

Guide to Digital Campaigning

A key aspect to any successful campaign is the publicity behind it, and a student election is no different.

As well as campaigning in person and on campus, using digital platforms to get your name in the heads of Edge Hill students could be make or break when it comes to securing one of our positions.

But that doesn't mean you should put too much pressure on yourself to become an expert campaign manager in the space of the next two weeks.

A lot of digital campaigning can be put down to persistence. Want to get your name out there? Be prepared to comment on all posts regarding the elections, to mobilise your friends online, and to temporarily saturate whatever social media you have with your brand.

In general, the key thing to remember is to have fun with your campaigning. The number one thing that will stick in the heads of a student audience is content that is creative in its branding while still portraying a strong manifesto showing that the candidate cares.

Think positive messaging. Do not get bogged down in the negative.

So, with all that in mind, let's get down to some of the details of how you might put together a successful campaign.

Planning and Strategy

You could spend hours – days, even – reading about how to put together a campaign strategy. Add a digital communications strategy in there? We're probably talking weeks before you get to the end of your reading list.

The truth of the matter is, your campaign strategy – or any strategy – is only worth writing if it benefits you.

You need to understand why it's there, what it's doing to help you, and where you might need to be flexible. And the best way to do that?

Keep it simple.

Here's a basic template of how you might put together a campaign strategy, incorporating the key aspects you should consider. Emphasis should, however, be put on the word **basic**. As we said, there's a whole world of creative campaign ideas just a Google search away...

Goals and objectives

Goals are big, grand statements about change and what you want to achieve in the long-term.

Objectives are short-term, practical targets that you want to achieve to meet your goals. The best objectives are SMART (specific, measureable, attainable, relevant, time-based).

Your goals drive the direction of most of what you do, a kind of *campaign philosophy* which you can live by. Your objectives give you specific targets which you need to hit to achieve your goals.

For example, in an elections campaign focusing on the Faculty of Health, Social Care & Medicine, you might set up your goals and objectives as follows:

Goals

- 1) Represent and address the concerns of Faculty of Health students in my campaign materials

Objectives

- 1) Email or message at least 50 Faculty of Health students to ask their main concerns from this academic year before 3 March.
- 2) Create five Instagram infographics and five Facebook timeline posters around the topics suggested by Faculty of Health students, to be released between 4 March and 10 March.
- 3) Film, edit and publish a campaign video covering key manifesto points, to be published on the evening of 13 March.

Available Channels

Once you've figured out what you want to achieve, you need to identify how you are going to achieve it. That's where the next part of your strategy comes in.

Making a list of your available channels means you know *exactly* what tools you can use to interact with voters, both before and during election day.

A channel is a medium of communication you can use to get the word out about your campaign. Typically, a student campaigner might include, some (or all) of the following channels in their planning:

- Campaign social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, LinkedIn)
- Campaign social media groups
- Newsletter list
- Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger, and other Digital Messaging services
- Blogging Platform (Medium, Wordpress, Tumblr)
- EHU Forums (think: am I a member of a society, or part of a course cohort with a group chat?)

DATA PROTECTION WARNING: While you can ask people to follow your new campaign channels, you can't re-purpose existing channels without students' prior consent. For example, if you are a society president, you must set up a separate mailing list and give students the opportunity to opt in. This is because, when a student joined your society, they opted in to receiving communications regarding that society, rather than your campaign. General Data Protection Regulations apply to all communication channels.

Targeted Audiences

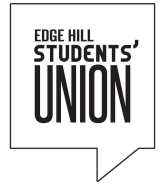
All students, right?

Wrong. While all students *can* vote for you, the likelihood that they will is slim, if not zero. **On average 12-15% of Edge Hill students vote in an election.**

You therefore need to identify ***the most likely*** student groups that will vote for ***you***, and work towards securing their vote before the big day.

Discovering your key audience is about **the most important aspect of your campaign strategy**. Try and think about:

- Groups you are already part of
- Places where you may already be considered a leader
- Undiscovered or underrepresented demographics on campus



Communications Timeline

And last but not least, bringing it all together.

