



Should you be scheduling or automating your #socialmedia?

By Lilach Bullock

Social media scheduling tools have always been the subject of hot debate – should you or shouldn't you use them? Are they against everything that social media stands for? Are they just a machine with no personality?

There's always been a lot of controversy surrounding scheduling and automation tools. Ultimately social media is about engagement, talking with your audience directly, and building strong, long lasting relationships ideally in "real" time.

I've personally always been a supporter of scheduling and automation tools. But, as with everything in life, they should only be used in moderation. There is no substitute for real-time and proactive engagement. This is a key part of social media and should be incorporated into all **social media marketing strategies**. However, when scheduling tools are paired with real engagement, they can be of huge help and can affect the results you achieve. After all, how else could you reach your audience 24/7, especially if you want to reach a worldwide audience, or your business only has a few employees that can manage your social media?



Scheduling tools, if used correctly and in the right context should complement your social media activities. Not only are they great for being able to reach and connect with your audience whilst "you are sleeping" but they also help you to be more effective and productive. Many of them also provide analytics so you can see how successful each of your updates are as well as a plethora of other features to help you maximise your results. For example, knowing what times are the most effective to reach the broadest number of people in your digital communities.

It's only when scheduling and automation tools are abused that results suffer and things go wrong (i.e. used as the main method of conversation on social media and rarely combined with real-time engagement). But in most cases, this type of behaviour will only get you so far on social media. People have no reason to engage with you if all your tweets or posts are automated with the same tweets going out at the same time, with the same links every day or every few hours – even those new to social media can spot this a mile off. And in the end it also defeats the main purpose of social media – connecting with people and developing relationships with them so that in turn they like and trust you.

Top tips for scheduling

1. Create a social media publishing schedule. This should include which network, what the update is, relevant links and hashtags, days and timings. Not only will having a schedule help you be more organised but it's also a useful way to be able to go back and measure which updates

are bringing you the most likes/clicks/engagement etc.

2. Don't schedule questions if you're then not around to answer them as and when people respond. Questions are a great way to increase engagement and should be done in real-time.

3. Whilst it can be tempting to send an automated welcome message to a new follower to save time we would recommend that you avoid doing this. A personalised message that shows you've taken the time to look at their Twitter handle will bring you much better results than simply sending "thanks for following us, check us out at xyz".

4. When scheduling don't send the same thing out at the same time on the same schedule every day. Mix things up a little so that you can test what performs best and also so it doesn't look like you are simply sending out the same updates and / or using the same scheduling pattern each and every day.

5. Think about the timings and frequency of how and when you schedule. Each social network should have a different plan – for example on Twitter you may schedule more updates than on Facebook. Likewise, an update on Facebook may not be relevant or provide as much value to your Twitter followers.



6. Ensure that you keep up with current events, industry news and trending topics in real-time, and share what you think is surprising, fresh or newsworthy for your industry and also for your customers and target audience.
7. Join conversations in real-time: don't schedule them.
8. Schedule your updates to post just before or after the hour. Often people finish a meeting before the hour starts; so often will quickly check their social media before (or if it runs over, after).

Scheduling tools

Below is our list of scheduling and automation tools that we use and recommend:

1. **Hootsuite** is a popular social media marketing dashboard that provides a host of features. Their scheduling is easy to use and allows you to bulk schedule too. You can also auto schedule at the most optimum time as well as respond to mentions and direct messages.
2. **SocialOomph** is a useful scheduling tool to use if you want to send recurring scheduled updates. You can also set up a welcome message to new followers.
3. **Bufferapp** is a cool scheduling tool that allows you to schedule updates or send them at the most optimum time. It also has a useful feature, which allows you to shuffle your updates.
4. **IFTTT** is a very clever and powerful automation tool. Not only does it help you share updates across social media but it can also remind you to back-up your spreadsheets and so much more! It has lots of "recipes" and "ingredients" (which you can create or use others), which sets off triggers. Each trigger then performs an action.
5. **Twuffer** is easy to use and simply allows you to schedule your tweets for the future. A useful scheduling tool for Twitter beginners.

Scheduling and automation tools can be a valuable part of your social media marketing. As we have mentioned above, they do not substitute and shouldn't be

used in place of real-time engagement.

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About the Author

Highly regarded on the world speaker circuit, Lilach Bullock has graced Forbes and Number 10 Downing Street with her presence! She's hugely connected and highly influential serial entrepreneur – the embodiment of Digital Intelligence.

Listed in Forbes as one of the top 20 women social media power influencers and likewise as one of the top social media power influencers, Lilach is one of the most dynamic personalities in the social media market, she actively leverages ethical online marketing for her clients and for Comms Axis.

A business owner, social media consultant, internet mentor and genuine digital guru, Lilach is consulted by journalists and regularly quoted in newspapers, business publications and marketing magazines (including Forbes, The Telegraph, Wired, Prima Magazine, The Sunday Times, Social Media Today and BBC Radio 5 Live). What's more, her books have achieved No 1 on Amazon for Sales and Marketing and Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

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