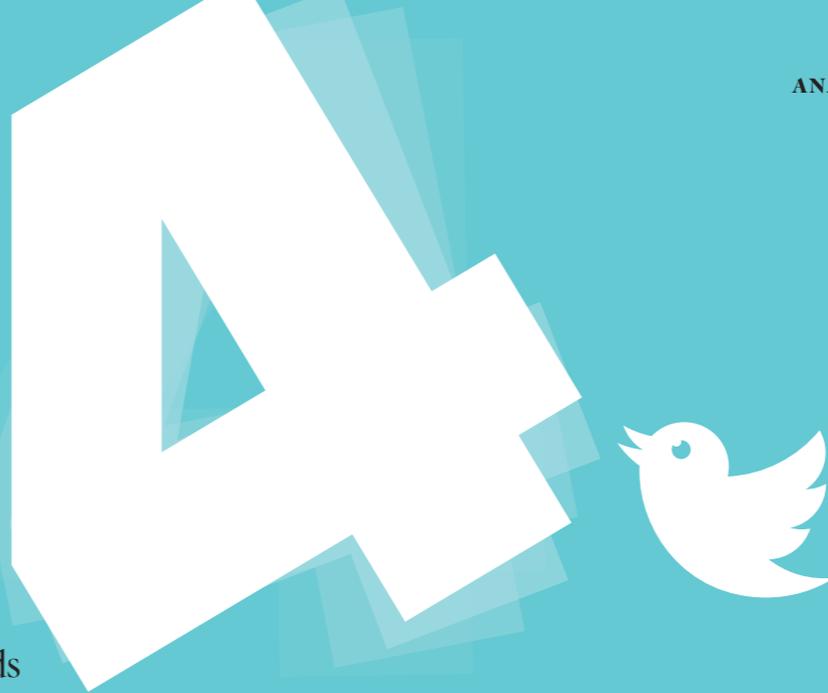


# HOW TO OUT-TWEET THE BIG FOUR



Social media can be a great leveller for smaller businesses. We talk to John Leyden, CEO at social climber Carbon Accountancy, about his methods



John Leyden's firm has one branch – but tweets far above its weight

The internet, and social media in particular, is a great leveller. While large businesses can use their considerable resources to make an impact online, smaller companies can use a smart strategy to compete with them.

Huddled's annual audit of accountants' social media activities makes this clear. While big accounting firms such as PwC and Deloitte do very well on Twitter, small and medium-sized practices such as Cobia and Bishop Fleming can give them a run for their money.

Carbon Accountancy is among the smaller firms that are making a big impression on social media. The London-based, single-branch practice was founded in 2001, with an initial focus on technology clients. The firm has since expanded to cover craft brewing, property, multi-site retail and leisure. John Leyden, Carbon's CEO,

says that the firm was an early adopter of online marketing and social media.

"We recognised the potential value of Twitter and other social media platforms from the start," he says. "There's no doubt in my mind that social media helps to build awareness, drives traffic to our website and, most importantly, delivers results in terms of engaging potential clients, as well as other useful connections. Twitter in particular has been an important part of our marketing strategy."

Carbon first started using Twitter to educate potential clients about R&D tax credits. Those tweets received a good response: "I think prospects understood that getting free money back from the government is a good thing."

Since then, Carbon has expanded its social media efforts, which has resulted in a strong performance against bigger players in Huddled's rankings – particularly in terms of the quality and frequency of its posts.

Here are Leyden's tips for practice owners and managers who are seeking to make the most of social media as part of their promotional strategy.

## LinkedIn for people, Twitter for brands

While Carbon uses LinkedIn and also invests in Google ads, the best platform for finding and cultivating leads is Twitter.

LinkedIn works better for promoting individual thought leaders than brands, Leyden says, while Facebook works best for consumer-facing companies. Twitter offers just the right mix of conversation and brand awareness.

"LinkedIn is extremely hard work, because everybody is using it for connections, whereas they use Twitter for engaging with people," Leyden says. "Talking to people who have a business need just rises to the top naturally. It's a lot easier."

## Outsource social media...

Carbon has been working with the same social media marketing agency for the past ten years. "They know us inside out. They don't act for any other accountants," says Leyden.

He recommends using an agency, rather than trying to manage social media yourself or hiring someone to do it in-house. "Even medium-size firms trying to hire and retain a very good social media expert probably will not be able to do

it well, because anybody worth their salt wants to work in an agency with a variety of clients and get exposure to a variety of things, not just do a nine-to-five on one brand."

