

A Starter Guide to

IMPROVING DIGITAL SALES

Produced by MWT Cymru



Cyngor Sir
CEREDIGION
County Council

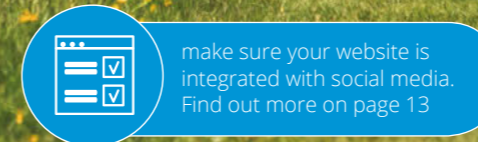


Introduction

This guide has been produced by MWT Cymru, the regional membership and marketing organisation for tourism businesses in Mid Wales. It brings together some of the key learnings from the Real Ceredigion Experiences pilot project, undertaken over recent months.

The project aims were to develop a pilot programme of activity, including research and workshops, to develop a network of exemplar businesses that showcase real benefits gained by adopting new ways of working and selling online. Whilst the case studies in this guide are attraction and activity specific, it is intended as a useful guide for all businesses and organisations wishing to improve their digital sales.

This guide is a useful starting point for all types of tourism businesses and organisations throughout the region.



What is Digital Marketing?

In a nutshell, digital marketing relates to the use of technology, digital platforms and data to carry out marketing activities. For example, this could include using a customer database to target previous guests with upcoming offers, analysing your Google analytics to improve your website, or engaging with your visitors on social media.

If we get our digital marketing right, we can improve our digital sales – sell more attraction tickets, activity packages, tours, and so on.

Key digital tools can be anything from:

- Devices such as smartphones, tablets, desktop computers and laptops.
- Platforms such as search engines, websites, social media and apps.
- MWTs Show Me Wales app is a good example. Online sales channels including Viator are another; this booking engine enables you to sell tickets and experiences through international channels, such as TripAdvisor.
- Software, such as Guestlink, supports you to manage the relationship with customers by recording e-shop sales.
- E-newsletter systems, such as MailChimp or SendinBlue, allow you to send personalised updates. Hootsuite® allows you to plan and schedule social media posts.



Your Customers

Marketing is about putting your customers at the heart of what you do; identifying, anticipating and satisfying their needs profitably. So, before getting stuck in to building a new website or spending money on Facebook advertising, it's important to recap on the basics:

- 1 Understand your customers; how to identify them, who they are, what they want and how to reach them.
- 2 Understand where your sales come from and how your visitors currently book/would prefer to book, given the option.
- 3 Understand the different platforms your customers use (those you're already attracting, and those you wish to attract). For example: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TripAdvisor, a particular website, Pinterest, Google+, Groupon, Google, etc).



Current Barriers to Increasing Digital Sales

Every business knows they should spend a proportion of their time on digital marketing and we all want revenue from digital sales. Businesses that participated in the Real Ceredigion Experiences project told us the following:





Addressing These Barriers

Time

This is a tough one. Ultimately, it depends on the importance of maximising digital sales to your business. Can you afford not to spend the time getting it right? Are there people (staff or family members) to help? A larger project such as overhauling your website can be a big job, but consider if you're doing that work yourself or employing a website/online marketing company.

Develop a social media diary/plan for the year – put in national and local events and use them to highlight your business. Social media need only take 5-10 mins per day, or every other day, depending on the frequency of your posts. Consider a control-panel such as HootSuite® to load items across your social media channels if you're struggling, although be mindful that it's better to be responsive to any replies, which can be difficult if all your posts are automated.

Expertise/Knowledge

Talk to organisations such as MWT Cymru that can give advice and point you in the right direction. Consider advice from other professionals as appropriate; do your own research online to get better informed (the Chartered Institute of Marketing is a great resource); and look at training and workshops available from Business Wales, Superfast Business Wales, Tourism Growth, etc.

Limited Digital Knowledge

Businesses told us that social media, websites and video were some of the main areas they struggled with. If you find video is 'a hassle' – shop around for the best package/software to take, edit and upload video effectively.

Where's the benefit?

If done correctly, you should be able to track the benefit to your business. Check with your customers what platforms they are using e.g. younger consumers are tending to use Instagram over Facebook. Focus your limited time and resources into the most appropriate channels.

