

Social Media 101: How-To Guide

Let's dive headfirst into the world of social media! Social media makes it easy to:

- Increase your brand awareness and website traffic
- Share educational information
- Connect with your community and build relationships
- Highlight your organization's events and work

This brief guide provides everything you need to know to start and manage your social media presence. We'll cover essential tips and best practices to help you succeed!

Step 1: Set Clear Goals and Objectives

Before building a social media presence, you need clear goals and objectives—your strategy will depend on this. For example, if you want to drive website traffic, your approach may be different than someone focused on enhancing customer service or simply growing their followers.

Using [**SMART \(Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-based\) Goals**](#) can help you get started. Here are some examples of SMART social media goals:

- Create a content calendar in 2 weeks
- Monitor competitor's social media activity daily
- Increase brand mentions by 15% in six months
- Boost engagement by 10% in six months
- Develop 5 educational social media campaigns in the next 12 months
- Create 10 new videos to share on social media in 2 months

A [**social media moderation guide**](#) can help you maintain your brand's integrity and values after you set your goals and objectives. It also helps set an organization wide standard for how to respond on social media. Moderation guides encourage positive and constructive social interactions, protect your audience from harmful content, and help determine how your organization responds to difficult, challenging, or inappropriate comments and messages.

Key Takeaway and Tip

- Inappropriate comments, bots, trolls, and scams all come with being on social media—keeping your social channels safe, friendly, and constructive takes effort, but it is worth your time!
- Don't rush developing your goals and be creative with it!

Step 2: Get to Know Your Target Audience

To be successful on social media, you need to understand your audience. Knowing your audience will help you get the best social media return on investment (ROI) and hone your brand. This article provides some [keys steps to finding your target audience](#).

Key Takeaway and Tip

- Knowing your audience will help you create and deliver content that resonates!

Step 3: Choose the Right Social Media Platforms

Social media is fun and effective, but it's also time consuming. To get the most out of your efforts, focus on the platforms that best match your goals and target audience. For example, if your main audience is on Facebook and Instagram, you may not need to have profiles on LinkedIn or X. Here are some [tips for choosing the right social media platform](#) and an overview of each major platform:

- **Facebook:** Huge, active user base (2.8 billion) and great advertising options
- **Instagram:** Great for visual-only content
- **X:** Ideal for breaking news and real-time content and conversations
 - **Bluesky:** newer X alternative that's growing very quickly
 - **Threads:** X alternative that easily connects with Instagram
- **LinkedIn:** Go-to platform for professionals and networking
- **Tik Tok:** Short-form video platform with huge, active user base (2 billion)
- **YouTube:** For video content with a huge, active user base (2 billion)

