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Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: Unable to decipher = (inaudible + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** (ph) + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode), **Talking over each other** = (talking over each other + timecode).

Moderator: Declan, thank you so much, this is Deborah back again. Lots for companies to think about there in a huge area that's always changing and always growing. Declan, if you're happy, we've got quite a few question now to, to look at, some have been submitted in advance, some have come in during the session. The session was, was timed to last from ten o'clock to eleven o'clock, I think we, we might have to go slightly over that if we're gonna cover the questions, so please do stay, stay tuned if you-, if you want to hear the answers to all the questions come through. It's also worth noting, this session is actually being recorded today, including this question and answer session, and it will be available on the Invest NI website within the next couple of weeks. So, do keep an eye on the Invest NI website Support for Businesses, you'll see a section on video tutorials, and all tutorials across all areas, not just social media, that Invest NI have done in recent times will be available there. So, Declan, if you're happy we'll, we'll make a start.

Declan: Yeah, perfect, thanks, Deborah.

Moderator: Okay, some of the questions are very specific, obviously relating quite tightly to organisations' needs at the moment, others are a bit more general. Maybe the first one is one of those more general, any key tips or tactics how to start to grow your social media followers? What should you be doing in the first instance to get those numbers up?

Declan: Yeah, so, good question. I think, you know, the first thing you need to be doing is, is creating really good content. That is the, the-, the vehicle that, that you need in order to engage with your, your target audience. So, it-, first of all the content needs to be good, and it needs to be relevant and it needs to be worth them hitting like, commenting, tagging somebody on it or, or sharing it. So, it-, first of all it needs to be good content. But the second part of, of that, I would say that growing your, your social media followers used to be the, sort of, be end and-, be all and end all because, you know, the more followers you had, the more potential reach you have. And, it, it's-, it's changed slightly somewhat because of various social media algorithms and so on, whereby, you know, a company may have 10,000 followers, but, but they, they post out organic content and, and you know, maybe reach 10% of those 10,000 followers. So, the, the way to get around that, which is what I've said before, is to create good content. So, even if you had 500 followers, if you post out a good piece of content, you may reach 5,000 people. So, regardless of maybe growing your, your audience is, is focus on the content. And if you have good content, not only will you reach more people but organically, you will build up a bigger audience as well.

Moderator: Okay, thank you. What about hashtags, Declan? Should you use them, is it important to use them, and if so, how many should you be putting on the end of posts?

Declan: Yeah, well, hashtags are one of the, the key things in order to get visibility, especially on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. That's how they categorise posts and so on, and especially if you're starting off, you know, maybe a new business or a new brand or whatever, to get-, to get that presence, to get that reach, certainly adding in hashtags into your posts will, you know, increase the reach of, of that particular post. So, each platform is slightly different, there, there-, there's a recommendation of around one to two posts on Facebook-, sorry, one to two hashtags on Facebook, one to two hashtags on LinkedIn. Or, Instagram does vary, I have seen various posts with five, fifteen posts but I tend to keep it in, in between, sort of, in between that and maybe go nine or ten hashtags for each post. I've also seen on Instagram, you know, people not putting them in the, the actual post anymore, they've gone into the first comment. So, they've actually putting maybe one or two hashtags in the post, but then, you know, flooded, sort of, the first comment box with maybe nine or ten hashtags as, as well because it, it looks a little bit better. And then, on, on maybe the likes of TikTok, you have, you know, four or five hashtags on, on TikTok. And Twitter as well, so I haven't mentioned Twitter, so one to two hashtags on, on Twitter as well.

And what I would say is, you know, just don't put in anything. Do your research, look at what some of the global brands are using in terms of that content topic, you know, what hashtags have they used, what hashtags have local people used, what hashtags have influencers used in your industry or, or on that content topic. So, add those in, but as well as use, use branded hashtags, so make sure you put your name out there. Or, you know, if it's a-, it's a process or a particular solution that you do, make sure you have your own, sort of, dedicated hashtag for that. So, a combination of the global ones, the local ones and, and your own hashtag for that.

Moderator: Okay, great, thank you, Declan. Declan, early in your presentation you talked about using and, and influencers. How would you recommend finding influencers just to work with on social media?

