COMMUNICATION

Using social media for timber marketing

by Arthur Bletchley

Over 90 % of the UK's population have internet access and 14 % of adult internet users prefer to use social media when communicating with unfamiliar people, according to Ofcom's *The Communications Market Report* (August 2015). So while less than email (41 %) this exceeds face to face meetings, SMS and voice calls. It is thus sensible to consider using social media to help market timber.

I inherited a small rural estate including 175 acres of woodland near Hereford almost 20 years ago and while the more accessible areas had been thinned, the larger part still needed attention. I quickly learnt that improving access for timber lorries and forest machinery within the woods was essential and made that investment. I was fortunate to be able to quarry my own stone for new and improved roads and was then left with an accessible timber stacking area. I obtained felling (thinning) licences and of course my timber contractor had an extensive contact list of interested timber merchants etc. I also harvested email addresses and spammed them to broaden interest: for example exporting ash stumps through Cork, Ireland to hurley stick makers definitely paid dividends. That though was all more than ten years ago.

It is not economic for an estate this size to maintain a contractor and his machinery permanently on site, thus thinning will be cyclical. I have recently obtained another felling (thinning) licence. This stop/start impacts on timber marketing and now it is almost like starting a new business all over again. For sure I still have the contact details of those who I last dealt with, but I would like to bake a bigger cake.

The use of social media has grown over the last 10 years. Now 72 % of adult internet users have a social media profile with Facebook being used the most. Others include Flickr, Google+, Instagram, Linked In, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tumblr, Twitter, Wordpress (Blogging) and YouTube.

Coincidentally, in the course of my other enterprises I have been successful in attracting French students doing their international marketing baccalaureate to my office on internships. The last one – Jules Balouin – kindly made a video promoting my timber for sale which I published on YouTube *(see below)*. At the time of writing it had been watched 77 times and has attracted interest from timber buyers looking for ash, Douglas, larch and oak. A link to the video has been emailed to those on the updated lists.

Adequate photographs, sound and video can be captured with a smartphone or tablet. Sound can then be improved with software like Audacity and the video can be processed with something like iMovie which is available on Mac and Windows. Movie Maker can be used on PCs.

The cost of marketing on social media platforms can be negligible, compared with the cost of mounting something like a Google Adwords campaign. The return on investment may though be variable.

So far I have discussed using social media to help market timber for sale from a small estate. Those with larger estates and agents who continuously supply timber should integrate their social media presence into their search engine optimisation (SEO) strategy – to promote their website, identification and use of keywords will be important.

Brexit may also provide opportunities for marketing timber internationally via social media, for example in meeting plant health and regulation standards.
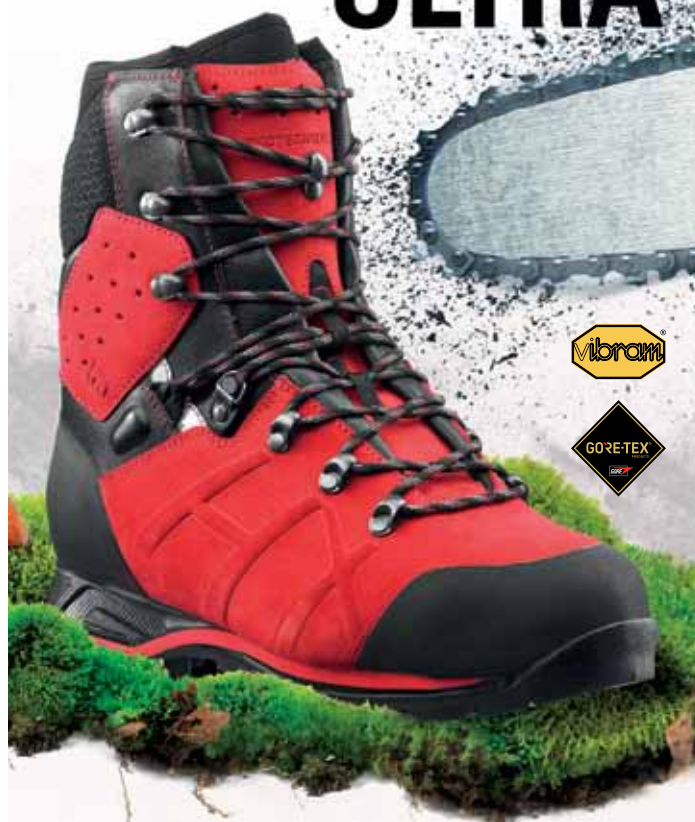

See Jules Balouin's video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQdi61yNn7E

Arthur Bletchley is a chartered surveyor and has recently also qualified as a mediator.