

Using digital for events – some ideas

This document outlines a single example of how digital can add value at every stage of a public diplomacy process. Opportunities will vary depending on where you are and the exact activity you are carrying out, but hopefully the ideas given here will inspire you to think more broadly about how digital can help – beyond simply tweeting a link.

Objective

Before you lay a finger on your mouse, you need to agree an objective – why are we going to go to all the effort of planning and running an event? Ideally it should be measurable. We all know that measuring can be difficult in the world of diplomacy, but you should at least have a clear focus on what you are trying to achieve and how you'll know that you've achieved it.

For this example our objective will be “to understand issues affecting British businesses trying to enter the Turkish market, and begin to address some of those issues”.

Audience

Now you have to be absolutely clear on who your target audience is. This impacts everything from the agenda to the promotion and the nature of your comms work, so make sure you are clear from the outset.

In this case it is likely to be British companies who want to do business in Turkey and local business owners looking to partner with British companies.

Preparation

Next we need to define our content. But instead of rolling out the standard set of messages, why not do something different? Why not ask your target audience what they would want from an event like this? Here are some ways you can do that:

- **LinkedIn** - use your personal profiles on LinkedIn to join and engage with Groups on the platform where business leaders are already meeting. In these groups you can openly say that the Embassy is thinking of hosting an event for entrepreneurs and you want their thoughts on what issues to cover. You can also target British business owners and Turkish ones and find out exactly what the issues are for both.
- **Twitter** – you could run a Twitter Q&A with the HMA or Head of UKTI inviting business leaders to post questions about doing business in Turkey and in the UK. From this you can gather intelligence about the issues facing businesses in both countries.
- **Blog** – use your HMA's blog to post an article about doing business in Turkey and ask people to leave their thoughts in the comments. It could raise some interesting questions

With these 3 activities you can start to tailor an agenda that would suit your target audience. You will also get a sense of how welcome such a seminar might be and might also start to identify people who could participate in the event – either as attendees or as speakers.

Organisation

So you know your objective, you know your audience and you now have a clear idea of what that audience wants to hear from you at your event. Next step is to start organising things.

And one big recommendation here is to use a tool like [Eventbrite](#). This is a free online tool that enables you to create an event page where people can sign-up and in doing so give you information about themselves – email address, size of company etc etc.

It's [not the only tool out there](#), but it's the best one we have found to date and is being increasingly used by other Government departments including the [Government Communications Network](#) (GCN).

Promotion

This is the most familiar part for many of us, but there are still new ways to look at it. One thing I would stress is the importance of using the right channels, in the right way. Don't simply write a news item for the web and then link to it from Twitter and Facebook. Start by thinking about where your target audience are likely to be.

You've already spoken to them on LinkedIn, so go back into those groups and follow up by telling people you're running the event and that the agenda is based on their input. That will make them receptive to spreading the word as well as attending.

Likewise use Twitter and your blog. If you like, you can use Twitter mentions, DMs or replies to directly target people who asked questions in your Q&A. Maybe ask your speakers to post guest blogs in the run up to the event so that you can whet people's appetites.

And remember, you shouldn't expect your target audience to come to you – you have to go out and find them. Place content in front of your audience on the sites they are likely to visit. Ask trade websites to republish your blogs, ask your LinkedIn contacts to share with their networks.

If you have business people on Facebook, then by all means target them. But remember that Facebook favours visual and audio material. So how about a short video talking about the Turkish market with an advert for your event at the end?

Delivery

It's tempting to think that once people start walking through your door you can stop with the digital work and focus on the face-to-face stuff. But there's still lots that digital can offer on the day of the event.

The most common is using a [Twitter hashtag](#) to live tweet during the event. This is a great way to allow people outside the room to see what is going on, and also to amplify the message. If you tweet, you'll be reaching all your followers. But if your attendees tweet as well, they'll be reaching all of their followers and you reach is multiplied considerably.

But it doesn't have to be just text. If you can, why not encourage people to take pictures and share those? Instagram is all the rage, but simply sharing via Twitter or [TwitPic](#) will do the job.

And why just broadcast via Twitter? Why not broadcast the event itself? Google gives you free live broadcasting through [Hangouts on Air](#). Why not use that to stream key speeches, or your round table discussions? Or just video them for broadcasting later. Which brings us to....

After the event

How often do we run events and then simply move on to the next project once everyone has gone home? Or at best we maybe write a new item for the website with 30 pictures of people giving speeches and a list of all the people who attended? That's a shame, because there is so much more we could do.

You could start by publishing all your presentations to [Slideshare](#) so that everyone who didn't make the seminar can still get to see them.

Then you could edit down those videos into a short 2.5min video on the highlights of the event – then package that up with your press release and tweet it all out to your media contacts so they can put it on their news site.

And you can build on the outcomes of the seminar. You can produce a working paper that you can publish as a publication on the website. Or even better make it a collaborative document that your contacts can feed into on an ongoing basis – the FCO used [Read and Comment](#) on their [Overseas Territories Consultation](#) last year.

Want to drum up involvement in that collaborative process? Back to LinkedIn and your Groups – where by now you are becoming a key influencer because you're so active.

Your HMA should almost certainly blog to go through the outcomes of the event and why it was a valuable exercise to go through. And if you can get some of the speakers to write guest blogs as follow ups, so much the better.

Monitoring success

We talked about making the objective of your event measurable. So now you need to find out how well it worked.

Your first step will be to monitor activity on Twitter. Use a tool like [Tweetreach](#) to see how many people you reached over the course of your event and its planning. This will also give you some insights into RTs and audience engagement.

Facebook insights (assuming you used Facebook) will also give you some good stats about which updates were more popular and got most circulation. But we could also do more detailed analysis.

You can use [SurveyMonkey](#) to run a survey of all the people who attended and ask them what they thought of the event. You could even go further and start regular public surveys with the same tool to monitor business sentiment to doing business in Turkey over the next 12-24 months. Changes won't be just down to your event, but you'll be monitoring results all the same.

You should also monitor the comments on any blogs you posted. This is especially useful if you can do before and after comparisons that may show changes in attitudes or opinions of your audience either side of the event.

And once again, go back into your LinkedIn groups, ask people what they think – did they hear about the event, did they see the tweets, do they feel any benefit. It's not just about numbers.

Feed it in

And of course, everything you have learnt, heard and understood throughout the process should feed into your policy discussions and reports to ensure that you continue to shape and adapt your policies around genuine needs and a real understanding of the issues.