

Social Media as a Means for Everyday Advocacy

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Over the past several years, the power of social media to create connections through the pandemic has had both positive and negative impacts. Libraries make use of social media as a marketing tool, a public forum, and as a digital third place for programming and community connection.

Most libraries use social media to communicate the needs of the library and patrons, and as a means to connect with community partners and stakeholders. I've spent the last eight years working in rural and remote libraries in Wyoming, New Mexico, and Nebraska, and each has used social media to their advantage in community engagement.

Many libraries immediately began offering virtual programming to stay connected with their communities during the early days of the pandemic. The Octavia Fellin Public Library (NM) not only transitioned its programming online, but also used its platform to help disseminate press releases and information regarding local mandates as the library had the largest social media following of all the city departments. This shift made social media platforms not just modes for marketing libraries but a digital space in which to offer services that had been suspended in their traditional formats. Libraries occupying virtual spaces offers not only the opportunity for libraries to advocate for their services, but also a space for library supporters and stakeholders to engage in everyday advocacy.

The ALA Social Media Guidelines for Public and Academic Libraries urges tailoring the purpose and scope of a library's social media.¹ Focus should be placed on posts and engagement that deal directly with programs and services offered by the library, as well as identifying the intended audience of the library. Maintaining library-specific social media should follow similar policies for conduct among staff creating content and those engaging with it as would be fitting in the library building. Allowing for public comments increases the feeling of community bonds and can result in information having a farther reach than anticipated. Instituting guidelines for acceptable use and behavior protects library users and staff from abuse.

Social media has offered a way for libraries to better connect with community needs as well as their own. The North Platte (NE) Public Library and Carbon County (WY) Library System have used their Facebook pages to broadcast library needs in terms of donations and volunteer requests. The Carbon County Library System gained enough traction via social media to outfit all eight of its branches with supplies for monthly LEGO clubs. The North Platte Public Library's Friday History Posts highlighting local history collections and stories have brought in community members seeking new resources about the community. In addition to fulfilling library needs, social media is a great way for libraries to engage with community stakeholders and begin a cycle of reciprocity.

The Community for Kids Action Team in Lincoln County (NE) and their Early Childhood Mental Health Committee (ECMHC) have recently begun a partnership with my current library, North Platte Public Library, bringing their parent engagement activities into the library space. In return, the organizations

have used their social media presences to help promote our programming and other services to their audiences.

In October 2022, the library hosted the ECMHC’s Play Is the Way parent event. The event’s PR and subsequent success was shared not only through the library’s social media, but also via the partners, reaching more parents and community members than the library alone.

Social media platforms also offer an instant way to recognize volunteers, summer reading sponsors, and other unseen contributors to library success. Sharing stories and anecdotes from patrons and staff helps showcase the library’s impact in the community and potentially garner support for library initiatives that need either funding or man-hours to accomplish.

Some tips to using social media for advocacy:

- **Start collecting stories.** Track, and share, positive interactions with patrons, volunteers, or even among staff.
- **Post photos.** Most social media platforms are driven by visuals; designate a staff member to take photos during programs.

- **Post consistently.** Whether it’s marketing upcoming programs or sharing stories, the more consistently you post, the more likely patrons who follow your social media will see your posts.
- **Encourage interaction.** Ask patrons to comment or share posts to help your messaging spread beyond those who directly follow the library.
- **Review your policies.** Look at your library’s social media policy to ensure it outlines acceptable behavior from library staff and patrons, as well as the scope and purpose of the library’s social media presence. &

Reference

1. American Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee, “Social Media Guidelines for Public and Academic Libraries,” approved June 2018, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/socialmediaguidelines>.

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