Key Takeaway and Tip

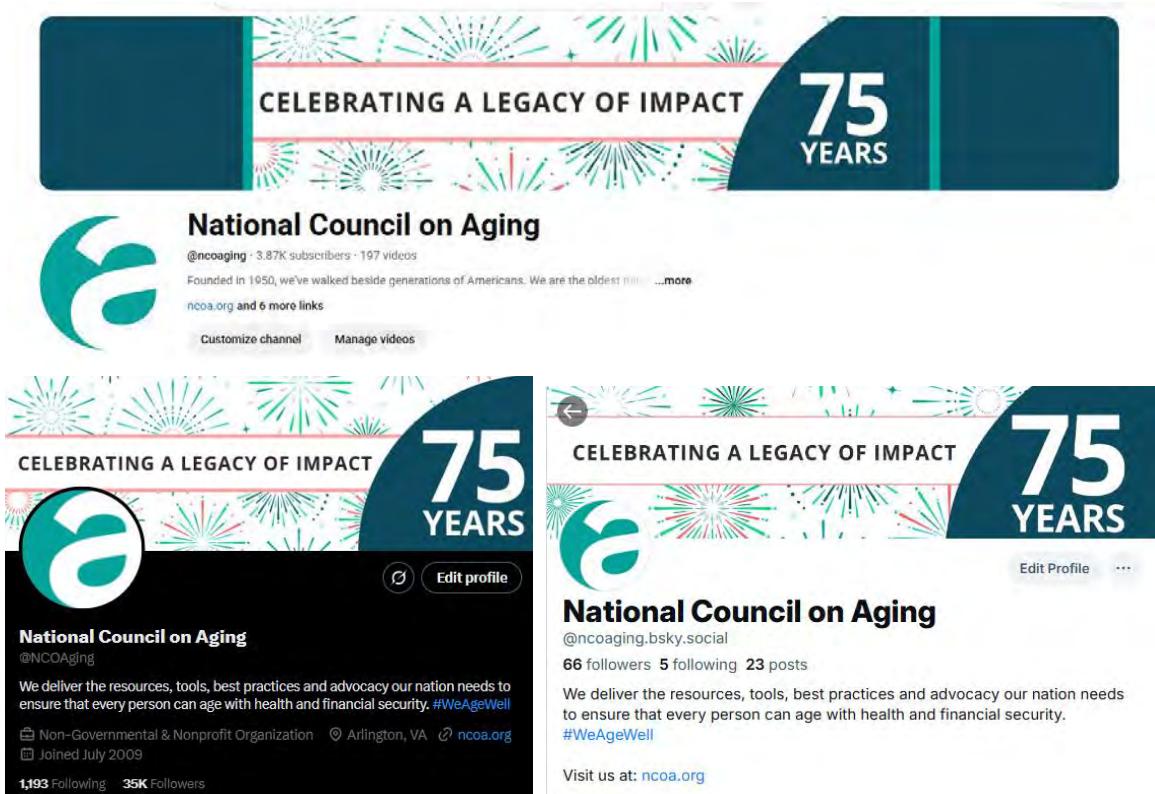
- You don't need to be on all social media platforms! Pick the platforms that are best for your goals and content.

Step 4: Create Consistent, Engaging Content and Branding

To make your organization stand out on social media, you need to focus on consistent branding across all your platforms and materials. Here are some tips to keep it consistent:

- Use your logo as your profile picture on all platforms
- Use the same profile banner across platforms
- Create templates for social media e.g., quote graphics, webinar and event promotions, and program highlights
- Use respectful, welcoming language with the same voice and tone across platforms

- Develop a list of hashtags to use consistently in your posts and some organization specific hashtags to further reinforce your brand e.g. #WeAreNOCA



How often should you post?

It depends! But consistent posting on social media is just as important as consistent branding. As a general guideline, aim for the targets below. But the quality and relevance of your content is more important than hitting a specific post count each day or week. Focus on sharing content that truly resonates with your audience.

- **LinkedIn:** 1 time per day
- **Facebook:** 1-2 times per day
- **Tik Tok:** 1-4 times per day
- **Threads and Bluesky:** 2-3 times per day
- **X:** at least 2 (up to 8)
- **Instagram:** 3-5 times per week
- **Instagram Stories:** 2 times per day

Can you post too much?

Yes! Overposting or posting too much content on your account(s) in a short timeframe can actually hurt your efforts. Overposting can negatively impact your social media strategy in a few ways:

- Sharing too many posts can dilute your message and make you appear unfocused. It also makes it difficult for your audience to identify your most important content, which could frustrate or overwhelm them.
- When an audience is frustrated or overwhelmed by content, it can lead them to unfollow you or mute your posts.
- If people start unfollowing or muting you, your engagement levels can drop. Similarly, posting too frequently about topics your followers aren't interested in will lead to less interaction and also lower your engagement.
- Low engagement can hurt you with the in-platform algorithms, which prioritize highly engaging content. The algorithms will show your posts to fewer people, decreasing your potential reach and brand awareness.

Why should you create a social media schedule?

No more scrambling! A social media schedule can keep you organized and productive. It lets you plan, visualize a week or month ahead, and gives you time to develop new content.

Using a social media management tool, like Hootsuite or Sprout Social, can also be very helpful. These tools allow you to schedule posts in advance and monitor your activity across multiple platforms all in one place. Check out the [top social media management tools](#).