Confidence

This comes with time, as you become more proactive and trial some of the various selling techniques. You are not alone – MWT is here to help and support you.



Business Feedback: the Key Considerations

MWT collated feedback from businesses participating in the Real Ceredigion Experiences Project (you can see a list of those businesses on pages 18 and 19 with their testimonials), which shared their thoughts on the following areas:



THE PROS AND CONS OF ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEMS



THE IMPORTANCE OF SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION



THE ESSENTIALS OF A STRONG COMPANY BRAND



AVOIDING WEBSITE PITFALLS



THE KEY REASONS TO UTILISE VIDEO CONTENT



THE TOP TIPS FOR BUILDING VIDEO CONTENT



THE LIKELY DIGITAL TRENDS IN 2019

**Do their experiences mirror your own?
What can you learn from them?**



The pros and cons of Online Booking Systems

Pros

- 1 You can maximise reservations.
- 2 You get paid more quickly.
- 3 Your business is open 24/7.
- 4 You are not tied to a phone.
- 5 Add-ons are easy.
- 6 You get valuable insights into your business.
- 7 Managing your time is easier.

Additional MWT Pointers

- 1 MWT always advocate having online booking/ticketing, whether you sell directly on your own website, or via another website/s, or both.
- 2 Keep in mind that more direct sales means less online travel agency (OTA) commission, and often a closer relationship with your customers.
- 3 The costs of booking systems vary. If you're new to online selling it's important to thoroughly research the options and if you're unsure, avoid tying yourself in. Look for pay as you go options, free trial periods, and any promotional discounts.
- 4 Consider any conflict between your reception/booking office taking bookings over the phone and online bookings – this needn't be an issue if well managed.
- 5 Cost of taking payments online – this is different to the cost for the booking system itself. Costs vary. Questions to ask yourself include:
 - Do you have your own PDQ machine?
 - Are you taking credit or debit cards, or both?

Cons

- 1 You need reasonable internet connection.
- 2 There is a cost for the service.
- 3 You might get a lot of new customers which is time-consuming and may stretch you if you are a small business.
- 4 You need to choose the correct platform and ePayment solution to bring you the type of customers relevant to your business.

- Is your business seasonal? – Is a PAYG (Pay As You Go) option better for the volume of sales you'll be processing?
- Pay out times – how soon will they pay into your account and will this affect your cash flow?
- Consider whether you want to allocate a certain number of tickets to walk-ins on the day, and therefore stop people booking online for same day tours/activities.
- Will tickets be numbered to avoid misuse?
- Do you have a limited number of places?

N.B. MWT members benefit from discounts and special rates on the Guestlink booking system, and PDQ and /or ePayment card processing options. Talk to us about channel management – if you're concerned about high commission charges imposed by some OTAs e.g. TripAdvisor, we can discuss ways of minimising these.



The Importance of Search Engine Optimisation

This is simply the name for activity that attempts to improve your search engine ranking – we all want to be on the first page of Google!

- 1 When you are a new business with a new website this is difficult. Combat with news, adding meta tags, and keep content fresh.
- 2 Quality counts. Content is King. Google uses algorithms which assess quality through user experiences and looks for complete phrases (voice queries tend to be complete phrases e.g. what's the best place to eat in Aberystwyth?).
- 3 Google looks for strong text based on SEO. Content has to be targeted to a given topic or keyword.
- 4 Make sure your site is mobile-friendly and responsive. If it isn't – get your site re-designed.



Search

My perfect break in Wales





The Essentials of a Strong Brand

“A brand is not a logo, it’s a consistent attitude and a carefully managed experience that meets or surpasses consumer expectations.” (CIM)

- 1 Consistency – every word, every photo, every video, every interaction with your customer supports your brand, so make sure it is right.
- 2 Customers have a psychological need to feel closely connected to you and want caring, affectionate relationships. Make them feel part of your family.
- 3 Stay flexible to be relevant. If your current tactics aren't working, pilot something else. Use all the social media platforms that your customers use.
- 4 Thank your loyal customers who give social media reviews, either in person or via a gift e.g. discount. They will spread the word and be your best ambassadors.
- 5 Be aware of your competitors... it can be time-consuming, but watch what they do and be ahead of them.
- 6 Don't be tripped up by TripAdvisor. Be on the ball when it comes to replying to TripAdvisor comments – but don't just reply to the negative... acknowledge the positive feedback too.
- 7 Build followers on social media – so your customers become part of an on-going community.