You have your goals and objectives. You have your available channels and target audiences. Now you need to create a calendar including all of your plans and communications.

We suggest dividing your activities into **Planning / Internal** and **Front Facing Communications**. That way, you can see what tasks require you to work behind the scenes, and when you need to start publishing content on social media.

TOP TIP: Put together a word document, name it strategy, and complete it as soon as possible. Even if your strategy changes, the sooner you have a blueprint for success, the sooner you can start actioning your plan.

Your brand

In terms of campaigning and marketing, your brand is where the magic happens.

Developing a cohesive and effective brand is not an exact science. It requires an understanding of your audience, of design, and a good ear for the kind of messages that will resonate with your target audience.

There are, however, some general tips which should help you on your way:

- **Choose an aesthetic and stick with it:** Right after you've clicked save on the final draft of your strategy, head over to your favourite design software and start developing your brand. There's a lot you can do here, but it's important to be consistent across: your colour palette; your font choice; your logo and logo placement; any images, photos, and headshots of yourself. Remember, **the goal is to create a brand people will remember.**
- **Utilise your goal(s) as a theme for your brand:** Remember when we told you to create a goal for your campaign, something that acts as an overarching philosophy for your campaign? Now's the time to put that to use in terms of how you present your message. If your goal, for example, is to represent Faculty of Education students, then your brand should feature imagery relating to schools, books, education, and teaching. Imagery and brand shouldn't be a second thought, it should fundamentally reinforce and support the message you are trying to portray.
- **Voice vs. Tone:** Your voice should be strong, consistent, and personal to you. How you use your tone differs depending on target audiences, platforms, and your use of different media. Think about it, your tone will be different when speaking to your university tutor than it will be when speaking to a friend, however in both instances the voice remains yours. Understanding the difference between voice and tone will help create consistency across your brand, while also giving you the flexibility to utilise different platforms. Put simply: know what you want to say, and decide the best way to say it.
- **Subtle changes:** Once you've established and launched your campaign materials, you should be *incredibly cautious* about making drastic changes to your brand. Changing the formats you are using and the way you are presenting information is absolutely fine. Taking a sledgehammer to your brand aesthetic and changing a slogan mid-campaign is a recipe for disaster.

Design Software

Not a designer? No worries, not many campaigners are! What successful campaigners do use, however, are **free resources** if they don't have access to tools like Adobe or FinalCut.

- **Canva**: If you're looking to make free social media graphics and digital posters with a huge range of free templates, Canva is about to become your best friend. An absolutely essential tool for all campaigners- <https://www.canva.com/>
- **Openshot**: Ask any social media marketer and they'll tell you video is key. If you're looking to edit together a campaign video to introduce yourself to Edge Hill students, Openshot is a free video editor that is powerful and easy to use - <https://www.openshot.org/>
- **TikTok**: Yes, we said TikTok. It may look fun and light-hearted, but at its heart is an incredibly powerful and easy to use video editor, built to design social media-friendly video content within seconds. Create an account, start making content, and download all your videos to be shared across your channels - <https://www.tiktok.com/>

The Thing About Social Media

Here's the thing about social media: done well, it may just win you an election. Done poorly, it will actively dissuade people from voting for you.

So, the natural question becomes... How do you use social media well?

There's no secret formula for social media. The truth is, you have to use a lot of common sense and persistence.

Think about what **you** would engage with if you saw it. Keep in mind the majority of Edge Hill students won't know who you are, so making a good first impression is key.

Are you likely to read a 2,000 word Facebook post with no image going into immense detail on a manifesto? Probably not. Are you going to watch a 60 second TikTok which is amusing and subtly distils key campaign points? Looking more likely!

Here's some key points to get started:

Social media as reflection of your brand: No idea where to start with social media? Our best advice is to let content develop naturally. If you've followed our steps on planning, strategy, and branding, then by the time you reach content planning you'll have a wealth of material to go off.