A social media schedule should be easy to read and provide all the basic information about a post: day, time, platform, copy, link, and graphic/video. Here's an example layout:

JANUARY 1						
TIME	PLATFORM	COPY	LINK	GRAPHIC/VIDEO	SCHEDULED (Y/N/TBD)	POSTED (Y/N/C)
AM	Facebook	It's #NationalGardeningDay!	N/A	2022 and 2023 photo contest photos	Y	Y
	LinkedIn	Maintaining mental health as an older adult isn't just about addressing problems; it's about thriving. And activities like #Gardening, walking, and meditation can help support #HealthyAging. 				
	Instagram					
	X					
PM	Facebook	Pets offer more than just cuteness—they also benefit our #Health! 	https://www.ncoa.org/article/cherished-companions-3-ways-pets-support-healthy-aging/		Y	Y
	LinkedIn					
	Instagram					
	X	Learn how having a pet can encourage us to stay active, improve our emotional well-being, and help us stay connected with others. #NationalPetOwnersDay #AgingWell				

		#NationalPetOwnersDay #AgingWell	3-ways-pets-support-healthy-aging/			
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JANUARY 2

AM	Facebook	Every six minutes, someone in the U.S. receives a new #ParkinsonsDisease (PD) diagnosis.	https://www.ncoa.org/article/living-better-with-parkinsons-disease-what-to-do-for-yourself-or-a-loved-one/	N/A	Y	Y				
	LinkedIn	This #ParkinsonsAwarenessMonth, take 6 minutes to learn how you or your loved one can live better with Parkinson's. !								
	Instagram									
	X									
PM	Facebook	We all experience #Stress from time to time. Staying actively engaged with your community and getting regular exercise are two ways you can help manage stress.	https://youtu.be/0dNLScB1IEA	N/A	Y	Y				
	LinkedIn	And #SeniorCenters are a great place to meet new people and participate in activities like yoga, aerobics, arts and crafts, dance, and much more! Get to know your local senior center and see what it has to offer! #StressAwarenessMonth								
	Instagram									
	X									

What should you post?

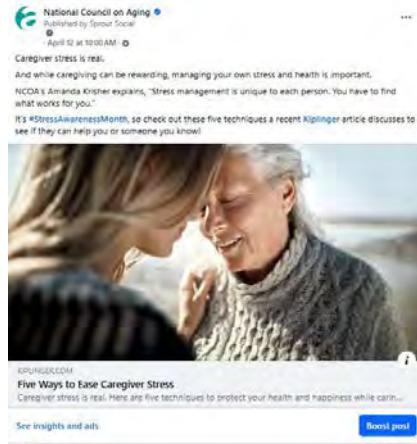
Posting a mix of content on your social media accounts will help keep your audience engaged and your profiles feeling fresh. Try incorporating a variety of content formats, like images, videos, and text-based posts, into your regular social media schedule.



Photo post



Video post



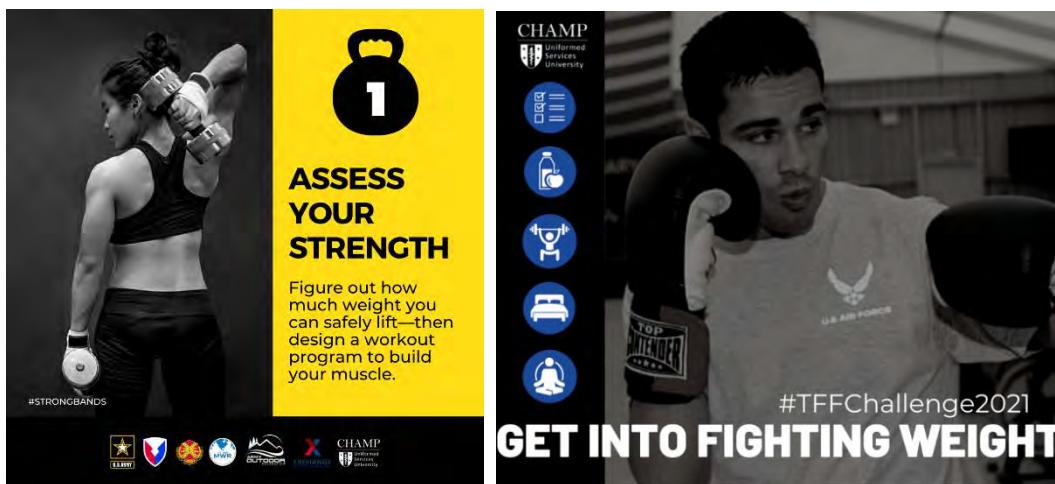
Link post

When creating your own graphics or infographics for social media, keep it simple. You want your visuals to be eye-catching, but don't overwhelm people with too much information.

