



LET'S GET VISUAL

The social media landscape has become more visual than ever with image based posts trumping text for engagement. It's time for retailers to jump on the bandwagon. RACHAEL GAVIN reports.

As the saying goes a picture is worth a thousand words and it has arguably never been more relevant than with the current state of social media. We live in an age of visual consumption spurred on by advances in digital technology. The arrival of smart phones with their cameras, easy internet access and photo editing apps has encouraged users to share more visual content. Combine this with how much easier it is for us to understand a picture rather than text and the result is higher engagement with images than words.

"People respond better to visual information as it is quick and easy to process," says Steve Hibberd, CEO of Tiger Pistol. "Particularly now as people are consuming media while on the go, content must break through the clutter and catch your audience's attention. This is much easier to do with images than text."

According to Nicholas Carah, social media researcher and lecturer at the University

of Queensland, this concept is reflected by changes Facebook has made to its news feed. "The algorithm in Facebook's news feed privileges images, so images are more likely to be seen because Facebook's algorithm has learnt over time that the audience is more likely to engage with visual content than textual content."

The visual focus of social media has been further enhanced by the emergence of image based platforms Pinterest and Instagram. Pinterest is a virtual pin board allowing users to curate boards based on their interests while Instagram—which has such potential to take the lion's share of social media use that it was purchased by Facebook—allows people to edit images to a more professional standard and share them easily.

"We hook into seeing images and pictures that resonate with us and have some meaning for us much easier than having to wade through text, so in terms of people being

able to connect with brands and the heart of brands I think Instagram does a great job of that, because you can get across a story or a feeling, evoke emotion much easier in an image than you can just in text," says Kylie Lewis, Of Kin.

Now that we're in an age of visual social media content it's important businesses, especially retailers, consider using them but it doesn't mean they should give up on Facebook. While its growth has slowed it still dominates with the Sensis Social Media Report showing 95 per cent of Australian social media users on Facebook in 2013, down only two per cent from the year before. However, the experts say the way businesses use it needs to change.

"If you can't identify who your audience is on Facebook then it's really hard, it may not be the most useful platform but if you're developing a page on Facebook it's kind of like any other account—you've got to develop