Planning and scheduling: Your comms timeline should give you a great start in terms of planning your social media, however most campaigners will also develop their own social media schedule across all the channels they are using. Scheduling in advance is going to be crucial as it will save you time later in the process, allowing you to be more flexible with live videos and content that is likely to receive more engagement. Remember, certain channels will require different post frequencies. Depending on what your engagement seems to be doing, we suggest:

- No more than three posts per day on Facebook and Instagram timelines.
- As many Instagram Story posts as you please per day
- As many Tweets as you please per day
- TikTok is entirely engagement based. If you're having success then up your frequencies and cross post to your other channels

Not all about content on your timeline: You need to get your name, brand, and face as far and wide as possible. Our best advice would be to **comment on as many EHU and EHSU groups, channels and posts as possible**. Get your name in as many conversations as possible and, come election day, you will already be in the heads of EHU voters.

Events, Groups, and Pages: While Facebook's algorithm has moved against pages to preferring posts from friends (an interesting point to consider if you were debating between setting up a new page for your campaign or using your personal account...), you will get

better engagement from its 'opt in' functions. Students who are part of groups and events that you have created are more likely to see your posts as Facebook has determined that they have chosen to receive those messages.

Utilising Your Community > Building a following: Building a large following is hard and takes time. Time that, frankly, you don't have. You have about two weeks between digital campaigning starting and voting opening. We highly suggest, therefore, using your existing friendship groups, society circles, and course friends to support you via social media. Using things like frames for profile pictures and sharing your social media graphics with your friends is a great way of spreading your message without having to build a following overnight.

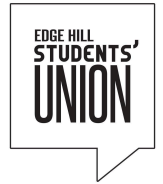
Analytics and Insights: The boring bit? Wrong! These days, every single social media platform offers analytics, and utilising them to find out how your content is performing is crucial. There's a ton of metrics you can focus on, but some of the most important are post reach (how many people are seeing your posts), content engagement (are people reacting to your posts) and dwell time (specifically for videos, are people watching all of your content).

- **Quick warning about analytics:** on most platforms, you'll have to switch your account to a business account or page to access analytics. This is free to do, but on Facebook, for example, in depth analytics may only be available if you set up a page.

Content Checklist: Getting Your Social Media Off to the Right Start

Having seen a fair few successful election candidates over the years, here's what we'd suggest as a content starter pack:

- **Branded Profile Picture and Cover Photos** – The basics are important, and creating a consistent aesthetic across all your channels is definitely something you should consider.
- **Humorous campaign launch video** – make yourself stand out but don't forget to mention why you're running in the first place! Some of the best videos we've seen have included more than just the candidate running, so don't be afraid to rope in your friends. Just have a search on YouTube for SU Election videos if you need inspiration...
- **Profile Picture Frame (Facebook)** – Get your friends, course mates, society members and followers shouting about voting for you:
<https://developers.facebook.com/products/frame-studio/>
- **Instagram infographics and Stories** – Make the information on your manifesto accessible with branded designs and stories



- **60 Second Timeline Videos** – Keeping your video content under 60 seconds means it can be published on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, saving you a lot of editing time.
- **Live Videos** – Particularly useful on election day, create urgency by broadcasting live from your social media channels telling people to vote.

A Final Word

We can't wait to see what you have planned for your campaigns. We would, however, like to say that you shouldn't stress about this process.

You've made it as a candidate, which means you deserve to be here. Your campaigning is where you can have a bit of fun and let your personality come out. It's not going to be like a normal election, but what we lose in street teams, banners and posters, we gain in creative content online!

We would also like to stress that you remember what it means to be a **fit and proper candidate**. Have fun, but never at the expense of others. Do not attack other candidates in public (or private forums).

What you post online can be seen by anyone, and once it has been seen, there may be no permanent way to delete it. Be sure that everything you are posting is positive and does not discriminate against any person or entity.

And of course, if you have any questions about campaigning, the elections, or anything in general, please feel free to email suelections@edgehill.ac.uk.

Good luck!