

"Social media has become an invaluable tool in my PR armoury by giving me a direct voice to speak to members of the media and the general public. This book is a useful guide to using social media effectively."

- Lord Sugar

SHARE THIS

THE SOCIAL MEDIA
HANDBOOK FOR
PR PROFESSIONALS

THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

CIPR

'Social media has become an invaluable tool in my PR armoury by giving me a direct voice to speak directly to members of the media and the general public. This book is a useful guide to using social media effectively.'

Lord Sugar

'Back in the day, the only way to easily communicate with your public was to use mainstream media and analysts as your mouthpieces. Recent years have brought an explosion of real-time communications channels that organizations use to reach their audience directly with valuable online content: videos, ebooks, white papers, photos, infographics, and more – and then have that information shared in social networks and covered by the media. However, many PR professionals still operate as if their only conduit is mainstream media. *Share This* cuts through the hype of social media to help business owners and public relations professionals make the transition to the new world of real-time communications.'

David Meerman Scott

International bestselling author of *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*, now available in over 25 languages from Bulgarian to Vietnamese

'Social media is PR. And this is a book by PR professionals and experts in social media. If you're a PR professional, get the expertise and insights of the CIPR Social Media panel and impress your friends and clients. Gets a +1 from me. Like.'

Paul Mylrea

Director of Communications, BBC

'This crowd-sourced book on social media is a welcome addition to PR literature, as it brings together a range of insights and world-views of social media and helps the sense-making process on its roles, value creation and appropriate strategies. I hope it will be regularly updated, as this is such a fast-moving field.'

Professor Tom Watson

Professor of Public Relations, Bournemouth University

'Blogs like mine set the news agenda for traditional media, PRs would be daft to ignore a book about how old-school spin is dead and full of advice about how to work better now that social media has rewritten the rules.'

Paul Staines (aka Guido Fawkes)

'This book challenges the minds and expands the horizons of PR and marketing professionals operating in today's digital age, providing excellent insight into how to survive and thrive in it.'

Steve Walker, FCIM

EMEA VP Corporate Communications, Oracle Corporation

‘Social media presents significant opportunities to the PR industry, and understanding and embracing these is critical to business success. This book covers and shines light on some of the most important topics in social media today. A must read for anyone in the PR business.’

Andrew Bloch

Vice-Chairman and Founder, Frank PR

‘If you want to join a conversation on the convergence of digital and PR, this book is the conversation to go for. A series of essays that shakes up the status quo, questions conventional PR practices, and takes thoughtful positions in a social tone that will challenge, engage and entertain the reader. Get it while it’s hot!’

Gerry Brown, FCIM

Lead Digital Analyst, Bloor Research

‘*Share This* is a brilliant concept – well conceived, well packaged, well written and a “must read” for any PR professional practicing today. To have such a broad compilation of views on social media – written specifically from a PR perspective – is definitely something our industry has been crying out for.’

Trevor Young (aka PR Warrior)

Edelman Australia

‘From corporate communications to brand marketing, social is now at the heart of what we do as PR professionals. This book provides outstanding practical guidance developed by some of our industry’s most distinguished practitioners and honed through the very methods that they recommend.’

Marshall Manson

Managing Director, Digital, EMEA, Edelman

‘When trying to make sense of the rapidly evolving social media world it makes sense to listen to the wisdom of crowds and *Share This: The Social Media Handbook for PR Professionals* does exactly that, being the result of a collaborative, online process using Google Documents. What makes *Share This* really valuable is the assumption that the PR reader isn’t starting from scratch; so those with a working knowledge of social media can use the book to provide practical and trend-led insights and apply them to communication challenges today – and probably tomorrow. As PR realises the power of social media to radically change how brands communicate with their audiences, never has there been a better time to read this book.’