Declan: So, yeah, well, there's a ton of influencers out there from, you know, the, the huge, you know, global influencers and so on, but what we've seen as, sort of, a trend over the last maybe few years, because of the cost of the, you know, the, the-, the large influencers, you know, that shift towards those micro or even nano influencers. And the best way to really find them is to just be present in, on social media in your, your local area and, and looking at various hashtags and, and trawling through posts, searching for various key words and hashtags in Instagram, in LinkedIn, in, in Facebook and, and so on. To see, you know, who is the top posts, who, who's-, who's writing about the, the-, the topics that you, you know, want to talk about or, or the products that you sell and, and so on. So, do your own research, you know, your, your own manual research, but also have a look at, you know, there, there are some companies in Northern Ireland that specialise with, sort of, partnering you up with various influencers in

your network. Like, there's also some websites as well, like, Influence.co and Upfluence. You know, they have a database of influencers where you can put in various parameters like, you know, how many followers they have, how much they're going to cost, types of topics that they're writing about and, and so on. And you know, what type of influence there are, and you can-, you know, there's a databases for-, to, to search as well. So, some of those websites and a combination of your own research and, and general word of mouth is the best way to find those influencers.

Moderator: Okay, thank you. You mentioned as well during your presentation about many companies will find the need to have employees, social media executives working exclusively on this. In Northern Ireland, what's your typical salary, what would you be expecting to pay a social media executive?

Declan: It does-, it does vary slightly, maybe in some of the bigger cities like Belfast, you'd expect to get a little bit more than maybe the surrounding areas and so on, but the average salary, you know, of a social media executive is somewhere between £25,000 and £29,000 a year. You know, and that's coming with maybe a year or two experience of using social media. So, that's the, the type of salary you would be expecting to pay if you were to hire a, a dedicated social media resource.

Moderator: Okay, great, thank you. Moving on now to look at B2B sales and the use of social media. Quite a few questions coming around this area, so I'll maybe try and lump a few together. A couple of people asking which of the social media trends are more, or most suitable for B2B companies, and how best can our B2B sales team use content marketing on social media? So, what, what are the key trends, and the best ways to, to-, to use content marketing?

Declan: Yeah, so, so I guess some of the trends were more specific to B2C, some of them were more specific to B2B and, and so on. I think some of the key ones to look out for if, you know, if you're a B2B company would be the most sophistic advertising, the, the-, the death of the cookie and the, the problems tracking IOS users and so on for-, on Facebook specifically, and Instagram. So, the, the more sophisticated advertising methods I think is, is going to be for, for B2B companies this year, and you know, building your advanced targeting and, and looking at those-, building those personas so that you have an idea of who your specific segments of customers are. Rather than, you know, relying on the, the targeting, or the, the re-marketing elements on, on social media like the Facebook pixel and, and-, and LinkedIn pixel and, and so on. So, certainly looking at the more sophisticated and strategic advertising methods is, is probably one of the key trends. Social media hires as well, looking at dedicated resources I think is going to be a, a key aspect of, of any B2B company. Social commerce probably not so much because you have-, you know, B2B companies maybe tend to maybe not sell online as much, so that's maybe something that's not one of the key trends.

But maybe lastly, one of the key trends is, is probably looking at content and, you know, investing in, in really good content, and whether that's graphics, videos or audio content which we've seen, you know,

becoming more and more relevant over the last certainly twelve to eighteen months. So, investing in, in really good quality content, and as I said, whether that's design, video or, or audio, would be some of the key trends. And you mentioned maybe some of the platforms there as well, and B2B, you know, I think it's widely regarded as-, LinkedIn is widely regarded as the best B2B social media platform there is out there. You, you know, you have a professional network of, of individuals in a-, in a professional capacity where you can, you know, engage with, where you can send content to in a-, in a B2B context, so hopefully that answers the, the, the biggest trends, maybe the best platforms and, and content for, for B2B companies.

Moderator: Okay, and switching over, then, to B2C, what would be the best platforms for a small company just starting out on the social media journey in a-, on a B2C context?

Declan: Well, the, the first thing I would say is it really depends on the company and depends on their target audience. So, you know, if they have a, a very young demographic of, of, of customers, you know, you might be looking at the social media platforms which has the, the younger users which might be the likes of Snapchat, TikTok. If you have a slightly older demographic maybe, you know, 18-25 or 18-30, you might be looking at the likes of Instagram and so on, and if you have a, a slightly older audience than that, you know, 25 to maybe 45, you know, the biggest demographic of those people would be on Facebook. So it really does depend on where your, you know, where your audience is and I, I do appreciate that, you know, you may have customers that range from 16-60 and you're thinking, you know, 'I could go on all of those social media platforms.' But I, I would say if you're starting off, you know, choose one platform where, where the majority of your audience is and focus on that. Maybe two platforms at the most but don't overstretch yourself. And the key thing is, as I-, as I said before, go where your audience is, is mostly, you know. Don't, don't go to Instagram because you personally like Instagram and, and you like the platform and so on. It, it doesn't matter. Go where your audience is. So I, I can't say for certain, you know, they should use Facebook or they should use Instagram. It depends on where their audience is and, and the type of business that they are, and the resources that they have at their disposal, which is key as well because if their-, if their audience was on TikTok, but they don't have anybody to create videos and humorous videos, then it's, you know, it's not-, it's not going to be a platform for them. So go where your audience is, with the type of, you know, platform that fits with your business and go with a platform where you have the resource to utilise it.

