

Social media scheduling: How not to spam your followers

Mariana Rickmann

Freelance medical writer

Olching, Germany

Correspondence to:

Mariana Rickmann

Herzog-Max-Str.7

82140 Olching, Germany

mariana@marianarickmann.com

Abstract

Social media is, today, an indispensable part of networking and business. However, many professionals are still learning how to navigate the sea of social media. Big companies have a dedicated department, but small businesses, entrepreneurs, and freelancers need to manage their own social media presence without decreasing their productivity. This represents yet another task that adds burden to already busy professionals. Posting on social media channels is a way to have an online presence and engage in conversations with business prospects, clients, and peers. Taking the time to plan the posts we want to share is an efficient way to manage our social media presence. Using tools that help schedule and manage postings allows more time to engage with our readers – the ultimate goal of social media. This article reviews the pros and cons of social media scheduling, how to better plan your posts, and some helpful online tools.

Social media represents a great tool to connect with your clients, prospects, and peers. But erratic sharing of content and updates may actually be pushing opportunities away, not to mention wasting precious time.

If I sporadically post something, provide comments, or reshare something that moves me, my followers are probably thinking: Mariana has some free time again! Some of my followers may even view my activities as spamming.

But it doesn't have to be like this.

Social media scheduling offers a smart way to organise your posts so that you have more time

to create better posts or to engage with your followers.

An organised social media plan helps you maintain a professional online presence instead of irregular and erratic posting. Why is this important? Because when you post regularly and consistently, your followers learn to expect your updates and your articles, they learn to trust in you, and eventually, it will be your name that pops up when they need the services you offer.

When you have a constant, engaging online presence, your followers are more likely to recommend you because they *know* you.

In this article, I will focus on some popular scheduling tools for social media posts and how to use them wisely.

Your professional social media presence

The phrase “publish or perish” has a twist today: “if you are not online, you don't exist”.

The year 2020 has proven to us all that the technology for online work and networking is up and ready. Nevertheless, online security is something that worries us all: passwords and accounts get hijacked, somebody can use your photos without your permission, and so many other threats that we do not even comprehend. This is one big reason why people decide not to be online even today.¹

However, if you are a small business owner, a freelancer, or if you are looking for a job, having an online presence today is inevitable. In 2019, more than 50% of all European companies used at least one type of social media for marketing strategies. And this proportion is increasing steadily.²

Social media and productivity

Another reason why people avoid social media is time constraints. Social media can be a great platform to interact with clients, prospects, and your audience, but it can also significantly interfere with your productivity.³

I get easily caught in threads and articles; everything is so interesting. And before I know it, 20 minutes are gone, and I completely forget why I was there in the first place.

Working in the age of information and communication involves new skills like social media know-how.⁴ Having a professional online presence is essential. But we need to learn how to navigate the sea of social media without getting lost in it.

How to have an online presence without wasting time

Finding the sweet spot where your resources meet your social media goals and needs is a delicate balance that needs constant adjustment.⁵

For starters, you do not need to be on every social platform that exists. Focus on the platform that best aligns with your objectives. You may ask yourself: where could my clients or my future employer be?

LinkedIn: Start here

LinkedIn is today what the Yellow Pages were 20 years ago. When people look you up on the internet, LinkedIn is the first place that comes up,

probably even before your webpage. Initially, it was a job search tool. But today, it is one big worldwide networking event, the place where you engage with business prospects, peers, and clients.

Scheduling social media updates and posts

Scheduling is about having a regular rhythm in your online publications.

A sporadic burst of multiple posts in a span of 30 minutes can be compared to spam. Moreover, if after your publication bursts, your followers do not see

anything from you in weeks, they may lose interest or forget altogether about you.

Social media scheduling allows you to have a presence in social media and meet your followers when they are there, even when you are not.

When you post regularly, your followers learn to expect your updates and your articles, they learn to trust in you, and eventually, it will be your name that pops up when they need the services you offer.



It gives you more time to engage and connect, which is the ultimate essence of social media.

An hour a week is all it takes to put down everything you want to share and schedule your posting. The app does the work for you and frees up time so you can focus on other things.

However, do not schedule and then run away. The app can help with the scheduling, but the interaction must come from you, not from a software or a robot.

There is nothing less engaging than commenting on a post or asking something from the author only to find out nobody answers. Interaction is critical, and this part still requires you to do the work.

Scheduling tools

Even if you are an expert social media user, having an efficient scheduling tool at your fingertips is always helpful.

