

## Digital Communications

### A Guide to Social Media Scheduling Tools

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Having an active social media presence is expected nowadays for any organisation; in fact, it's essential. If managing social media is just one of the many hats you wear, then scheduling tools are going to become your best friend.

In this guide, we will look at:

- what scheduling is
- the pros and cons of scheduling
- an introduction to four scheduling tools: Tweetdeck, Hootsuite, Sprout and Buffer.

#### What is scheduling?

There are several tools, both free and paid for, that allow you to schedule your social media posts in advance. The majority of these work for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and blog posts. Tweetdeck is the exception. As it's Twitter's own scheduling tool, it only works for scheduling tweets and doesn't integrate with any other platforms.

Instagram doesn't allow third party sites to schedule Instagram posts. For example, on Hootsuite you can schedule an Instagram post, however it will not publish it at the time you schedule it. Rather, it will send you a notification to push through the scheduled post.

#### What are the pros to scheduling posts?

Scheduling allows you to plan your social media content in advance and ensures that you always have a steady stream of content being posted.

It's best used for evergreen content, such as:

- blog posts
- podcasts
- videos

It's also useful to plan content in advance and schedule tweets and posts to promote upcoming events and campaigns.

All paid scheduling tools will also include analytics so that you can see how your content is performing. Some also offer in-built image and editing tools to help you create images for your posts or upload your own images and add filters or text over them. This will help them stand out on people's newsfeeds and timelines.

### What are the cons to scheduling posts?

Scheduling is great for ensuring that you always have content for your social media channels so that whenever someone looks at your Facebook or LinkedIn page or Twitter profile, they'll see that you are active.

However, it's important to remember that social media is about engaging with people and having conversations. It is tempting to schedule all your content and then forget about it until you need to schedule more content. Don't use scheduling as a box ticking exercise.

Always ensure that you log in to your social media accounts at least twice a day to look at what people are talking about (this is where Twitter lists are really handy) to see if you can RT, Quote RT or get involved in the conversation.

Most scheduling tools also include listening functionality, where you can see who has replied, commented or retweeted. Best practice is to schedule your content but check in daily to interact with the live engagements.

### Scheduling and trending news

If a natural disaster, a terrorist attack or anything like that occurs, immediately check to see what content you have scheduled and whether it is still appropriate to go out. Edit it or pause as appropriate.

**Now let's take a look at Tweetdeck, Hootsuite, Sprout and Buffer in a bit more detail.**

### Tweetdeck

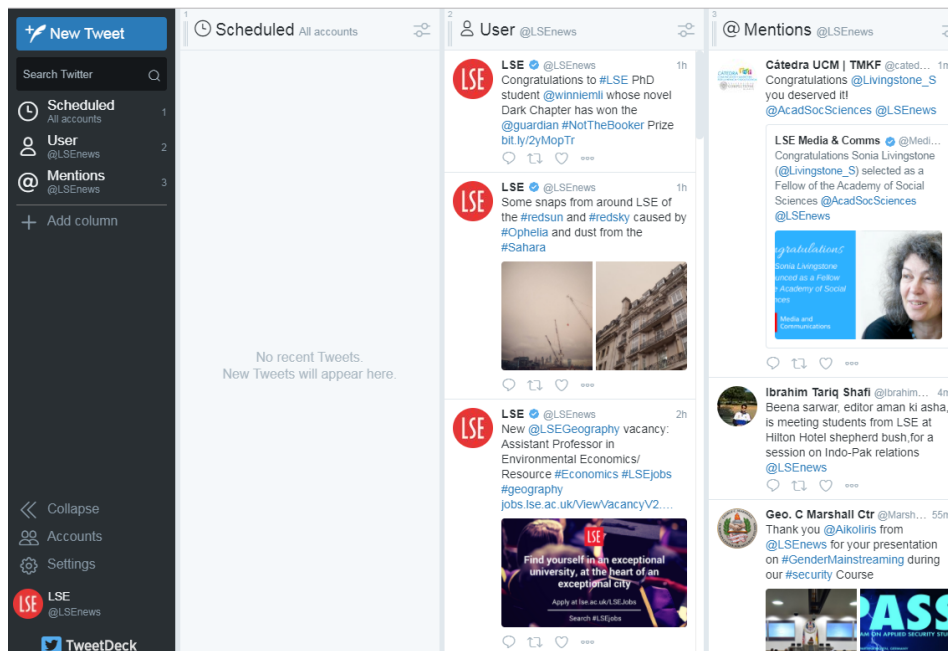
**Who is it best for?** An individual or team who only manage a Twitter account and who have little or no budget for scheduling tools.

