

Rinks can join highly specific conversations happening on Facebook with a hashtag

By Joe Dysart

Essentially, Facebook allows anyone to categorize a conversation they're having on the social network by using a simple hashtag (#) and keyword in their post.

Log onto Facebook and type #RollerSkating in Facebook's searchbox, for example, and you'll be presented with all the posts on Facebook prefaced with that hashtag/keyword.

Got something to say about the topic? Simply write a post that includes #RollerSkating, and voila, your rink is now part of the conversation.

The feature represents an incredible opportunity for rinks, in that they can use Facebook hashtags to search for highly specific conversations happening on the social network – such as #RollerskatingAustin – and then craft promotional posts highly pertinent to that topic. Plus, rinks can start their own conversations by creating a post, and then coming up with their own hashtag/keyword combo for it, such as #RollerSkatingPartiesAustin.

"Hashtags make it easy to find, follow and join online conversations about the topics that you care about," said Lauren Thomas, campaign manager, Digital Sherpa.com, a Web marketing firm.

Hashtags were of course popularized by Twitter, which in a few years has risen from obscurity to one of the most active and influential social networks on the Web.

Currently, there are countless conversations occurring on Twitter, all neatly organized with the hashtag/keyword system that Facebook has now adopted.

The major difference between the two is that Facebook posts coded with hashtags are not – as they are on Twitter – limited to 140 characters. Indeed, Facebook currently allows posts to be 63,206 characters in length, which includes any images. This represents a major advantage for Facebook, especially among the significant percentage of Web users who are more comfortable expressing themselves with much more than the stingy 140-character splurge of text allowed by Twitter.

Even better: Facebook is also allowing businesses to add hashtags to the ads they run on Facebook. So if you include #TheNextBestThingSinceSlicedBread in your Facebook ad, and someone on Facebook is searching for it, they'll be presented with your ad in Facebook search results. "This will allow advertisers to target more active fans who are actively discussing something -- rather than just belonging to a grouping or having liked a certain page at some point in the past," said Ben



Facebook digerati (computer elite) at work on the social network's Next Big Thing.

Harper, social data and insight manager, Zazzle, a Web marketing agency.

Adds Karyn with a Y, a blogger for ClickByClickSocialMedia.com, "By adding a hashtag to your post you are making it viewable for anyone who searches for that subject – even if they aren't a fan of your page or already connected with you. This gives you the opportunity to access a whole new audience – and you know they are interested in your topic because they have searched for it."

Once you get the hang of using hashtags on Facebook, you'll also be able to leverage the same concept on other social networks that use hashtags to organize conversations, including Instagram (<http://instagram.com>), Tumblr (<https://www.tumblr.com>), Pinterest (<https://www.pinterest.com/>), Google+ (<https://plus.google.com/>), Orkut (<http://www.orkut.com>), Diaspora (<https://diasporafoundation.org>), Tout (<http://www.tout.com/>), Friendfeed (<http://friendfeed.com/>), Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/>), Vine (<https://vine.co>), and Gawker (<http://gawker.com/>).

Here are some best practices for hashtag use on Facebook and other social networks, recommended by social media specialists:

*Get a quick overview on hashtags: The free "Quick Start Guide to Hashtags" (<http://www.hashtags.org/quick-start/>) offers an excellent strategy for getting the most promotional benefit from hashtags.

*Get network-specific guidance: There are a number of guides for hashtag use on a variety of social networks, including how to use hashtags on:

>>Facebook: ([\[book.com/help/587836257914341\]\(http://book.com/help/587836257914341\)\)](https://www.face-</p>
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>>Twitter: (<https://support.twitter.com/entries/49309-what-are-hashtags-symbols#>)

>>Google+: (<https://support.google.com/plus/answer/3120322?hl=en>)

>>Instagram: (<http://blog.instagram.com/post/17674993957/instagram-tips-using-hashtags>)

>>Pinterest: (<http://www.hashtags.org/how-to/marketing-how-to/using-hashtags-on-pinterest/>)

>>Flickr: (<http://www.hashtags.org/news/and-now-comes-flickr-with-hashtags/>)

*Identify which hashtags work best: By using Facebook's free analytics tool, "Insights," you'll be able to track which hashtags are most effective by clicking on the "Reach" column there and studying which posts are getting the highest reach, or reads.

*Use hashtags for branding and selling: You can assign a hashtag to describe your entire presence on Facebook, or a specific product or service.

*Piggyback on trending Facebook hashtags: Facebook now includes a "Trending" box in the upper right corner of your Facebook page, featuring links to topics and hashtags that are trending on the social network. Find a way to piggyback on a trending topic, and your post could be seen by hundreds – or even millions.

*Standardize a hashtag across all networks: You can use the same hashtag/keyword for your rink on all the social networks you promote on (i.e., Facebook, Google+, Pinterest and Twitter).

*Use both capitalization and lower case for hashtag phrases: Don't use

#thisisnoteasyto read. Instead use #ThisIsMuchEasierToRead.

*Don't forget the photos: Any Facebook post – including those with photos – can be coded with a hashtag. Don't forget to include a photo with your post, if at all possible.

*Use hashtags anywhere appropriate in a post: Facebook users often use hashtags at the close of a post, but you also insert a hashtag in the middle of #sentence if the placement seems right to you

*Avoid special characters: Generally speaking, special characters (%^&) don't work with hashtags.

*Don't spam: Sure, it's tempting to promote a rink by including the hashtag #LadyGaGa in your promotional post. But in the end, you'll most likely only tick off a bunch of Gaga fans, and perhaps have to wipe a bunch of glitter off your rink's windows the next day.

*Bring in a pro: Hashtags.org (<http://www.hashtags.org/trending-on-twitter/>) offers a paid, analytics service that continually tracks the most popular hashtags trending on Twitter. For maximum exposure, brands should sign up for hashtag analytics on hashtags.org, which shows the most popular hashtags. By choosing hashtags that are already trending, users who are interested in specific subjects, particularly locally focused and relevant ones, will find a company's social content much easier.

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