Moderator: Okay, great, and I think you've, you've more or less answered one of the next questions which was do you recommend concentrating on three or four social media sites, or try to be in as many as possible, but keeping it focussed, knowing who your audience is depends-,

Declan: Yeah, exactly that, Ria. It's, it's about not overstretching, as well. You know, you could choose to do four, all four or five of the largest social media platforms but if you can't do all four or five well then it-, don't go there. Focus on one or two and crack it first before you move on to another platform.

Moderator: Okay, another question coming in. What style of post do you find works better? Static

or animated social media posts?

Declan: Well, just as a, a rule of thumb, all social media platforms rank videos higher than any other form of content, so if you put out a video, it is likely to reach more people than you put out a, a, an image, for example. So, static posts don't tend to get as much reach as videos, so in terms of the best type of post, it, it would be a video. It would be some sort of animation or, or certainly whether it's a, a series of images which is turned into a video, that gets much more reach than, than any other type of post.

Moderator: Okay, and a couple of questions are going to, to link together. I'm keeping an eye on time but hopefully another 5-10 minutes max for the remaining questions. So, how often would you recommend to post on social media? And then somebody else is commenting, 'I find it hard to plan regular content. I've got bursts of content, blank, then can't think of things to post. I know we should be following trends but making specific business content regularly is difficult.' Any advice?

Declan: Yeah and that is-, that, that person isn't alone. A lot of companies do struggle with creating content regularly. What, what I would say is that there are a number of things you can do to, kind of, alleviate that. Well, first of all, in terms of just content inspiration. If they have, you know, split down their audience into different segments or personas, if you wanna call them that. So it could be they will take a female audience, so say there's a, a female audience of an 18-30-year-old group or a segment and they've created a persona around that, you know, if they truly understand their customer, they should be creating content, you know, which they're gonna like and engage with. So that should give them some ideas. Also, say they have another segment of, you know, 25-35-year-olds or 30-40-year-olds, they will be into maybe different things than the younger audience, so they could also, you know, create content which matches what, what they're like and, and so on, so that could be a, another, sort of, source of content inspiration. That, that could be quite useful because if you're-, if you're able to, sort of, demonstrate and break down those particular segments and, and groups of people, you know, that should bring that content inspiration. There are other-, are other platforms as well like Answer the Public.com where you can type in any key word or phrase and that'll tell you what people are searching for around that particular topic online, so if people are asking questions around, you know-, you know, what is the best, you know accountancy package to use for a business with under five employees, you could create content around that person is searching around, accountancy software or, or whatever. So, Answer the Public is quite good for that, as well.

General, sort of, looking at various key words and, and speaking to customers. You know, your customer's asking you questions on a daily basis. You know, that should be a source of inspiration for content too because if they're asking the questions, you know, other people are thinking of those questions too and if you can answer people's queries with content on social media, that's gonna help with your, your sales process. And just the last thing in terms of struggling to create content, what I would recommend as well is, is creating a content calendar. You know, whether it's fourteen days in advance or 30 days in advance or even seven days in advance, if you, you know, print, you know, at a very basic level, print a, a calendar template from, from Microsoft Word or whatever and write in a piece of content for each day for

the next 30 days or fourteen days, and keep yourself on it to post those, that content every day. So, you know, Monday might be an inspirational post, Tuesday humorous, Wednesday, something, piece of content around your products or services, Thursday is putting spotlight on a customer, whatever it is. If you have something filled in in advance for those every, every, every day, you know, that'll keep you on it and that'll, you know, get you motivated to, to do the posts on a daily basis. And that, that is just in terms of frequency, how often you should-, you should do that. Every platform does recommend posting at least once a day. Twitter is, is probably, you know, five, six, seven times a day but certainly Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn is, is once a day, as well as, on Facebook and Instagram, maybe a story or a couple of stories a day as well. So it, it can be labour-intensive but it-, that's the recommendation for, for engagement and growth and, and generating leads and sales, I guess, at the-, at the end of the day.

Moderator: That's great, Declan, thank you and have you any tips, Declan, on managing negative or incorrect comments in post? Is it better to ignore, reply, delete? What do you think?