[Tweetdeck](#) is Twitter's own scheduling tool, although it's separate to the platform as you cannot schedule tweets directly on Twitter. As such, it's completely free to use but has its limitations. For example, you can upload your own images but it doesn't offer an image library.

As it is owned by Twitter it's only useful for scheduling tweets and doesn't support any other platforms, such as LinkedIn or Facebook.

One plus is that you can add columns with search terms, such as the #Brexit example below. This helps you keep an eye on any interesting tweets or links to news articles that you can then schedule for a later date.

For more detailed information on Tweetdeck and how to set it up, [visit their website](#).



## Hootsuite

**Who is it best for?** Individuals or teams with a small budget.

[Hootsuite](#) is one of the more established and well known social media management platforms and has four pricing options. There is a:

- free account
- Pro account
- Business account
- Enterprise account.

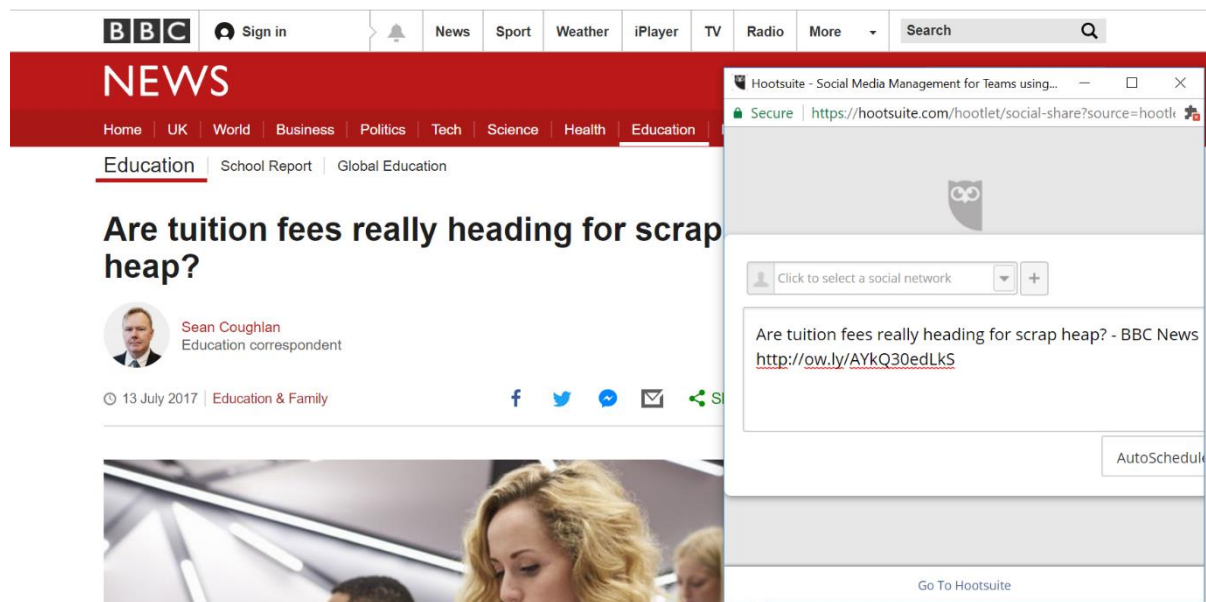
The free account allows you to manage up to three social media accounts, however Facebook counts for two as you must have a personal account to manage a Facebook Page. If you'd like to use Hootsuite to manage a Twitter account, Facebook Page and LinkedIn group, for example, you would need to pay for the Pro account (which costs roughly £12 per month and allows you up to 10 profiles).

In Hootsuite's new Composer feature (in beta), they have a media library as well as a Giphy library so you can add visuals to your posts to help them stand out. You can of course also upload your own.

With the paid plans, you get access to analytics so that you can see how your content is performing and you can also set up teams so that your colleagues can collaborate. Hootsuite also produces handy guides and blog posts as well as training for their clients.

Thanks to the [Chrome extension Hootlet](#), you can also schedule posts directly from news outlets or anywhere on the web. Simply click on the Hootlet extension button in your browser

and it will bring up a compose window. Click the drop down for the social media platform(s) you'd like to share it to, edit the copy if needed and click on AutoSchedule.



