

A guide to Social Media advertising for small businesses

Introduction to Social

The rise of social media, since the advent of Facebook in the early 2000s, has been meteoric. Whether you're consuming news through Twitter, keeping up with friends on Instagram or watching 'how to' videos on YouTube, UK users spend a considerable amount of time engaging with content across multiple devices, with an average of two hours a day spent scrolling through social media. The proliferation of smartphones means this medium has cemented itself into our lives and, today, over two-thirds of the UK population are regularly active on social media. The ever-growing consumption of this channel makes it important for SMEs to consider as part of their advertising efforts, but with so many platforms to choose from – Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Snapchat, to name a few – it can be hard to know what will work for your business. This guide sets out to give small businesses the knowledge to use social ads confidently.

The steady rise in investment, usage and influx of user data over the last 10 years has meant that social media platforms have become more sophisticated, better serviced from an advertising point of view, and increasingly more advanced in terms of targeting capabilities. Each platform has its own role to play in the wider ecosystem, making it important to understand the strengths and weaknesses and how much ad investment should be allocated to each.

It's important to recognise social media as very visual, lending itself to what's called 'thumb-stopping creative' from a predominantly video perspective. Due to short attention spans on social (users scrolling quickly through their feed), brand messaging needs to be upfront and eye-catching so that it cuts through.

What marketing challenges is social best suited to?

Simply put, social media advertising is buying ad space on social platforms to deliver your message to audiences locally, nationally or globally, depending on the scope of your campaign. Most advertising campaigns on social have two parts – a branding and sales element. Your brand message will deliver awareness of your company or product, explaining who you are as an SME and how you distinguish yourself against your competitors. The performance-driving element is complementary to brand awareness, although it's arguably the more impactful and measurable of the two strategies as it's this that will sell your product or service to the right audience.

Setting objectives is important: what is the purpose of your campaign? Outcomes vary between brand (e.g. how much of your audience were reached or how many video views you generated) and performance (e.g. how many sales / leads / clicks you generated). When setting up a campaign, consider the end goal and ensure this aligns with the objective you choose to measure. You should also ensure that the audience who see and engage with your brand message are then shown a way to buy your product or service, thus closing the purchase loop.

How to reach your audience

One of social media's strengths is the ability to target users via a whole range of different capabilities, due to the wealth and breadth of data. These include demographic (gender, age), location (where your audience is geographically located), interest or contextual (hobbies, groups that users follow, types of content they consume), platform (Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, Pinterest etc.) and device (desktop or mobile, type of handset). We will explore each of these capabilities in more detail below.

Demographic: Reaching your audience on platforms they use the most is an important consideration to any social advertising campaign. This information is readily available from regularly updated online resources that each platform provides. Being armed with this knowledge in the planning phase of your campaign will allow you to better understand where to invest.

Location: Ensure that the correct geotargeting is in place for your campaign. If your product or service is only available in England, for example, you shouldn't have Scotland selected in the targeting. Platforms also have the ability to show different messages in different areas, although doing this will limit your audience reach.

Pinterest: Whereas paid search leverages the intent of a user, paid social often relies on interest-based targeting. This allows brands to insert their ad amongst relevant content to generate awareness or provide a solution to the user. If your service is landscaping, you would look to target users who are interested in gardening and home improvement.

Platform: If you are looking at broad reach and mass awareness, Facebook is often the best option. However, if your target audience is predominantly women, Pinterest is a good choice. Knowing where to find your user is key to maximising your budget and having the most impact on your target audience.

Device: Most social consumption is on smartphones, with Facebook estimating that around 70-80% of time spent browsing the platform is in-app. This means your creative should be suited to the right dimensions to deliver the most impact on a mobile screen. Should you wish to target specific devices, this is also available to you when setting up a campaign.

Creative considerations & typical lead times

Given that eye-catching creative is vital to ensuring users see your message on social, there are several creative considerations to keep in mind. Social ads can be repurposed from other creative - such as online video, digital OOH or TV - however, it's important to adapt to fit specific social formats and platform requirements. These can easily be found online, with most platforms following similar sizes and rules.

Despite being able to adapt social creative from other channels, it should not be an afterthought when drawing up production budgets and timelines. Thumb-stopping creative takes time to create, which is why you should allow for four to six weeks before a campaign launch. The first step is to brief out your requirements to the creative team by clarifying which social platforms are part of your advertising campaign and which formats you will be using. Formats vary by platform and by objective, and although there are many to choose from, familiarising yourself with online guides and drawing on your creative team's experience will help clarify the type of creative you need to achieve your marketing objectives.

