



Digital Marketing for Stud Farms - Made Easy

*Learn how to make the
most of online opportunities
for you and your farm.*

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WORKING FOR IRISH BREEDERS



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Foreword & Acknowledgements

As the move away from traditional media continues apace, the use of social media tools for reaching customers, building relationships, and becoming a recognised Industry name is essential. Having a Website, Blog, Twitter and Facebook profile is not sufficient anymore, without the knowledge of how to use them for your business!

The advent of Social Media has seen a revolutionary shift in the culture of the Bloodstock Industry. Social Media provides equal business opportunities for all sectors of the Bloodstock Industry, which is vital in these challenging times.

This guide is our attempt to decode these technologies and tries to identify the most relevant information to help you on your journey into the world of Digital Marketing.

We hope you find the booklet valuable and informative.

We would like to thank all the attendees for their full and attentive participation on the day. We would also like to thank the team at ITBA for their invitation to present and their excellent support.

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The opinions and examples expressed are subjective views of the Equisoft staff and were made in the context of the seminar only.

The Equisoft Team

EQUISOFT LIVE

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Websites

A **domain name** is the technical name for a website address such as itba.com can be registered from as little as €10.00 and an annual subscription from €60 upwards is payable to the 'host', the company providing the website facilities. Some companies will update the site for you at a charge, but most sites are very easy to update from your own PC. A recommended host is www.blacknight.com and it is also recommended that you purchase as many domain names as possible, for example joebloggs.com, joebloggs.ie, etc. All of the domain names can be linked to open on the single site, making it easier for visitors to find your site and preventing competitors from using your name on sites elsewhere. Websites also provide up to ten email addresses or more depending on the chosen package, enabling you to be contacted @joebloggs.ie, etc.

A run through of popular equine websites reveals some of the main points to feature as well as some pitfalls to avoid. Among the recommended sites to view are www.irishracing.com, www.sportinglife.com, www.theirishfield.ie and www.summerhill.co.za, all of which are clearly laid out, easy to navigate and provide details of interest to encourage more visitors to the site. The aim of all sites should be to keep visitors returning to the site on a regular basis, in order to promote new products, services and news.

Some of the features that might discourage visitors can be viewed at www.sportingpost.co.za, a site considered by some to be too busy, making it difficult to navigate, confusing and difficult to find news and updates.

While many NH trainers in the UK and Ireland have embraced new technology and set up very good websites, very few Flat trainers have yet to do so. Micheal Halford's website is a good example and worth visiting, www.michaelhalford.com.

A look at Richard Hannon's site, www.richardhannonracing.co.uk, shows how useful and easy it is to provide direct links to the Racing Post, imbedding Racing Post information, race replays and form into the personal site. This can be easily achieved by copying and pasting the links provided by the site.

Another very useful feature of a website is a 'blog'. This allows the user to write comments on a regular basis, encouraging interaction and feedback, which in turn encourages visitors to visit the site frequently. Some very good examples of this can be seen at www.hayleyturner.com, www.irishnationalstud.ie (Osblog) and www.tinnakill.com.

Analytical Feedback

While a warning must be given that Facebook personal profile cannot be analysed and any message suggesting you can check the number of visitors to your Facebook personal profile is bogus and fraudulent, there are some very useful sites providing analytical information on standard websites. By visiting www.google.ie/analytics, for example, you can obtain an overview of the visitors to your website, providing an insight into the frequency of visits and from which countries and regions the visitors are from. This can be of use in targeting specific audiences. The 'bounce' rate is also useful to view. It will be high if visitors only visit the homepage then go, but will be low if they spend time on the site and visit more pages. This is a free service and Google provide a code to copy and paste within your website.

Security

With websites and emails comes security issues, but careful choice of passwords can prevent problems. Computer-based software can be set up to crack passwords in minutes, so the more simple your password the more you are at risk. As an example, a password of only six characters, all in lowercase only, will take just ten minutes to crack. A password of six characters, in a mix of uppercase and lowercase, will take ten hours. If it also contains numerals and symbols (such as *, #, @) it will take 18 days.