Declan: That's a good question and it's something, you know, I experienced very recently working with a software company that had developed a, a platform to help with-, something to do with COVID and we, we ran a targeted ad and at, at certain individuals, and there was comments, you know, around various things. All negative. Well, not all negative but some of it was negative and, you know, the, the company-, the, the best thing to do is address it and, and respond to it and hit it head on in the-, obviously the nicest possible way. Keep it polite and so on. And they did that for, you know, a few days but it just became-, it, kind of, spiralled out of control, to the point where they had to just turn comments off on, on the ad. So, I would say, you know, hit it head on, address those negative comments, but if it gets too much, you're probably left with no choice but to, to turn the comments off on, on various posts. But the best thing you've to do is, is to hit in head on. But if it gets too much, just turn it off because it's just-, it's just gonna, you know, damage PR and, and so on, but hopefully that answers the question.

Moderator: Okay. I think-, I think it does, Declan, thank you. A few quick questions on TikTok. Is TikTok only available on mobile or can it be accessed on a-, on a desktop?

Declan: Only available on a mobile device. There are-, you can get various applications where you can use your mobile phone on a desktop if that's something that you want to do. So, like, for, for Google users or, or Android users, you can get a little window which looks like it from-, on your desktop, and use your TikTok app on that but it's built for mobile. It's mobile-first. Its, its, all its tools and things are, are, are specific for mobile but-, so I would-, I would stick to mobile and, I don't know, it may be available for desktop in the future, who knows? But, yeah, only mobile for now.

Moderator: Okay, and do you need a personal account on TikTok to create a business account?

Declan: So, whenever you sign up for TikTok it will automatically have signed you a personal account first and foremost, but, but like Instagram you can go into manage your settings and switch to a business

or a pro account quite simply. You don't need any number of followers or so on, although it is recommended that you maybe have sort of a base before you do switch to a business account. But yeah, you can switch to a business account fairly, fairly easily. And you can-, you can now switch to a, a, a business or a creator account, but most creator accounts will be, you know, massive, sort of, influencers, like large influencers anyway, so I think a business account would suffice for now.

Moderator: Okay. Declan, do you have any examples of professional services that are doing TikTok well? People (inaudible 22.50) saying that's really stuff recorded?

Declan: Yeah, I suppose it's, it's one of those things that can be-, can be difficult to pinpoint companies locally. You need to be large enough to search in (ph 23.08). There was a real estate company or estate agents in Banbury (ph 23.11) that was working really well on TikTok, quite humorous and so on. The name escapes me but I'll, I'll get it for you. There are some big brands, I suppose professional services brands, using it really well like the likes of Adobe have a really good engaging TikTok profile, so does Canva the design tool. Sage are actually really good on it, the accountant software company as well. Shopify-, I think I mentioned Shopify during the, the workshop. They're all really good, so if you want to check out any of those brands and see how they're using it, I think that really would be a good starting point. And I did mention Apex Motion, the robotics company as well during the presentation, so check those guys out as well. But they all take that, sort of-, a humorous or fun sort of stance on, on TikTok which I guess is the whole ethos of the platform. So, if you are thinking about it, you know, do, do come with a, a jovial attitude to it.

Moderator: Okay. And I've just three questions left that have popped in to the chat box, one related to TikTok. And it's from a person who works as a social media associate for a small business, and he's specifically asking TikTok where you're using short videos. Looking for some advice on how to get started. The business is focused in Ireland and transfers old tapes such as VHS to digital format, so this person is thinking-, afraid that most of the customers wouldn't be in TikTok 'cause they're gonna be of a certain age profile, so should they still be looking to engage on TikTok or what are your thoughts?

Declan: Yeah, that, that is an interesting one because they've obviously done sort of-, some sort of research or, or have some sort of knowledge, and yes the people most likely that have VHS tapes would've been adults in the '80s, '90s, whatever. So, you know, in terms of the target demographic, you know, it probably is an older audience and, you know, strategically, you know, does it make sense to create only videos for eighteen to 25-year-olds? Perhaps not. Now-, and it really depends on, on how, you know, how much resources they have and so on, because there is a possibility that they could use TikTok to create brand awareness among the younger demographic, which could be, you know-, they could influence then their parents or their grandparents to say, 'Here's a company that, that can change your, your VHS tapes to, to digital format, you know. Did you know about them?' That could be a, an element to get into. Now, how much resources is that gonna take to, to, to target an influencer in the decision-making process? You know, they might be safer focusing on the likes of Facebook, which has an older demographic to really the, the product and the service out there, I think. You know, if it was me making

that decision and looking at maybe small resources, I probably would go Facebook, first of all, and paste it because it's-, it fits with the demographic, in my opinion. But, there's nothing to stop them using TikTok as an influencer unless it's, it's resources.

