts and feelings, as you go along, you will also be developing a catalogue of material that will help you when preparing your final report – an important requirement for most activities under the Erasmus+ programme. Not only do blogs enable you to produce a written record, you can also upload photos and clips to share with your network.

If you have an existing website then you can simply add a blog page.

Alternatively there are a number of blogging platforms that you can sign up to to create your very own blog space. **Blogger** is a free weblog publishing tool from Google for sharing text, photos and video with some great templates to get you started. **WordPress** is another free service that allows you to create your own personal blog or business site. Both platforms also integrate with Twitter, Facebook and other social media channels, allowing you to notify your followers each time you post.

An interesting alternative to more traditional blog spaces is **Tumblr**, a 'micro blogging service'. Essentially, it offers a hybrid between rapid Twitter-style updates and a conventional blog. Posts tend to be shorter, a good option if blog contributors are likely to be pushed for time.

Some ideas for blogging content for your project are:

- past participant stories – where are they now?
 - current participant stories – what are they up to?
 - stakeholder updates – what's important right now for your sector?
 - newcomer information – what can they do with your organisation?
 - useful resources for your readers.
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The options are endless, but in general, people react well to two types of information: fact and emotion. It is important to consider which of these you would like to focus on.

Top tips

Timing: The most popular blogs are timely and relevant so if you have completed a mobility project, write about it soon afterwards not months later. Alternatively, try to write about topics in the news that are relevant to your project for instance on International Women's Day or European Day of Languages.

Consistency: If you have a website, brand guidelines or a style guide, consider extending this to your blog as well to keep your overall style and tone of voice consistent.

Invite guests: Create a blogging template which allows you to invite a range of people to contribute, such as participants, staff or stakeholders.

Include images: As with other social media visual content on the page will help to engage your audience and hold their attention for longer.

Keep it short and sweet: Information overload is common on the web so by writing blog posts of around 500 words and signposting with subtitles and bold key words, you can keep your reader engaged.

Let us help: If you are an organisation or individual who wants to share your project update but don't have the capacity to create a blog account, we welcome guest bloggers to submit blog posts. Email us at erasmuspluscomms@ecorys.com for more information. You can also check out the Erasmus+ UK blog page to find examples as well as news and advice, information about other projects and top tips.

Making the UK National Agency work for you!

By working with us at the UK National Agency and interacting with us on social media, we can help you to share your successes. We are delighted to share and disseminate your project content and to feature you in our newsletter, blog and other resources.

To help with your planning and delivery, we have a webpage on the topic of promotion and dissemination. It contains tools and resources to assist you in promoting your project through its lifecycle and for different promotional activities, such as:

- Guides on how to apply the Erasmus+ branding to your project materials for your events and publications
- Information on how to share your project results at final report stage on the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform, which is compulsory for all Strategic Partnership projects

Another way the National Agency can help is to support you to work with the media to promote your project.

If you're interested in working with the media you can download our press pack, which includes press release templates; a factsheet with useful information about how to contact the media – from timing to who to approach; and lots more.



Useful links

General:

erasmusplus.org.uk/promotion-and-dissemination
<https://mediatrust.org/communications-support/resources>
<https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalgarage/topic-library>

Facebook:

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/help>

Twitter:

<https://support.Twitter.com>
<http://resources.mediatrust.org/top-tips-for-Twitter>

Scheduling posts:

hootsuite.com
<https://education.hootsuite.com/collections/courses>
<https://blog.hootsuite.com/twitter-analytics-guide>
<https://tweetdeck.twitter.com>

Create high quality visuals and graphics for free:

canva.com
piktochart.com

Blogging:

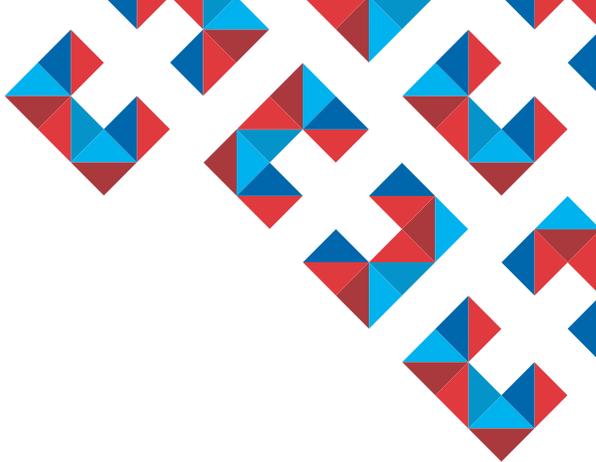
blogger.com
wordpress.com
tumblr.com
hubspot.com/blog-topic-generator
<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/topic/blogging>
erasmusplus.org.uk/blog

Handbook of Digital Storytelling – Jennifer Jones

https://issuu.com/dgmcgillivray/docs/digital_storytelling_handbook

Don't forget to follow our social media channels so that we can see what you're up to and help you disseminate your project:

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Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport.
The Erasmus+ UK National Agency is a partnership between the British Council and Ecorys UK.