Scheduling tools are not only a useful way to queue up your posts, some can even be an overall social media management system.

These tools help you improve your efficiency, so you have more time to produce great content or develop connections with your followers in real-time.

An hour a week is all it takes to put down everything you want to share and schedule your posting. The app does the work for you and frees up time so you can focus on other things.

Below I mention some of the scheduling tools recommended by expert marketers and writers.⁶ This is not an exhaustive list but includes the most recommended and popular ones. These tools are continually evolving and have different offers according to your location, as well as special offers during the year. I recommend you check their webpages for updates. (See Table 1)

Buffer

- Simple, but still a good option. Buffer is specialised in scheduling.
- Buffer does not show answers to your posts; you will need to check them in the social media platform.

- The browser extension allows you to schedule directly from the web page you are in: the selected text gets marked as a quote, and you can customise your message.
- Excellent customer support.
- It has extensions to help you analyse your data, for a fee.
- The dashboard and the mobile app are straightforward to use.
- The basic plan is free, with some limitations: three social channels, ten scheduled posts, one user. For most people, this is sufficient.
- Buffer offers three different plans for entrepreneurs, freelancers, and small to big companies. It is very versatile and can be used by either B2B or B2Cs.

Recurpost

- Recurpost is a scheduling tool that repeats your schedule once it finishes publishing your library.
- The more posts you add to your library, the less your posts get repeated. The idea is that it reaches a different audience by posting automatically at other times.
- Similar to Buffer, you can also get a free account to try it out.



Table 1. List of some popular scheduling tools

	Website	Plans (monthly)*	Pros	Cons
Buffer	www.buffer.com	Publish: Basic: free Pro: 15\$ Premium: 65\$ Business: 65\$ Analyse: Pro: 35\$ Premium: 50\$	Simple and easy to use. The free option is ideal to start.	Limited features
Recurpost	www.recurpost.com	Standard: free Medium: 20.83\$ Large: 41.67\$	Suitable for resharing posts.	Limited features
Edgar	www.meetedgar.com	Edgar Lite: 19\$ Edgar: 49\$	Suggested variations. Unlimited content library.	The Lite version allows only three social accounts.
Hootsuite	www.hootsuite.com	Free plan Professional: 25 EUR Team: 109 EUR Business: 599 EUR Enterprise: Contact for pricing	The most complete and popular social media manager.	The free plan is minimal. High pricing. Some problems with Facebook images.
Oktopost	www.oktopost.com	Customised plans	B2B. Several options. Allows tracking of clients and sharing in groups.	It is not recommended for freelancers. Not for iPhone.
Coschedule	www.coschedule.com	Marketing Calendar: 29\$ Marketing Suite: contact for pricing	A complete social media and marketing manager. The calendar helps to have a broader vision.	High pricing, the panel can be overwhelming.

* Prices shown in providers' websites as of December 15, 2020, but are subject to change. Please check each website for local prices and special offers.

Edgar

- Edgar started in 2014 as a way to make social media scheduling faster and smarter, and today is much more than a scheduling tool. It offers more features than Buffer.
- It suggests variations of phrases from your links that you can use when posting.
- It offers an unlimited content library, auto-expiring content for seasonal or one-time promotions, and resharing of old posts.
- Edgar targets freelancers, growing brands, entrepreneurs or small businesses, with two pricing options and a free trial period of seven days.

Hootsuite

- More than just a scheduling tool, it is a proper social media management system. It works with more than 32 social network platforms.
- It allows you to interact with your followers directly from the app.
- Similar to other scheduling tools, you can manage all of your social networks from one dashboard, from a desktop computer or mobile phone.
- It also provides an analysis of your activity, for a price.
- It has a free plan that allows one user, three social media accounts, and 30 posts per month.
- Hootsuite focuses on B2C. Depending on your needs and the size of your business, you may want to have a look at all four different plans on offer.

Oktopost

- Similar to Hootsuite, it is a complete social media managing system that helps companies extend their marketing strategies to social media.
- Interestingly, it monitors for compliance with industry regulations in several sectors, including healthcare.
- It automatically offers you variations of your posts.
- It publishes in LinkedIn groups, allows for easy comment tracking and discussions.
- Oktopost also provides detailed analytics, like traffic activity on LinkedIn groups. It allows you to track a client from the first click until their first buy.
- Oktopost focuses on B2B and prices are tailored to each company's budget, allowing a free trial for beginners.