Moderator: Okay, and one query from a company that's an education award company around inclusivity, we're looking less to sell our services online but to make people aware of our expertise in this area and to engage educators and concerned individuals in discussion. We've published news stories when a school achieves our enhanced award but they're not resulting in discussion or engagement at all, really. Any tips?

Declan: Okay, yeah. So, I suppose, you know, the focus in on brand awareness and awareness here rather than, you know, I guess, sales or, or generating traffic to a website or, or so on. So, it depends on the platform that they're, they're using and their target audience, really. So, you know, it'd be interesting to see what platform that they're publishing the, the content on. I know a lot of the education individuals or teachers do use Twitter quite a lot and, you know, if they're-, maybe they're using the Twitter platform, maybe they're not. If they are, the, the lifespan of a Tweet, you know, if it's-, if it's one Tweet that they're pushing out there, it can be about fourteen minutes, so there's a possibility that people are not actually seeing their posts. Which means, you know, if people don't see their post, there's low engagement, there's low reach and so on. So, it could be a, a case of maybe that post is not enough, maybe you posted at the wrong time, maybe using the likes of Twitter, which can be very hard to get engagement on. So, there's a number of different variables there that, that they-, that make, you know-, which might be resulting in that, sort of, high engagement. And, it could be the content, too. So, it could be, you know, maybe it's an image on a lot of text and people don't interact with that, maybe it was a video slideshow or some sort of, you know, photo album or something worked a little bit better. So, there could be a number of different variables there as to why they're not getting the engagement. You know, it could even be simply posting at the wrong time of day on, on Facebook or, or Instagram.

So, there's, there's a number of different things that they could be looking at. But, if that person wants to reach out and have a chat with me, I'd be happy to do that. You know, and, and delve into it a little bit deeper. You know, no, no worries at all.

Moderator: Okay, thank you, Declan. And yes, it can be tricky answering questions without, without the full context behind it. One final question I just want to go that was submitted, and this is for a business that's focusing on local people, supporting the locally-grown movement. The full ethos of my business is local, so what is the best way to increase sales and the best platforms to be-, to be using if you want to keep the focus local?

Declan: Yes, so I suppose, in terms of-, one of the trends that I already mentioned was that there is a split, split, especially Facebook is focusing more on a, sort of, local, locally-grown movement. So, there's, there-, there's a number of maybe local Facebook groups of, of people that you can, kind of, you know,

tap into and, and be part of the conversation that they're having, whether it's an old history group, a local, sort of, buy and sell group, a local what's on, sort of, group. So, have a look on maybe the likes of Facebook to see are there any local groups that you could, kind of, utilise. So, that could be a good starting point. I think tagging your, your posts on Facebook, as well, with the local area does increase the reach within that local area, too. Because, people-, it will come up in people newsfeeds and so on, so certainly doing that could, could work. There is also a new social media platform which seems to gain quite a bit of traction called, well, I think it's called Nextdoor. And, that, it's, sort of, an extension of a local Facebook group where people in local geographic areas come together and they talk about things like missing pets, strange activity in the area, local events, good deals around products and, and so on. Around, you know, various reviews of, of local businesses and so on, as well. So, possibly exploring the Nextdoor social media platform, it is a very new platform and I'm, I'm not sure if a business can join it and how, you know, that sort of maybe promotion works. But certainly, something to explore, as well, maybe over the next couple of weeks to see how it-, how that could, could fit.

Moderator: Okay. Declan, thank you, I think we'll have to, to conclude our question and answer session there today. Obviously, social media's one of those areas that's continually moving and trying to keep on top of trends is, is, is, is challenging. But, that's been great today, to hear about some of the key trends for this-, for this year. So, that's our webinar finished for today and I'd very much like to thank Declan for presenting today. We tried to get through as many of your questions as we could, we hope you found this session useful. If you were not able to have your question answered today, we continue to update our business website, nibusinessinfo.co.uk, with the latest guidance, advice and FAQs. And, to receive updates, if you haven't already, please sign up for the email newsletter on nibusinessinfo.co.uk. Also, do please keep an eye on the Invest NI where you can register for all forthcoming events across all topics and across all areas. And, as I mentioned previously, today's session has been recorded and will be available on the Invest NI website in the next couple of weeks. Should you wish to be notified of the latest events, news and support from Invest NI, then please also ensure for our two-minute update email newsletter at investni.com/newsletter. That's it for today's session, I'd like to thank you all for attending, it's been great to see so many people along to today's session and I hope you all have a great day. Thank you.