## Sprout

**Who is it best for?** Sprout is best for established social media teams with a fairly substantial budget.

[Sprout](#) is a paid-for-only tool and starts at \$99 per month. It's certainly one of the more sophisticated social media management tools on the market. Its features include not only scheduling but also:

- an in-built social media calendar that everyone in the team can access, making it more collaborative
- monitor profiles, keywords and locations
- create and manage tasks so that it acts like a CRM system
- more in-depth analytics
- free, presentation-ready reports that can be custom branded

It's useful if your social media accounts have a large element of customer service as you can tag and organise messages and have a single-stream inbox, which you can filter.

## Buffer

**Who is it best for?** An individual or team with a small budget.

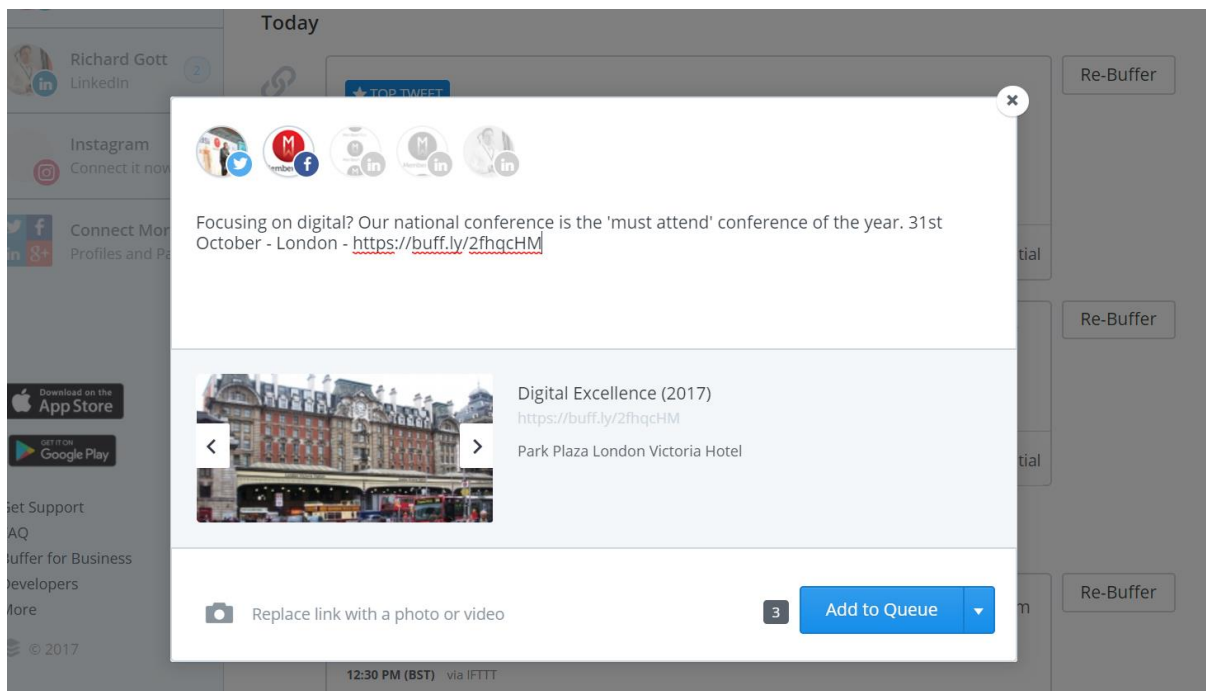
Buffer is an established social media management platform with three pricing plans:

- Free
- Awesome
- Business

The free plan allows you to have one profile per platform so unfortunately won't work for a Facebook Page as it would count your personal profile as a profile, as with the free version of Hootsuite. Also, you can only schedule 10 posts per profile. The Awesome plan is very cost effective at \$10 per month and you can have 10 social profiles and schedule 100 posts per profile.

Buffer has an in-built image creator called Pablo and you can also upload video and gifs. In the Awesome and Business plans, you can create a social media calendar and have access to analytics.

Like Hootsuite, [Buffer also has a Chrome Extension](#) where you can schedule or 'buffer' any link from anywhere on the web. Buffer has a unique feature where you can re-buffer posts. This is great if you have a lot of evergreen content that you can keep sharing. Just remember to tweak the copy slightly as Twitter penalises you for sharing the same tweets.



Buffer also has a great blog where they share best practice, top tips and insights.

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**For more information social media scheduling tools, please email the social media team in LSE Communications Division at [comms.socialmedia@lse.ac.uk](mailto:comms.socialmedia@lse.ac.uk)**

### **Resources**

1. SproutSocial Insights Blog <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/>
2. Hootsuite Blog <https://blog.hootsuite.com/>
3. Buffer Blog <https://blog.bufferapp.com/>