Key Reasons to Utilise Video Content

Now more than ever, video provides essential content that could help you to exceed your sales targets. Here are a few reasons why we suggest video should be a priority.

- 1 Viewing Videos is expected to make the largest volume of consumer internet traffic.
- 2 In order of preference, consumers watch customer testimonials, tutorials and demonstration videos when making purchasing decisions – can you video customers participating in your activities? (with their permission, of course). Activity providers – can you video your instructor giving them a tutorial about how to do something?
- 3 Around 65% of business not using video say they intend to start using it.
- 4 Over 50% of marketing professionals name video as the type of content with the best ROI (Return-On-Investment).
- 5 Videos added to an email can increase click through rates significantly.
- 6 Personalising video content means you can give customers what they want in a format they prefer.
- 7 Content marketing is about creating interesting content people actually want to engage with.



Avoiding Website Pitfalls

A series of checks for your own site – if your website meets any of these criteria you need to address the problem.

Here's what businesses had to say:

- 1 Your site takes too long to load. The vast majority of visitors to your site will only wait a maximum of three seconds.
- 2 It isn't mobile friendly. Get it sorted if yours isn't.
- 3 The site isn't updated regularly. Use a decent CMS (content management system) which allows you to change and update easily.
- 4 Not user friendly. It offers poor navigation and doesn't offer calls to action.
- 5 Excessive pop-ups. Use them in moderation and use strong copy so that customers enjoy what they are reading.
- 6 Multi-media that auto plays. So annoying!
- 7 Disorientating animations. Leave them out.
- 8 Naff stock photos. Employ a professional to take them to your brand values.
- 9 Contact form but no contact information.
- 10 Missing social sharing buttons on content.
- 11 Internal links aren't user-friendly or go to the wrong page.
- 12 Image sliders take forever to load. The longer it takes to load, the more likely your site will be abandoned by the user.

As travel and tourism businesses/ destinations we are lucky that the stunning landscapes and scenery of Wales lend themselves so well to video. We can describe our amazing views to visitors – or we can show them. Why not do both? Pick up your smartphone and have a go yourself. Consider getting a professional to help, depending on the nature of your business and what you want to get across.

Remember to ask your visitors/guests to share their own videos and photo content and ensure they know how to find you on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TripAdvisor etc.





The Top Tips for Building Video Content

- 1 Tell a story... appeal to your customers needs and desires.
- 2 Create a stimulating and eye-catching title if appropriate.
- 3 Focus on the mission and less on the product.
- 4 Don't be boring.
- 5 Make videos mobile-friendly.
- 6 Display your website address in the video.
- 7 Educate your audience.
- 8 Use atmospheric music... be aware of copyright.
- 9 Use video content generated by customers... get them to do your testimonials as a powerful selling-tool.
- 10 Include a call to action which invites the reader to take further action such as signing up to a newsletter or visiting a website.



The likely Digital Trends in 2019

And so, you can be ahead of the rest...

- 1 The Rise of smart speakers such as Amazon Alexa, Google Home and Apple HomePod. Content is being written so it can be more easily searched for by voice command.
- 2 Internet will overtake television. More time will be spent online than watching TV.
- 3 Social media will be integrated into other services.
- 4 Live video will keep growing.
- 5 Chatbots will become the norm. Love them or hate them, chatbots will enable users to select food, choose a new phone or book a hotel room without the hassle of downloading an app.



Additional MWT Pointers: Social Media

One of the biggest challenges faced by businesses is translating social media engagement into sales.