Avril Lee

Partner, CEO London, Ketchum Pleon

SHARE THIS

SHARE THIS

The Social Media Handbook
for PR Professionals

**Chartered Institute of
Public Relations (CIPR)**

**Edited by
Stephen Waddington**

CIPR

 **WILEY**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2012
© 2012 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Registered office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ,
United Kingdom

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book and on its cover are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher and the book are not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. None of the companies referenced within the book have endorsed the book. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Share this : the social media handbook for PR professionals / Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) ; edited by Stephen Waddington.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-118-40484-3 (cloth)

1. Public relations. 2. Social media. I. Waddington, Stephen. II. Chartered Institute of Public Relations.

HD59.S45156 2012

659.20285'4678—dc23

2012019131

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-118-40484-3 (hbk) ISBN 978-1-118-40485-0 (ebk)

ISBN 978-1-118-40486-7 (ebk) ISBN 978-1-118-40487-4 (ebk)

Set in 10/14.5 pt Berkeley by Aptara Inc. Best-set as the typesetter

Printed in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall, UK

CONTENTS

List of Contributors x

Foreword *by Jane Wilson* xi

Introduction *by Stephen Waddington* xiii

Part I Changing Media, Changing PR 1

- 1 An Introduction to Social Networks 3
Katy Howell

Part II Planning 13

- 2 Kick-Start Your Social Media Strategy 15
Simon Sanders
- 3 What has Google Ever Done for PR? 23
Andrew Smith
- 4 Integrating Traditional and Social Media 31
Helen Nowicka
- 5 Social Media Guidelines: Creating Freedom Within a Framework 39
Gemma Griffiths
- 6 Open Communication: Psychology, Ethics and Etiquette 49
Becky McMichael

Part III Networks 59

- 7 Facebook: A Way to Engage with Your Audiences 61
Robin Wilson
- 8 Twitter: The Unstoppable Rise of Microblogging 71
Alex Lacey
- 9 LinkedIn: Social Networking for Professionals 79
Matt Appleby
- 10 Google+: Better than Buzz? 87
Dan Tyte
- 11 The Business of Blogging 93
Stephen Waddington

Part IV Online Media Relations 101

- 12 Modern Media Relations and Social Media Newsrooms 103
Stuart Bruce
- 13 Brands as Media 113
Rob Brown
- 14 The Future of Broadcast 121
Russell Goldsmith
- 15 Media Relations Modernised 129
Adam Parker
- 16 Pitching Using Social Media 137
Julio Romo

Part V Monitoring and Measurement 145

- 17 Real-Time Public Relations 147
Philip Sheldrake
- 18 Social Media Monitoring 157
Andrew Smith

- 19 Measuring Social Media 163
Richard Bagnall

Part VI Skills 175

- 20 Skilling Up for the Future 177
Daljit Bhurji
- 21 The Future of PR Education 185
Richard Bailey

Part VII Industry Change 193

- 22 Employee Engagement: How Social Media are Changing Internal Communication 195
Rachel Miller
- 23 Back to the Future for Public Sector Communications 205
Mark Pack
- 24 Modernising Public Affairs for the Digital Age 213
Stuart Bruce
- 25 Social Media and the Third Sector 221
Simon Collister

Part VIII The Future 229

- 26 Here Comes Web 3.0 and the Internet of Things 231
Philip Sheldrake

- Index 237

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Jane Wilson	Chief Executive, CIPR
Stephen Waddington	Managing Director, Speed Communications
Katy Howell	Managing Director, Immediate Future
Simon Sanders	Marketing Consultant
Andrew Smith	Managing Director, Escherman
Helen Nowicka	Head of Digital, UK, Porter Novelli
Gemma Griffiths	Managing Director, The Crowd & I
Becky McMichael	Head of Strategy and Innovation, Ruder Finn
Robin Wilson	Director Digital PR and Social Media, McCann Erickson
Alex Lacey	Senior Corporate Comms Manager, Herbalife Europe
Matt Appleby	Managing Director, Golley Slater PR
Dan Tyte	Director, Working Word Public Relations
Stuart Bruce	Corporate Communications Consultant
Rob Brown	Managing Director, Staniforth
Russell Goldsmith	Digital & Social Media Director at markettiers4dc
Adam Parker	Chief Executive, Realwire
Julio Romo	Communications Consultant
Philip Sheldrake	Founding Partner, Meanwhile
Richard Bagnall	Board Director of Gorkana Group, MD of Metrica
Daljit Bhurji	Managing Director, Diffusion
Richard Bailey	Senior Lecturer in Public Relations, Leeds Metropolitan University
Rachel Miller	Senior Internal Communications Manager
Mark Pack	Head of Digital, MHP Communications
Simon Collister	Senior Lecturer at University of the Arts London

FOREWORD

Jane Wilson CEO, CIPR

The media through which humans communicate are constantly evolving, reflecting changes in technology and preferences in content and consumption. In public relations, communicating messages through a variety of media is the primary means by which we engage audiences in dialogue to develop mutual understanding and deliver against organisational objectives. As the media we use change, so must the practice of public relations.