A shorter attention span on social means getting your branding and message upfront, preferably within the first two seconds of the ad. A good rule of thumb is keeping your social ads under six seconds, with fast-paced animation on both the image and messaging. [Facebook's Creative Hub](#) is a great resource for inspiration and best practice, as is [Pinterest's Creative Advertising Guide](#). Alternatively, browsing platforms and seeing what stands out and catches attention in situ is another easy way to get ideas and see what works i.e. Tik Tok always recommend to not make ads, but to make TikToks.

Media budget considerations

Social budget is largely dictated by your business objectives, the length of your campaign and the overall marketing mix you've selected. Of your total marketing budget, around 30-50% should be allocated towards digital and 15-20% of that towards paid social advertising. Of course, this is not always an exact science but can be used as a guide when planning a social campaign.

The first step advertisers should take when planning a campaign is selecting an audience and determining its size. With brand campaigns, for example, a reach of 60-70% against your audience is considered high penetration, however, this may also come at a high cost. Most social platforms have easy-to-use campaign planning tools that will allow you to see audience sizes and the budget required to reach them. However, action-driving campaigns (sales, leads, etc.) should be dictated by determining the ROI your social conversions will generate. This can be done by estimating the worth of each action and using that as a goal cost-per-acquisition (CPA). Only through testing, learning and iterating over time will you determine the optimum social budget for your objective.

In order to generate enough results, data and learnings from your campaigns, allow your activity to run for at least a month. Some sample budget ranges, and what you can expect to achieve from these, can be found below.

Small - £5-10k

- A small budget lends itself best to a more specific audience bought within the platform's ad auction. Rules can be set up to ensure the budget lasts longer (i.e. daily spend caps) and you can restrict your targeting to get more impact against your audience. It's worth noting, however, that widening your targeting generates a lower cost-per-thousand ads served (CPM), although fewer people will end up seeing your ad due to a small budget. One platform recommended.

Medium - £20-30k

- Medium budgets allow for testing within the campaign, be it running different creative variants to see what generates the best response or segmenting your audience to understand which performs better against the objective. You can also set up a brand and performance element, re-engaging those who have watched your video ad with a more action-driving ad to generate action. One or two platforms recommended.

Large -£50k+

- With a budget of over £50k in a month, you're able to run across multiple social platforms, set up tests as part of your campaign and have direct response running alongside awareness. For large budgets, you can also unlock platform support and often, free of charge, brand studies that the platforms offer.

Technical considerations

Although it's a visual medium, there are many technical aspects to social media advertising that are worth considering. Most platforms are 'biddable' and 'self-serve', which means they require a hands-on approach in setting up, monitoring and reporting on results. Most platforms adapted the look-and-feel of Facebook Ads Manager, so this is a good place to start when learning. All platforms have their own certifications too, with online learning courses suitable for all levels.

An intermediate knowledge of Excel is very handy – platforms allow you to customise reports in their dashboards and export them into Excel for your campaign reporting and performance tracking.

Finally, a basic understanding of how an ad server works and what the limitations of social reporting within digital are will allow you to be more confident when interpreting results. All platforms will be set to a window of attribution, meaning if someone sees or clicks on your ad within that timeframe and then converts into an action, your social activity will be credited with having an impact on the result. This is similar to other digital channels, however, social comes with its own challenge because some of the data does not pass into the ad server and thus is not de-duplicated against your other digital marketing efforts. This is why being able to understand the strengths and limitations of your social data will allow you to make more informed marketing decisions in future campaigns.

Real-life campaign examples

Check out these case studies from small business start-ups that have thrived due to Pinterest campaigns.

- [We are Knitters](#)
- [Heist](#)

With thanks to the businesses who authored this guide:



Pinterest is the home of inspiration to help you create the life you love. It is a visual discovery engine for finding ideas like recipes, home and style inspiration, and more. With billions of Pins on Pinterest, you'll always find ideas to spark inspiration. When you discover Pins you love, save them to boards to keep your ideas organised and easy to find.



TikTok is the leading destination for short-form mobile video. Its mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy. TikTok for Business is a global platform that gives businesses the tools to be discovered and connect with the broader communities around them. The self-service advertising platform TikTok for Ads Manager provides all businesses, regardless of their size or budget the ability to independently launch and optimise their ad campaigns, access reporting, and efficiently reach target audiences.

[tiktok.com/business/en/back-to-business-program](https://www.tiktok.com/business/en/back-to-business-program)
ads.tiktok.com



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