

The Use of Social Media to Promote the HMS *Colossus* Excavation 2012

Innes McCartney

Introduction

From 20 May to 8 June 2012 the CISMAS Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Cismas.org.uk>) was used to promote the excavation on the site of HMS *Colossus*. This involved not only placing content on the Facebook page for all users to view, but also actively promoting it using both Facebook and Twitter.

Process

The CISMAS Facebook page was setup a month in advance of the excavation and was primarily aimed at promoting our work in 2012. As with any media platform, its number of subscribers is generally related to the quality of the content it produces. Over the course of the project we uploaded 127 different images; all of which were given detailed descriptions as to what they represented. The images were segmented into three distinct subject areas, aimed at appealing to different interest groups. They were:

1. Underwater Images aimed primarily at divers, but with content showing the structure and key features of the wreck to appeal to those with a broader interest in the archaeology of ships;
2. Finds photographs taken during the post diving recording process, aimed at all with an interest in the archaeology of finds;
3. Surface and Team photos, aimed at people who know CISMAS and to also thank those involved in the project.

In order to maintain a steady output of new content on the page, it was necessary to ensure that there was photography taking place during all phases of the project and that this was collated so it could be used editorially. In practice this meant that during the day, someone on the boat and someone in each dive team needed to be tasked with taking photos. The finds recording process naturally produced photos which could be accessed each evening and added to the Facebook page.

It was also important to have a broadband connection to the internet to insure the smooth operating of the page. A local BT Hotspot conveniently served this need. It should be noted that this is a potential pitfall if a similar project was to be carried out in a remote area. It is worth checking in advance what broadband coverage is available.

The process of selecting, collating, editing, uploading and captioning the images for the site took place each evening and on average took around two hours to complete. After that, online queries, questions and comments needed to be answered. On top of this was the need to promote the site by primarily:

1. Encouraging followers on Facebook to “share” content with their friends;

2. Tweeting the most attractive content on the site to generate “Retweets” in Twitter by the people/bodies who have large numbers of followers with an interest in archaeology/heritage/history themes. These included “@EHArchaeology”, “@TourGuideGirl” and “@navalhistoryguy”.

Results

The effectiveness of our coverage and our capacity to broadcast to new audiences what CISMAS was doing is best measured by examining the statistics generated by Facebook of activity on our Facebook page. A measure of the coverage the Facebook page was able to generate during the project is shown in Figures 1. & 2. below.

Figure 1 shows that the number of active followers (or “Likes”) of the CISMAS page grew from 42 to 125 during the project. This was a steady increase throughout the two weeks, with one notable increase around the time of the second sharp rise in Daily Logged in Views. Our number of “likes” compares well with similar pages such as NAS and Ships Project which have larger memberships and have been running for longer.

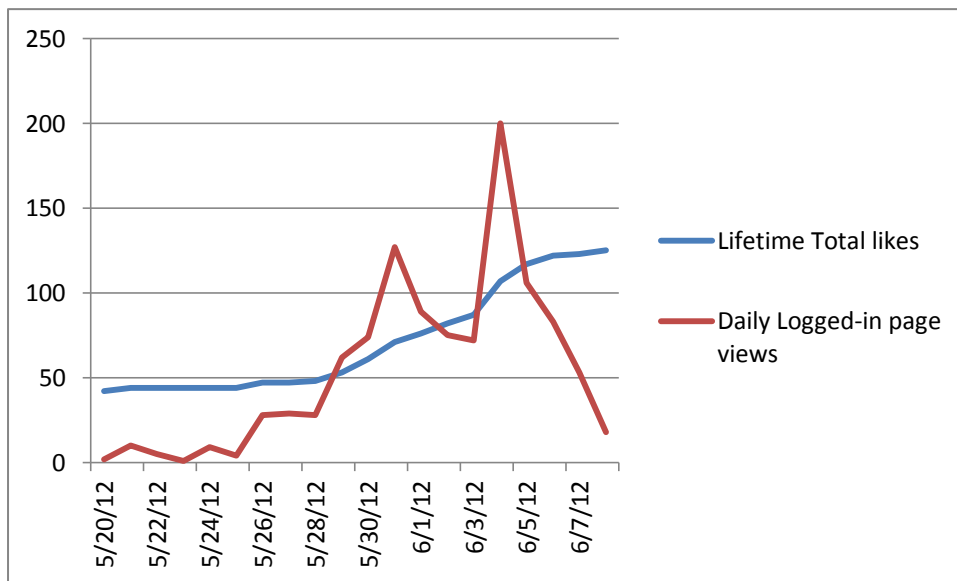


Figure 1. “Likes” and “Logged in Page Views” of the CISMAS Facebook page during the HMS Colossus excavation 2012 (Innes McCartney from statistics generated from Facebook).