Currently, a rapid evolution in media is taking place. Through the choices, made by millions every second of each day, to share and curate content, individuals the world over are engaging with each other on a scale unimaginable to most people just a decade ago.

Previous modes of media allowed for the transmission of information, filling a human desire for knowledge, but could not cater for the human impulse to interact. This is changing not only our profession, but society for the better.

For thirty years or more public relations was a mostly misapplied term, synonymous with the transmission of messages through news media. The practice of public relations focused on the management of relations with the gatekeepers to these media to the point where popular culture typically reflects a misunderstanding of our profession, labelled 'PR'.

The evolution of media offers us an opportunity to take public relations back to a better understanding of itself. By providing us with the ability to listen to our audience, to reach them individually and as groups and with a

new depth of data available to help us measure the outcome of this activity, and all in real time, we can achieve genuine dialogue by encouraging and participating in conversations. Social media may help public relations realise its potential contribution to the achievement of strategic objectives in an even more meaningful way.

To maximise this opportunity we need to adapt our skills to the media through which we seek to engage. This book is not a starting point. It assumes the reader has a better than basic understanding and is looking to move even farther ahead with expert guidance. It discusses how the evolution of media is changing areas of professional practice such as public affairs and internal communications. It looks at public and private sector public relations. It reminds us that, as paid advocates, we should tread carefully. We do not own the media space, our audiences do.

I am grateful to the experts, drawn from both members and non-members, who have shaped this book with their contributions and are actively shaping our profession with their willingness to share their knowledge. The Institute is particularly indebted to Stephen Waddington, who coordinated the authors and did more than any other person to bring it about. Sharing is the essence of our current media age. Learn from this handbook and share your experiences with us on the CIPR Conversation.¹

¹CIPR Conversation: <http://cipr.co/cipr-conversation>

INTRODUCTION

Stephen Waddington, Editor

In time we'll come to stop using the term social media as a catch-all phrase to describe the creation and sharing of content and it will become the norm. *Share This: The Social Media Handbook for PR Professionals* has been written to help accelerate that timescale.

In 2012 all media must be social – and public relations practitioners who want to continue to work in the industry must quickly adapt to this new environment.

The book developed out of a series of Summer Social workshops run by the CIPR's Social Media Panel during the summers of 2010 and 2011 by Philip Sheldrake and Gemma Griffiths. Each week, people turned up to events around the country to hear experts – many of whom feature in this book – lead conversations about different aspects of the development of public relations.

At the end of the summer of 2011, the CIPR's Social Media Panel decided to record and replay some of the conversations from these sessions in a book to share with practitioners more widely.

Share This is itself a social effort. We've pushed the boundaries of book production, which, in itself, has been an interesting process.

The book was conceived and written over a three-month period by 24 public relations practitioners representing a cross-section of public, private and voluntary sector expertise. The project was managed via a series of Google Documents with contributors reviewing and commenting on each other's work.

Each chapter has been written as a standalone piece of work and is intended to be read independently. You can either choose the topics that interest you or read the entire book from start to finish.

My thanks to everyone who volunteered their time to contribute to the project and tolerated my persistent hounding against deadlines. Special thanks are due to Philip Sheldrake for his drive and support. Finally, thanks to Phil Morgan, Andrew Ross, and the team at the CIPR for recognising the potential of this project and supporting us in bringing it to fruition.

Part I

Changing Media,
Changing PR

Chapter 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL NETWORKS

Katy Howell

The meteoric rise of social network sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube changed the communications landscape forever. But social media are vastly more diverse: a connected and complex ecosystem founded on relationships, passions and a desire to be connected.

Social networks are not new. As individuals, we have always maintained social connections, be they with family, friends or professional acquaintances. We belong to groups, clubs, neighbourhoods and, of course, society. The internet and developments in technology have simply made our networks visible and easily accessible. We can now meet friends and colleagues, ask for recommendations and even build relationships with brands – in an online and often public space.

It's big, it's connected and it's here to stay

More than 70% of the internet population uses social networks in one form or another² and the numbers are growing daily. One in nine people³ on Earth have a Facebook account, and if it was a country, it would be the third largest

²ETC New Media Trend Watch, Social Media and UGC: <http://cipr.co/zv0JKl>

³This number is calculated by dividing the planet's 6.94 billion people by Facebook's 750 million users.

after China and India. Even relative newcomer Instagram has gathered 12 million members⁴ in less than a year.