However, a password of nine characters, all lowercase, will take four months to crack and if it includes uppercase, too, it will take up to 178 years. Throw in some numerals and symbols and the time taken to crack it increases to 44,530 years. Avoid using dictionary words, which are easily detected in malicious software, as well as names, places or football teams. Try using a pass phrase instead of just a password. Keep it simple so that you can easily remember it, to avoid having to write it down. Some useful tips for creating safe passwords can be found at www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Password-You-Can-Remember. There are also two useful sites for managing passwords, if you are unable to remember them. <http://keepass.info/> enables you to store your passwords safely on your PC, while <http://lastpass.com/> provides an online service for password storage.

Never send credit card or bank details by email, as emails are unprotected and carry the possibility of being read by unknown individuals. Malicious software has been designed to recognise credit card digits and intercept emails. When entering confidential details on websites always look for the security symbol of a padlock, which shows that the site is fully encrypted and safeguarded against fraud.

Search Engines & S.E.O.

Cookies are a small text file designed to uniquely identify visitors to websites and to track visits. They are mostly harmless and are easily deleted.

Email scams are usually easily recognisable from their subject line, offering free money or 'phishing' for personal bank details, and should be deleted without opening. Never open attachments from unknown emails as these could contain a virus.

Search Engine Optimisation or **S.E.O.** is the process of tailoring your website to achieve a better result when someone searches for a key word or phrase. Search engines are programs that search documents on the Internet for specified keywords and return a list of the documents where the keywords were found. Web Search Engines include Google, Yahoo and Bing. These programs can be called Spiders or Crawlers and can index web pages, assigning them a rank based on the content.

The top item that affects an SEO is the number of times a search term, such as 'stud', 'yearling' or 'farm', appears in a web page. It will be better ranked if it appears within the heading or leading paragraph of a page. The number of links from other related websites will also raise your ranking. Try to include relevant links to key industry sites on your own website in return for a link to your own site appearing on those websites. Links can be easily imbedded into your website and, when clicked, will open in a new browser page, so will not close your own site to your visitor.

Be aware that your content should still be reader-friendly and do not attempt to overload it with key search terms. You will receive negative ranking for the inclusion of too many key words and also for any paid links from '**link farms**' – non-related sites that charge to link to sites.

A '**static**' site, that is one on which the content does not change, will be indexed less frequently and will have much lower ranking due to limited content. A '**dynamic**' website, where the content is updated regularly and there are several different pages to the site, will be indexed more frequently and, due to greater content, has a much higher chance of containing key words. A dynamic site has a far greater chance of appearing near the top of search engines than a static site. When '**googling**' or searching for a site, most people look only at the first page of results, therefore it is important to ensure your website is up among those first results.

Ways to improve your position on a search engine include improving inbound links from other reputable industry related sites, creating new content regularly, and using a Blog to easily create fresh content. The more pages on a website, the more that

Blogging

are indexed. Provide share options for social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit.com, Digg.com and Delicious. The codes are provided free from the sites and can be easily imbedded in your own website. It will also help to choose a domain name that has a key word associated with your business when first registering your website.

Some content is not index able for keywords. Flash is not index able, so it is advisable to provide alternative content. Images cannot be indexed, so use tags and appropriate descriptions for image names, which can be indexed. If posting PDFs to your website, use those that can be indexed.

A **blog** is basically a journal/daily diary that is available on a website and the activity of updating a blog is '**blogging**'. A person who keeps a blog is a '**blogger**'. Some of the most popular blogs on the Internet, such as various news and current affairs sites, receive up to 54 million visitors a month. Very popular and well-made blogs in Ireland include www.irishnationalstud.ie/news and www.tinnakill.com/blog.

Blogging can be a useful way to humanise your business. It is more informal than other websites and allows you to write posts in your own voice and give your business a more human face. It reassures prospective customers that there's a 'real person' behind the business who will take care of their needs. It can improve your customer service and allow interactive questions and answers, so that your customers can submit questions and you can answer them. A blog also enables you to provide stud updates and other information relevant to your customers. Prospective customers who see your blog will be encouraged by your commitment to good customer service.

A blog makes it easy for you to post new information on a regular basis and also makes it easy for your visitors to find the information they want. It promotes your products and services and via your blog you can mention new products and provide sales details.

Facebook and Twitter are social media sites that allow you to easily blog. However, blogging through your own website provides better SEO possibilities and is far more Google and search friendly. Facebook posts up other people's news, which pushes your posts further down the page, so a blog on your own website has a much longer shelf life. Similarly, on Twitter tweets are only visible to the average user for less than two weeks.