Ask yourself, "Is this need-to-know or nice-to-know?" Include only essential details on the graphic itself, and save additional information for your social media post copy.

Here are some tips for effective social media design, along with visual examples:

- Limit the number of fonts you use. Two is okay, but don't go overboard!
- Use contrasting colors—opposites attract! It will make your text and design elements easier to read and help your graphic stand out on social media.
- Use white or blank space when you can—less is more. Let your design breathe.
- Be consistent! Create templates for your designs. For example, if you host a lot of webinars, create a webinar design template so that it helps brand your webinars.
- Be creative!



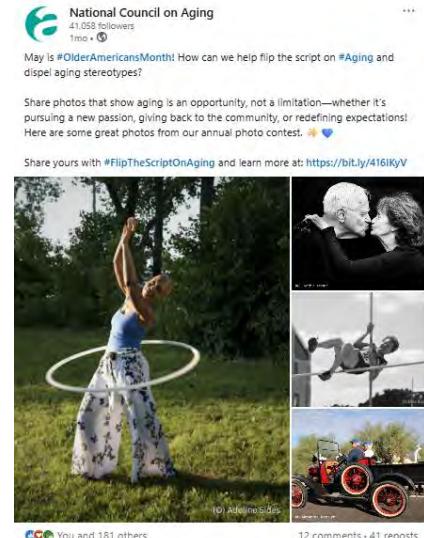
What does engaging content look like?

Engaging social media content is relevant to your audience, provides value (education or entertainment), and is eye-catching. As we mentioned earlier, it can take time and some trial and error to figure out what kinds of content resonates best with your audience.

Here is an example of [an engaging social media post](#).

Reasons why this is more engaging:

- Relevant and timely—this was shared on the first day of Older Americans Month.
- Eye-catching—this post used photos of older adults from NCOA's annual photo contest.
- Provides a reminder that aging is an opportunity and we all deserve to age well.
- Has a call-to-action which encourages people to share their own photos that “Flip the Script” on aging and get involved to raise awareness of Older Americans Month.



Here is an example of a less engaging social media post.

Reasons why this is less engaging:

- The post is about alcohol awareness. Even though this was shared during Alcohol Awareness Month, which makes it timely, relevant, and educational, the topic fell flat with the audience.
- People may have felt preached to about their drinking habits.
- It was a link post, which can be less popular on Facebook than photo or video.
- Sometimes stock photos lack visual appeal compared to “real” content.



Key Takeaways and Tips

- Overposting can hurt you just as much as not posting enough
- Creating a social media schedule can keep you organized and productive
- Sharing a mix of content types helps keep your audience engaged

Step 5: Monitor Your Presence

Understanding how your social media posts are performing gives you insights into what your audience likes (and doesn't like), helps you respond to comments and messages quickly, monitor your competitors, and better manage crises that arise.

Schedule daily social media monitoring (morning and evening) so you have dedicated time reserved to like and respond to comments, reply to direct messages, and engage with partner and other professional accounts—collaboration is necessary for success! Monitoring social media also helps you keep an eye on what's trending so you can tie your content to trending topics.

Social media management tools (see above) can generate monthly performance reports. These reports track your metrics, benchmark your results, and help you adjust your strategy as needed. If the data shows something isn't effective, stop doing it. Similarly, if your audience loves pet photos, make sure to include more of that content in your social media schedule.

Key Takeaways and Tips

- Check your posts and monitor social media daily!

Final Takeaways and Best Practices

- More isn't always better—overposting can hurt you just as much as not posting
- Quality and variety of content matters
- Consistency is key
- Get to know platform specific algorithms and embrace platform specific search engine optimization (SEO) practices
- Have fun and be creative!