And whilst the landscape continues to grow and change apace, our audiences have moved beyond the media hype and embraced new communication channels wholeheartedly. Social networking already accounts for 1 in every 6 minutes spent online.⁵

Being social online isn't restricted to 'Generation Y'. At the time of writing, the average profile age on Twitter is 35 years, and a bit older on LinkedIn, at 40. Facebook's biggest demographic is now between 35 and 54 years. Even YouTube has an even spread of users right across the 20–55 age range.

But, more significant than just the volume and demographics of participants is the change in the way people communicate, and changes in the way people are connecting, collaborating and building relationships online. A change in the way people are demanding, sharing and creating content. From user-generated content to link sharing, the frequency of participation in social networks is intense.

When it comes to sharing, the volume of content circulating through the networks is staggering. Every minute, 60 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube, 3000 images go up on Flickr and more than 700 YouTube links⁶ are Tweeted. Conversations, too, demonstrate the enthusiasm for connecting online. There are 95 million Tweets a day, 85% of bloggers post more than once a week,⁷ and 57% of people talk more online than they do in real life.⁸

The rich and complex picture of social media is still evolving. As the networks grow and the conversations proliferate, people are increasingly engaged. Add mobile to the mix and you now have always-online, connected everywhere, through any device, social networkers.

⁴TechCrunch, Instagram Now Has 12 Million Users, 100K Weekly Downloads In China Alone, Alexia Tsotsis, 31 October 2011: <http://cipr.co/AyWOMj>

⁵comScore, The Network Effect: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Tumblr reach new heights in May, Andrew Lipsman, 15 June 2011: <http://cipr.co/wzE8pW>

⁶YouTube Statistics, as of 8 March 2012: <http://cipr.co/x9pYW8>

⁷SlideShare, Technorati Blogging Stats Preview, Eric Schwartzman: <http://cipr.co/w0DkZ0>

⁸Source Alex Trimpe via Ogilvy – 21 February 2011, ThinkQuarterly, Google.

And even when the statistics in this chapter need revising (probably in a matter of weeks), it is clear that social networks are part of our lives and they are here to stay.

People connect, technology facilitates

In truth, no matter the demographic, device or even the numbers, human beings are motivated to connect and share for a multitude of reasons:⁹ researching, finding information and inspiration, participating, connecting with friends and for entertainment. Social network sites are the vehicle, not the destination.

Although ‘to Facebook’ appears to have entered the vernacular as a common verb, it is not social networking platforms that drive the conversation – it is people. People connect to share interests, passions and friendships, with content as the catalyst for conversations. This is demonstrated when conversations around topics are mapped online. It becomes clear that both people and conversations will move across the different social platforms. Migrating and coalescing in different online locations.

The BBC’s weekly political debate programme, *Question Time*, is a good example of how interest and conversation will move across the different types of social network. In between broadcasts the programme’s current topics of the week are debated in forums, on blogs and within the BBC website itself. But as the programme goes live, the conversation jumps to Twitter, with a rapid stream of 140-character opinions attached to the hashtag, #bbcqt. As the broadcast finishes, the conversation slides back to longer debates on other social networks.

The result is that connection and communities are spread across the social landscape in a fire hose of conversations. With so much chatter, it becomes difficult to find and join conversations or to network. But, it is again technology that can help people navigate the social landscape. Most social networks

⁹Jeffesposito.com, 15 interesting facts about social media in the UK, Adam Vincenzini, 16 February 2011: <http://cipr.co/w9AKZZ>

are designed with functionality to help users find connections and topics of interest within them. However, it is still a challenge to find relevant conversations and communities across the whole social landscape.

The search engines recognise that people want to source information from their trusted networks. They also understand the value of human filtering to identify valued content. Both Google and Microsoft Bing are incorporating social conversations (and social signals) into their results.

And whilst the algorithms used to rank content are still very much a secret, it seems that 'Likes' on Facebook or Google's +1 recommendation and social referrals are impacting the ranking of information. Now when people search, their own social network (called the social graph) impacts results. This is called 'social search'. It narrows the results for the searcher, making visible content created or touched by users within their social graph.

It isn't just in searching for relevant content and conversations that technology facilitates social networking. It is technology, too, that empowers our online voice. Technology provides social network platforms that are easy to use, facilitate sharing and make it simple to connect to our friends, peers and/or any company we choose.