Facebook's Ads Manager can be used to organise, optimise and measure adverts. In addition, social media monitoring tools can be used to look for specific key words, such as brand mentions.

Ensure your website link is on your Facebook page. You could also consider setting up a Facebook group in order to generate sale opportunities. For example, an attraction might want to create a group for visitors attending a specific event, to share updates or post 'exclusive' content. A heritage railway might want to have a group for steam train enthusiasts to 'meet' online and discuss all things trains related. So take the time to consider how Facebook can be used more effectively for your business.

Sales prospecting through Twitter or Instagram can also be effective. Start by outlining key words that your prospects might be using and search these, e.g. #visitmidwales #realmidwales. Follow your prospects and listen to that they're saying. Don't simply post about last minute deals, special offers or availability. Think about how to use social media to build your brand, e.g. an activity provider offering horse riding could tweet a photograph from the stables, or a view from the top of a horse.

Social media ads can also be an effective way of converting new followers into customers. If you have a link in your post to your website, ensure that you measure how many people are clicking on it.



*Please be mindful of GDPR with any aspect of digital marketing/selling. Further information about GDPR is available to MWT members. Please contact us for advice.

Digital Marketing Plan Template

Overview: a summary of your aims/objectives, strategy and tactics

- **Business objectives:**
your digital marketing plan must deliver on your overall business objectives, so what are they? e.g. increasing ticket sales by 10% over the next 12 months (this is measurable and time bound).
- **Marketing objectives and strategy:**
your digital marketing plan must support your overall marketing plan for the business.

Don't worry if you only have one marketing plan that includes digital as part of it – every business is different. In this part of the plan you would include key information about your target markets, competition, and how you want to position yourself in the market.

Audit: this looks at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

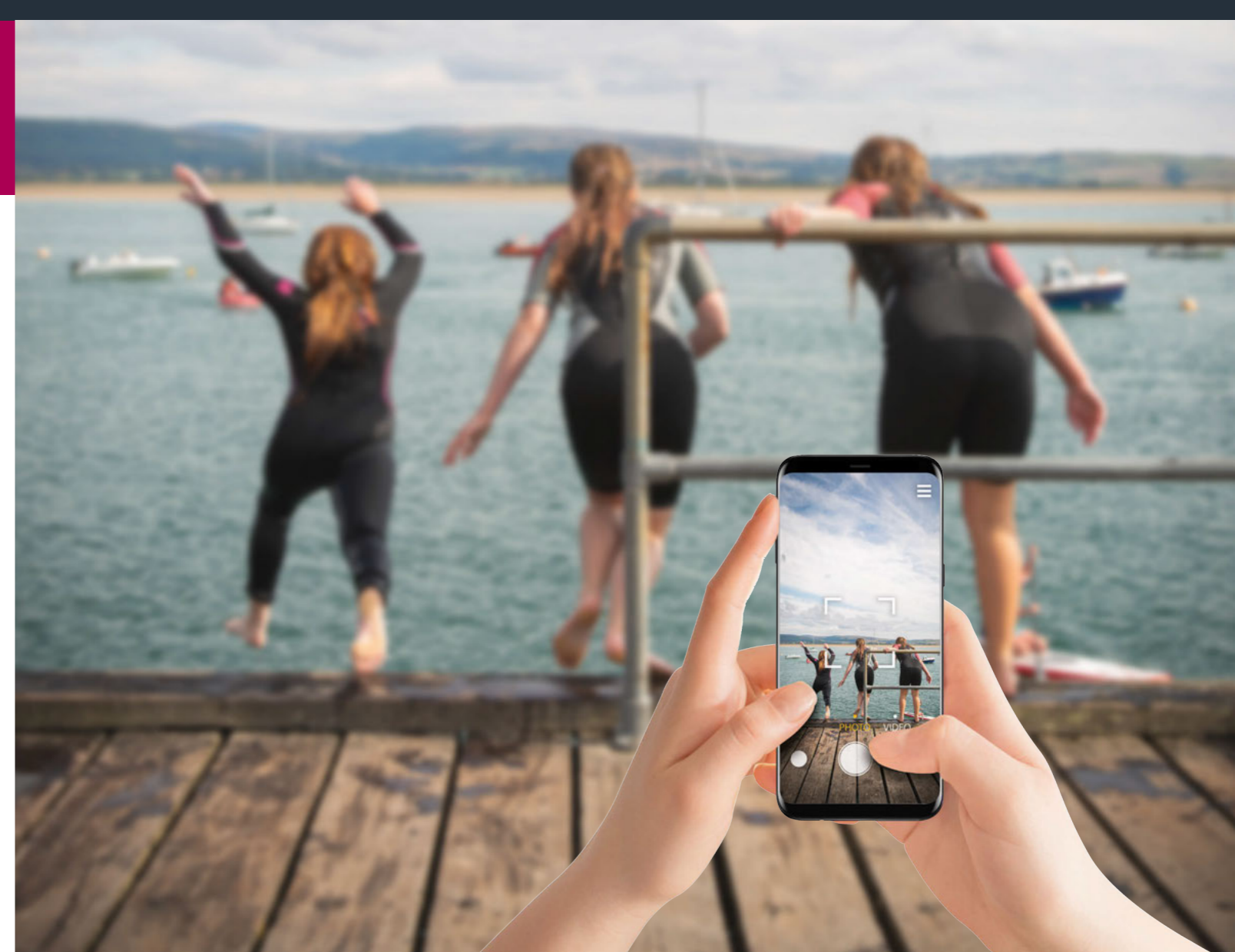
- **Tip:**
strengths and weaknesses are internal to your business/controlled by you, e.g. 'we have good engagement on social media'/'we lack time to update our website as much as we'd like.'