Another advantage of your own blog is having a captive audience, more links and only having links to your own content, giving you

full control. More importantly, it is easier for you to develop a site that matches your brand rather than a generic Facebook page.

There are many simple ways to begin blogging and blogs can be set up on free-to-use service providers or with paid-for providers. The advantage of paying for a provider is that no adverts will appear on your blog and you can choose themes to match your brand. A free blog site can be easily linked to from own website, while a paid-for site will be better integrated within your own website pages. However, free blog sites are very popular and easy to set up. They are 'patched' for you and are automatically included in blogging networks.

The most popular sites for setting up a free blog are www.blogger.com and www.wordpress.com and setting up is a very simple process with step-by-step instructions, enabling you to be up and running in minutes. The best blogs attract visitors to your site on a regular basis. Ideally they are updated daily, with an enticing short introductory paragraph that grabs attention. They can be more informal than a standard website, with a more casual tone, and can be linked to Facebook and Twitter.

facebook.



Facebook is a social phenomenon that now attracts 845 million active users per month worldwide. 47% of the Irish population and 2.2 million Irish users are active on Facebook, 35% of whom are aged 35 or over. 65% are aged over 25, so it isn't solely a young person's social network.

Creating a page is free and very easy to set up, from www.facebook.com. When first creating a page, you will be asked to choose either a personal account or a business account and you may choose to have both. Care should be taken when switching between the two accounts, so that you keep your personal comments and photos away from your business page. Remember to register, for free, a 'friendly URL', such as www.facebook.com/equisoftlive, to make your page easier to remember and find.

Facebook allows you to post up news from other sites, links to videos and photos, as well as your own comments and photos. You can add, edit and delete posts and your Facebook page can be easily integrated into your own website and other social media sites, by copying and pasting the code freely provided by Facebook.

Basic tips for making Facebook work for your business are to post news frequently, neither too often nor too rarely. Make sure the news is relevant and of interest to your customers. Don't just broadcast information, pose questions and encourage interaction.

twitter



Never ignore feedback and always take the opportunity to engage with people. If feedback is negative try to present a reasonable argument. When uploading photos try to tag as many as possible to increase your audience. The 'tag' option automatically appears when uploading, but can be 'skipped'. Use 'comments' to add to existing posts rather than creating too many new posts. While Twitter can be synchronised with Facebook this isn't recommended, since you will do better to keep both accounts fresh and avoid repetitious content.

Facebook allows you to interact with your own selected audience, while **Twitter** allows you to interact with the whole world. It boasts over 250 million active users, and 350 million tweets per day, with 177,000 active Irish users. It is a very similar medium to group texting. Twitter is an online Social Networking Service and Microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters, known as 'tweets'. Setting up an account is free, quick and easy via www.twitter.com. Try to stick with your 'universal' name so that your website users and Facebook followers can easily find you.

The aim of Twitter is to follow people's updates, thoughts and personal status, while they follow yours. It keeps you connected to your community and industry. It enables you to find new, and old, connections through 'Microblogging'. You may use only 140 characters to tell your story, so your content must be contained in that short snippet of text. A tweet can encourage followers to read articles on a website or blog and can be a useful marketing tool, promoting products and events.

By making a point to comment on and share you can build your Twitter following. You have 'followers' while you are 'following' others. Do not neglect your account and keep it current and up to date. Remember to tweet responsibly – your views are out there for the world to see and are representing your company and product.

Linked in.

Linked In is a professional network boasting over 48 million members from over 200 countries. It is a free to use professional web service to find people you should connect with and is a useful tool to expand your network, by setting up your own profile so that other users can find you. The network of connections you create is full of industry experts willing to share advice if you ask. They can also provide inside connections when job-seeking or creating new business opportunities. It is basically Facebook for professionals and should always be kept professional. It can be easily set up via www.linkedin.com.

The object of Linked In is to keep you connected to former colleagues, current colleagues, and other professional associates. You can send messages to all, or some, of the contacts in your network and send and receive job leads, requests for expertise and other alerts and questions. Through your page you can display your résumé and profile to potential employers, clients or business partners and showcase your skills and professional reputation. Recommendations can be requested from your network connections and displayed on your page. Like all endorsements, recommendations from colleagues and supervisors boost your professional reputation on Linked In and should be approached with the same professional courtesy online as in person.