The Daily Logged in Views (in Figure 1.), defined by Facebook as “Daily Page views from users logged into Facebook (Total count)”, shows a steady increase throughout the project whilst new content was being produced. It tailed off when we stopped excavating and began to pack up. Clearly this is related to new content delivered. Without interesting new content, followers don’t log in to view.

It will be noted that there are two clear spikes in the “Logged in Page Views”; first, around 1 June and second, around 4 June. These were in part caused by the quality of the content uploaded at that time. The first spike is related to photos of the intact block (F1003) taken situ and on the boat on that day. The second relates to a gallery of photos of the fully excavated gun port which were uploaded then. There was also an undoubted cumulative affect caused by the page becoming more extensive as well.

However, as Figure 2. Shows the actual spikes themselves were mainly generated by “Retweets” bringing new readership to the site. This is because the sheer volume of new readers far outstripped the number Facebook “Likes” and their friends. The most important “Retweets” were specifically:

1. On 1 June “@EHArchaeology” (4,600 followers) “Retweeted” a photo of the intact block (F1003);
2. On 4 June “@TourGuideGirl” (1200 followers) “Retweeted” the link to our galleries;

We also got “Retweets” from several others with much smaller numbers of followers throughout the project which undoubtedly helped bring viewers to the CISMAS page.

It is impossible to know the knock-on effect of these boosts to our coverage, but “Daily Total Impressions”, defined by Facebook as “Daily The number of impressions seen of any content associated with your Page. (Total count)” reached 7,500 after the “@EHArchaeology” “Retweet”.

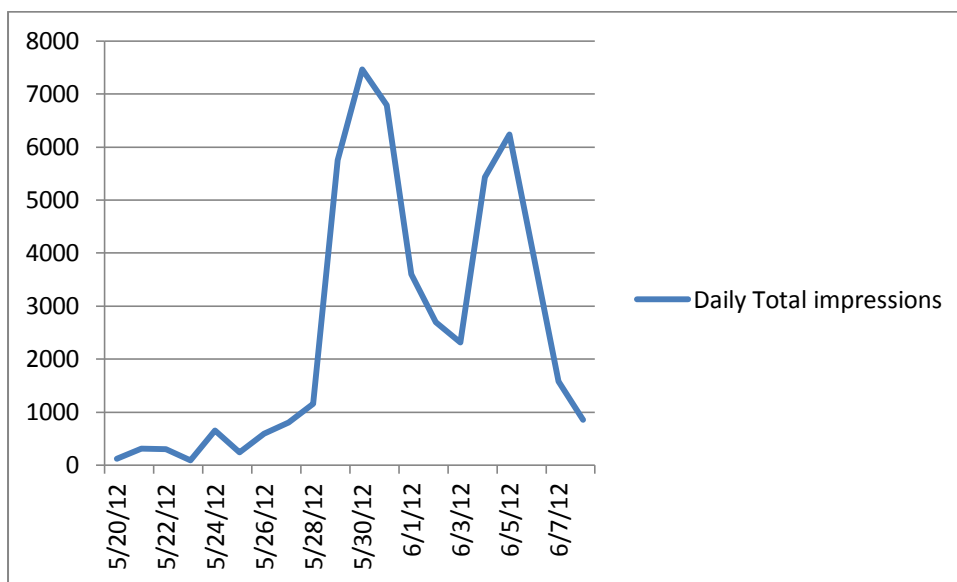


Figure 2. “Daily Total Impressions” generated by the CISMAS Facebook page during the HMS Colossus excavation 2012 (Innes McCartney from statistics generated by Facebook).

Conclusions

Although we had no set expectations about what sort of coverage we could generate through the Facebook page, it rapidly became clear during the excavation that there is a large and actively interested readership online for these types of projects. The challenge is to get the message out to potential readers. Using Facebook to host the excavation pages and Twitter to gather new readership was a strategy which seemed to work.

This was an interesting exercise with cumulatively reached over 53,000 impressions (Facebook page statistics) by the end of the excavation. Overall the following points are worthy of note:

1. Quality content needs to be generated daily;
2. Active pushing of content on Facebook and Twitter needs to take place daily at least. Better if several times a day;
3. A broadband link is essential;

4. Good quality images of all facets of the project need to be deliberately taken, collated, edited and uploaded daily;
5. An overriding strategy of approach with some degree of specific editorial control is a good idea;
6. The major spikes in our readership were linked to activity in Twitter, which is clearly a far better media for finding new audiences than Facebook, which is more reliant on organic growth through friends of friends.

This was only an experiment in what could be done to promote our project online. It is anticipated that in the future other avenues in online media could also be utilised to broaden our appeal. But as an experiment of this type, it shows what can be achieved.

It should be noted that this exercise bore no additional costs to the project and was carried out alongside the regular duties of the excavation team.

04/07/2012, Innes McCartney BA (hons), MA, MA. Postgraduate Researcher, School of Applied Sciences, Bournemouth University. CISMAS member since 2005.