Explaining the plethora of social network sites

Whenever social media are mentioned, it seems that Facebook and Twitter dominate the discussion. After all, it is these well-known social networks that the traditional media consistently reference. The adverts and programmes we watch entice us to like Fan Pages and use Twitter hashtags, whilst the tabloids flash us headlines on the evils of social networks (while encouraging us to 'share' the very same stories with our own social network!) They are now part of the mainstream.

Of course the social media landscape is far more complex. It is an ecosystem of differing styles and types of network: networks and platforms that range from self-publishing and content sharing, through to discussion boards and virtual worlds. What they have in common, though, are principles founded

on Web 2.0 technology.¹⁰ Principles that ensure communications are two-way, interactive and, above all, shareable.

Although they have a common foundation in technology, social networks don't fit quite so neatly into categories or types. Constantly evolving to become more useful to their users, we see new applications and services launch, such as group buying and smartphone photo sharing. Established social networks, too, absorb new functionality. You are just as likely to view a video embedded on Facebook or Tumblr as you are to see it on YouTube.

Putting the complexity of creating a detailed classification aside, there is value in identifying the main types of social media platform. Understanding the primary rationale for the different social networks is invaluable when evaluating where, how and when to communicate.

Networking sites

Networking sites should not be confused with the term 'social networks'. The latter is an umbrella phrase that encompasses all the differing types of social media, platforms and connections.

A networking site is an online service made up of individuals and is most recognisable by the user profiles. Networkers connect with links to friends, sharing common interests, passions, ideas and content. Ultimately they are designed to enable people to socialise online.

Facebook is the most recognisable site. It was originally created for students and now accounts for 58% of all visits to social sites.¹¹ But there are many more networking sites, including the relative newcomer Google+, and there is significant variation in popularity from one country to the next.

Then there are networking sites that have a specific focus. The best example is LinkedIn, which is a business-related site and is mainly used for professional networking.

Some networks are popular in certain countries. Hyves is popular in the Netherlands, StudiVZ in Germany, Tuenti in Spain, Nasza-Klasa in Poland

¹⁰O'Reilly Media, What Is Web 2.0: <http://cipr.co/wY0Qza>

¹¹Data from Experian Hitwise white paper, 'Carpe Diem – Seizing the moment in social media': <http://cipr.co/yePdFC>

and Skyrock in various parts of Europe. But it is Orkut and Hi5 that lead the conversations in South America and Mixi and Cyworld in Asia.

Blogs

In February 2011 there were estimated to be more than 156 million public blogs in existence.¹² Created in a diary style format, they represent the opinions and thoughts of the writer. Technology platforms such as WordPress, Blogger and TypePad can also be used to create forums, news feeds and even websites.

Influential and connected blogs are frequently updated and have lots of comments. Subject matter and interests vary across a vast spectrum of topics. There are news blogs, like The Huffington Post; passion-led blogs, such as Maison Cupcake Blog; and leading industry blogs, such as Mashable and TechCrunch.

Microblogs

Microblogging is a short form of blogging – typically no more than 140–200 characters per post. The most recognisable platform is Twitter, although Tumblr is quickly grabbing the public's attention (it receives the second highest number of page views from any social media platform after Facebook¹³). Other platforms include FriendFeed, Posterous and the microblog for private use within organisations, Yammer.

Collaborative communities

Some social networks see users collaborate to achieve a single goal. The oldest and most recognised collaborative site is Wikipedia. But it isn't the only wiki. There are numerous wiki platforms¹⁴ and a wide variety of sites covering

¹²State of the Media: The Social Media Report Q3 2011, NMIncite, Nielsen: <http://cipr.co/xUs9EN>

¹³Ibid. 12

¹⁴Wikipedia, Comparison of wiki software: <http://cipr.co/wwWJgs>

issues from medicine to wine tasting, and, of course, the CIPR social media wiki.¹⁵

Sites that facilitate collaborative buying (or group buying to get a better deal) also proliferate. Most well known are Groupon and LivingSocial. But it isn't just discounts that are driving collaborative purchasing. So, too, is the rise of collaborative consumption.¹⁶ Whether it's car sharing with Streetcar or hiring a room with Crashpadder, social media are facilitating the cultural shift towards sharing possessions.