Box 1. 10 Key points to have in mind when scheduling your social media posts

1.	Be authentic.
2.	Keep the human touch. Monitor your posts for comments, respond and thank people for sharing your posts.
3.	Do not automate direct messages to people. People will be suspicious and may think there is nobody behind your account.
4.	Space your content. Share your posts at the time when your audience is more likely to be online.
5.	Be mindful of tragic or important events that may be happening at the moment of your scheduled post.
6.	Do not take hashtags and use them in meaningless ways.
7.	Analyse your impact to know if your scheduling strategy is working. Almost all social platforms have a way of measuring your activity.
8.	Try different strategies like changing days or time slots and different headings. What day of the week works best? Is there more activity when you post more often? What headlines raise more engagement?
9.	Focus on one or two platforms, the ones that help you best. When you try to be everywhere, you end up missing interactions in some platforms. Show up and engage in the ones you choose and make fewer but better connections.
10.	Listen. Listening to what people have to say is as important as sharing your own view. If you schedule your posts without interacting, you miss a significant opportunity to know what the people think about your topic. Like in real life, online communication has two sides: talking and listening.

Coschedule

- Coschedule is a marketing work management software that includes social media scheduling.
- It offers a marketing calendar, where you can see all your marketing projects, including social media posts, emails and events.
- The social media scheduling tool includes a template for scheduling similar types of posts, making the process very easy and intuitive.
- They offer two plans: The Marketing Calendar and the Marketing Suite, and similar to other tools, there is also a free trial period of 14 days.

Pros and cons of scheduling in social media

The main aim of scheduling your posts should be to spend more time and focus on the activities that have more value to you. Scheduling is not just a way of saving time, but a way to optimise your social media interactions.

The key points to keep in mind when scheduling your social media posts are summarised in Box 1.

These are the main benefits of scheduling:

- Organise posting and updates if you have several social network accounts.
- Increase traffic to your website.
- Become more productive.
- Engage with people who are online when you are not.



- Pace your posting as opposed to sporadic bursts.

Having a schedule of your social media posts could be beneficial for you and your audience, as long as you don't lose the "human touch".

Why you may not want to schedule:

- If you are very familiar with social media and can manage it without it interfering with your productivity.
- If you are only in one social network and are very disciplined with the time you spend on social media.
- In some cases, posting "by hand" avoids penalties from social media algorithms.
- If you feel that scheduling your posts is keeping you from connecting with your audience.

Like in real life, online communication has two sides: talking and listening.

But if you are starting to use social media for your business, scheduling your posts is an excellent way of engaging with your audience while focusing on what is important.

Our digital self has a place in social media

Our social media profiles reflect who we are, and this also applies to companies. Proper pacing gives the impression of reliability and consistency, attributes that business partners value.

While scheduling your social media posts frees you to engage in other activities, it does not engage with your followers for you.

Do not forget to keep the human touch.

After all, the whole aim of following your updates is to make a connection with a human being.

Disclaimers

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and not necessarily shared by EMWA, nor does the author or EMWA have any commercial link to the online tools presented in the article.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.



References

1. Zhang Z, Gupta BB. Social media security and trustworthiness: Overview and new direction. *Future Generation Computer Systems*. 2018;86:914–25.
2. Social media – Statistics on the use by enterprises, statistics explained. [cited 2020 Dec 10]. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Social_media_-_statistics_on_the_use_by_enterprises#Purposes_of_using_social_media.
3. Wushe T, Shenje J. The relationship between social media usage in the workplace and employee productivity in the public sector: Case study of government departments in Harare. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*. 2019;17(0):10.
4. Hysa B, Spalek S. Opportunities and threats presented by social media in project management. *Heliyon*. 2019;5(4):e01488.
5. 21 Productivity hacks from 21 prolific writers. Copyblogger. 2017 [cited 2020 Dec 9]. Available from: <https://copyblogger.com/writer-productivity-hacks/>.
6. The best social media tools for engaging, designing, scheduling, and analyzing. Copyblogger. [cited 2020 Dec 11]. Available from: <https://copyblogger.com/best-social-media-tools/>.

Author information

Mariana Rickmann, PhD, has been a freelance medical writer since 2018, with focus on medical communications for small healthcare businesses and start-ups. In her blog, she shares writing tips and helpful resources for healthcare entrepreneurs. She is part of the Freelance Subcommittee and the Sustainability Special Interest Group of EMWA.

Google Scholar profile: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=es&user=aWlcPhcAAAAJ>.