**... but don't take your eye off it** While the agency looks after the day-to-day running of Carbon's social media, Leyden doesn't take his eye off the ball. He meets with the social media team every three to four weeks to review how they've been doing, and what they'll be covering over the coming weeks.

**+ Using an algorithm, Huddled ranked the following companies by the quality of their Twitter accounts**

Top Twitter accounts by average quality of tweets			
RANK AND NAME	HANDLE	SCORE	
1	Deloitte UK	@DeloitteUK	326.8
2	Bishop Fleming	@BishopFlemingUK	212.0
3	PwC UK	@PwC_UK	176.4
4	KPMG UK	@kpmguk	174.4
5	Carbon Accountancy	@Carbon_Acc	170.4
6	Mazars UK	@Mazars_UK	169.2
7	Grant Thornton UK	@GrantThorntonUK	163.2
8	Price Bailey	@Price_Bailey	162.4
9	Cobia Accounting	@CobiaAccounting	162.0
10	Armstrong Watson	@ArmstrongWatson	158.0
11	French Duncan LLP	@French_Duncan	150.0
12	EY UKI	@EY_UKI	145.2
13	DNS Accountants	@DNSAssociates	141.8
14	Smith & Williamson	@SmithWilliamson	140.4
15	MHA Moore & Smalley	@MooreandSmalley	138.8
16	CroweClarkWhitehill	@CroweCW	137.6
17	TaxAssist Accountants	@TaxAssistUK	123.6
18	BDO LLP	@bdoaccountant	118.6
19	Haines Watts	@hainewatts	116.0
20	Scrutton Bland	@ScruttonBland	111.4
21	Kreston Reeves	@KrestonReeves	109.2
22	Streets Accountants	@StreetsAcc	109.0
23	UHY Hacker Young	@UHYHackerYoung	108.2
24	Cowgill Holloway	@Cowgills	108.0
25	Bartfields	@BartfieldsLeeds	106.6
26	Menzies LLP	@MenziesLLP	106.0
27	Forrester Boyd	@ForresterBoyd	103.8
28	Moore Stephens UK	@MooreStephensUK	100.4
29	MHA MacIntyre Hudson	@MHUpdates	100.4
30	Duncan & Toplis	@duncantoplis	85.4

SOURCE: HUDDLED, TWITTER REPORT FOR ACCOUNTANCY

"A team of two or three people look out for content on the web and put ideas forward. I've got the final say on things. They've got some discretion to do their own thing, but certain more controversial or high-level things would be down to me," he says.

This control is important: you need to be aware of what's being said and how on your channels, or they could lose focus or, worse, alienate followers.

"Also, make sure that the agency understands the company and the brand and what you're trying to do, rather than just maximising the number of tweets," says Leyden.

## It's about content – but not always yours

Carbon's agency was clear from the off that social media isn't about going in and talking up your brilliance. It's more about offering helpful tips and guidance, says Leyden: "I think it genuinely gets people more engaged, instead of your just saying: 'We can sell you this.'"

A lot of tweets will point people towards online content

such as a blog post, but it's a myth that the content you link to needs to be on your website, he says: "It's not always just about creating content. Very often there is a lot of content out there, and lots of people don't see it. So you just point them towards other people's content."

## Play the long game

Leyden says that you can't jump on social media and expect immediate results; you should prepare to spend a year working on it before it starts paying off.

"Probably the biggest challenge is that when you start out you'll have zero followers," he says. "You send something out and somebody looks and says: 'Oh, you've got no followers.' There is a sort of critical point, I think, and it's probably around the 2,000 followers level." Below that level, you'll stand less chance of being retweeted or getting conversations going.

Eventually, though, you will have conversations with followers, which is when you can turn them into clients. "At some point you need to say: 'Should we take this offline?' It's about timing it right – not too early such that you're coming across as hard-selling," says Leyden.

Follow these rules, he argues, and you can make an impact on social media to rival that of the Big Four. "It's quite telling that PwC and KPMG rank third or fourth in the table and then a small firm ranks one below them. The smaller firms may be more passionate about what they're doing than some employee at a large firm. That shows through the results."

Tell us about your Twitter tactics: @YourAAT

**"It's telling that KPMG ranks fourth in the table and a small firm ranks one below... Smaller firms may be more passionate"**