Communities and forums

Communities and forums proliferate across the Web; some launching and disappearing almost overnight and others becoming as established as the mainstream media. There is no one typical approach to them. So below are a few of the most prevalent types of forum.

Discussion-based forums tend to create close-knit and trusted communities. Often based around specific interests and driven by a passionate and vocal membership, the range of conversations can be quite broad. Take a look at Mumsnet.com or Moneysavingexpert.com, where discussions focus on parenting and finances respectively. These communities can be deceptively large (Mumsnet has more than 1.5 million monthly unique users¹⁷).

Review communities have blossomed to help people identify great services and products and avoid those that have disappointed others. In fact, a recent survey shows that 42% of people have written a product review online.¹⁸ These communities focus on reviews, usually on specific topics. Probably the best known are TripAdvisor and Review Centre, but there are specialist sites such as 'White Goods Help' and the entertainment site Metacritic.

Some businesses that want to create their own networks have launched *branded communities*. Not all have been successful, but some have tapped into interests to create strong, interactive experiences for their audiences.

¹⁵CIPR Social Media Panel wiki: <http://cipr.co/ciprsm-wiki>

¹⁶Collaborative Consumption Hub: <http://cipr.co/xGrrhN>

¹⁷Statistic from Mumsnet Google Analytics: <http://cipr.co/ypFamK>

¹⁸SlideShare, The Science of Sharing: An inside look at a consumer: <http://cipr.co/wkwMgu>

Mothercare launched the successful Gurgle.com for parents (now in the US and India too); BT Tradespaces is thriving with its membership of small businesses; and some communities, such as Weightwatchers, are extensions of the brand website.

Finally, there are *DIY communities*. Here, individuals or groups create their own social network using services such as Ning or BuddyPress. Alternatively, communities are founded within established social networks such as Facebook Pages or LinkedIn Groups.

Content-sharing communities

With the profusion of social networks and subsequent conversations has come a deluge of content. From videos and pictures to links and music, it seems content can be found everywhere. And not just content published by companies, but user-generated content. Much of this content is stored and found on social networks that focus on sharing, ranking and sorting.

Photo sharing is exemplified by Flickr – a site with more than 51 million registered users.¹⁹ Here, users can publish photos, share and even sell them. Other photo-sharing networks include Zoomr and Photobucket and photo apps such as Instagram.

Video sharing is an established cornerstone of social networking, accounting for over 4% of all internet usage. YouTube is the most popular, accounting for nearly 70% of all visits to video websites.²⁰ Other platforms include Vimeo, Dailymotion, Redux and Metacafe.

The internet has revolutionised the way in which fans listen to music. But it is social networks that have allowed people to share their preferences and current listening habits, often in real time. Spotify, SoundCloud, Last.FM, Gogoyoko and Playlist are just a handful of the music-sharing platforms. Even the ubiquitous iTunes has Ping – where users can follow their favourite artists and friends to discover what music they are talking about, listening to and downloading.

¹⁹Yahoo!, About Flickr: <http://cipr.co/xggElr>

²⁰Statistic from Experian Hitwise white paper, 'Online Video: Bringing Social Media To Life': <http://cipr.co/A0HYRt>

Bookmarking is the simplest and easiest form of content sharing. Bookmarking sites such as StumbleUpon, Digg, Pinboard and Reddit, allow users to organise links, tag, add notes or comments and then share them. Some sites, such as Digg, encourage voting to rank the links; others, like Delicious, help you to organise your links into 'stacks' around content themes.

Geo-social networks

Whilst some social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, allow user location to be added to posts using geolocation, there are also specific geo-social networks such as Gowalla and Foursquare. Geolocation allows users to tag current locations, create a comment about the place or 'check in'. Adoption of these services is still quite small. However, as more people connect to social networks via mobile, it is likely that the use of geolocation services will continue to grow.

Virtual worlds

One of the most recognised virtual worlds is Second Life, unless you are an RPG gamer, in which case you will be familiar with World of Warcraft and its 10-million-strong user base. Virtual worlds are online communities within computer-simulated environments, where users interact with one another through avatars. There is still little mass adoption of these technologies and very few demographic or usage data. But it is a network to keep on your radar for the future.

PRs need to understand the social network landscape

For today's PR practitioner, adapting public relations to this changing environment can seem daunting. Social networks present a complex, but rich, landscape of opportunities and risks.

The focus must always be on the communities, whether they are connected through interest groups, trusted friendships or driven by passions.