Opportunities and threats are external to your business, e.g. the impact of legislation such as GDPR or availability of WiFi in your area.

- **Customers:**
the audit also looks in detail at your customers – who is online that you'd like to target, how are they buying online?
- **Competitors:**
what are their strengths and weaknesses? What can you learn from them?
- **Tip:**
sign up to your competitor's e-newsletters and keep abreast of what they're doing. Look at their website and see how/where they're selling themselves.
- You can bring the results of this audit together in a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats).

Strategy objectives

- **Keep objectives SMART:**
Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time bound. This will help you to measure them later on e.g. we will attain 50 more Twitter followers in January.



Plan

- **Segmentation:**
how have you 'segmented' your audience?
- **Targeting:**
how will you target the different segments of your audience?
- **Positioning:**
how do you want to position yourself in the market place? i.e. how do you want customers to perceive you?

For example, as an all-year-round visitor attraction/great for young kids/ specialising in niche tours.

Digital marketing mix

- **Product:**
can the product you're selling be digitised? E.g. Can you add value by selling tickets online?
- **Price:**
consider different options here. For example: could you release a certain number of tickets at an early-bird rate to reward loyal customers? Could you present a package price for different elements, or do you want to ask customers to contact you for a bespoke quote? – consider the pros and cons of different options, and how you can add value to customers.

- **Promotion:** think about what to say, who to say it to, when to say it, how to say it and where to say it. Develop a social media calendar around event dates e.g. Valentine's Day, St David's Day.

You could consider paid options, such as Google Adwords, or how to improve you SEO ranking organically with improved content on your website. Think about how you want your customer to feel when they read, watch and engage with your content.

- **Place:** are there any additional online channels you can utilise to increase the convenience and choice of where customers can find you?

- **People:** is there any area of face-to-face interaction that could be complemented or streamlined by being digitised? One example could be chat bots on your website. Be careful here. The answer might well be 'No'!

- **Process:** can the process of buying online be made quicker or easier for your customers? Try to think objectively. You could always ask others to try using your website, or online booking system, or review your social media profile to provide feedback.

Family and friends might feel under pressure to say nice things, so try to garner objective opinions from within your target markets and from industry peers.

- **Physical evidence:** make sure that your social media pages, video content, website etc, are all up-to-date with what you're doing off-line in the 'real' world. Testimonials and reviews can also be useful to reassure customers. Ensure your website has an SSL certificate.

Implementation

- **Resources:** do you have the skills and man power to implement your digital plan? Do you need to outsource anything? Do you have the time? What is the required budget and is this readily available? Do you already have the technology/software? And if not, when do you need it by?

Control

- **Measurement:** how are you going to measure whether your plan has been a success? What are your KPIs? (Key Performance Indicators).

For example, you might use Google Analytics to measure website traffic.



Real Ceredigion Experiences: Participants | Testimonials

"During our participation in the Real Ceredigion Experiences research programme, we developed a range of responses for TripAdvisor reviews and social media comments, so we have content to hand. Our video now includes more laughter and happiness so that the customer experience is better demonstrated. It is so useful to talk with other local businesses in order to learn from them. We are tailoring our digital sales platform to be better suited to our business and enable a better – and easier customer experience."

Rhydian Evans, Adventure Beyond |
www.adventurebeyond.co.uk

"My website is being re-designed to consider search engine optimisation and branding, and I will be improving my payment systems and my social media content, particularly Instagram and Facebook. Video and photography are key to people understanding how beautiful the Welsh countryside is and using my business to explore its beauty, culture and history."

Richard Smith, Cambrian Safaris |
www.cambriansafaris.co.uk

"I have developed a much greater understanding of the benefits of social media and video content and the need to develop a better marketing strategy. Don't be afraid to make radical changes!"

Steve Hartley, Dolphin Boat Surveys |
www.dolphinboattrips.co.uk

"We have now set up a Google+ and Instagram accounts to develop our business reach. We corrected our metatags and links on our website to optimise SEO – we learned about it during our research and got our web designer to show us how to do it. In addition, we are using Facebook marketing campaigns and video to boost our reach to potential and existing customers."

Anwen Elias and Scott Thompsett,
Crys Melyn Cycling | www.crysmelyn.co.uk

"Such a helpful programme which has encouraged me to develop video content, set up a YouTube channel as well as Hootsuite to manage social media. I also learned the importance of changing my website to be mobile-friendly and to let the customers do the talking for you, through their online reviews!"

Julie Akkermans, Cae Hir Gardens |
www.caehirgardens.com

"Researching and receiving mentoring through Real Ceredigion Experiences programme has made us more focused in providing relevant and personable social media content. We are planning in a better way and this gives us more credibility with our target audiences."

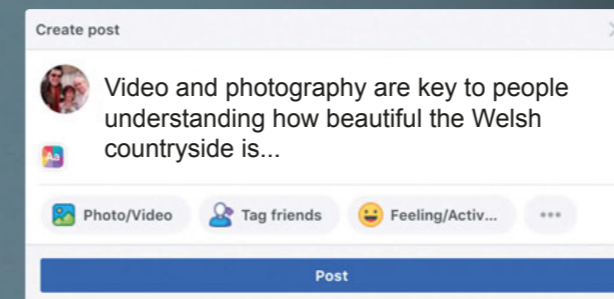
Holly Owen, Ceredigion Museum |
www.ceredigionmuseum.wales

"We are upgrading our website to include more video and better pictures as well as focusing on search engine optimisation. We are reacting to TripAdvisor and social media comments in a more organised way. We have a great product but it was not reflected in our marketing. We are working to ensure that it now is."

Dafydd Rees-Evans, Penrhos Park |
www.penrhospark.com

"A content calendar for social media is a great idea and we are boosting Facebook posts. We have learned that the first 5 seconds of a video are vital in capturing viewer's attention and we are getting our new website up and running using all the advice we have discovered through Real Ceredigion Experiences."

Huw Evans, Tregaron Trotting Club |
www.facebook.com/pg/tregaron.trotting



Part of our role at MWT Cymru is to empower the tourism industry in Wales to adopt new ways of working and harness the opportunities of doing business digitally. By supporting you, we aim to increase the amount of tourism product available to purchase online, through ticketing, packaging and the effective use of online sales channels.

If you have any questions about this starter guide, or would like further help and support, please contact us.

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Welsh version available

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