What to Do Once Your Site Is Built

Abstract

When maintaining a digital branch, your work is never done. This chapter of "Building the Digital Branch: Guidelines for Transforming Your Library Website" provides guidelines for what steps to take once your site is built and launched. It includes how to train your staff to help maintain the site, how to continue to work with your community to ensure their needs are met, and a sample style guide for staff who create site content.

You have worked hard to transform your traditional library website into a digital branch. You've done careful planning, gotten approval, built your site, and launched it. It has all the features you planned, your library hoped for, and your community approved. Now that your website is transformed, are you finished? Not even close. At this point in your work, your focus can shift to three things: staff, the site, and your community.

Focus on Staff

Now that you already have the digital branch running, library staff are trained in the basics like how to post to the site, and you've given them some ideas for starting out. Now you need to work with staff to maintain the digital branch.

Continuous Writing

Staff can't just upload some content onto the site one time and then move on to the next project. Adding content is similar to buying materials for your library—you never really stop doing it. If you do, your content will get old and outdated and people will stop reading it or clicking through it.

How are you supposed to continually develop new content for a digital branch? Here are a couple of ideas: One is to be a lifelong learner in your area of the library. Are you a reference librarian? I'll bet that you find a new tool every week or so or discover a new resource that would be useful to share with patrons. There's your blog post for the week! Teen librarian? Just read *Rolling Stone* or *Paste* magazine (or some other much cooler magazine or Web-based entertainment site). Whenever you get in something new that fits with that content, blog about it—provide a direct link, and any locally flavored info (e.g., That cool band? The singer's mother-in-law lives in Kansas!). The goal here is to share relevant information.

Some staff members will easily be able to write new content. On the other hand, if you're not that type of person, you might need to schedule some weekly writing time. For example, you could set a reminder that every Tuesday at 3 p.m. you'll write for thirty minutes. Half an hour isn't too long, and you should be able to pump out at least one short blog post in that amount of time. If you write more, so much the better—you're ahead of schedule!

The point is that you have to make writing and posting a priority. With a digital branch, one of your goals should be to connect with your online community. You can't do that if it's not a priority.

Job-Specific Training

Since your digital branch needs to incorporate multimedia as well, you might need to teach your staff how to do things like take photos and post videos to the Web. For videos, if your organization has a little money in the budget, go buy either a consumer-level digital camera or a Flip video camera (see figure 13). The digital camera will most likely have a video setting—this works great for starting down the video path. If you don't have the resources to purchase a camera, see if you can borrow one from a staff member or community organization. Librarians at my library who started making videos used their own cameras at first, and they created some nice videos that way.

The Flip camera is even better because it is an extremely simple video camera. There's one big red button that you push to start recording, and that's it. Plug the Flip camera into a PC, and it has entry-level editing software built in. When you're ready to upload a video to the Web, you can post your video to YouTube automatically (assuming you set up your YouTube account first). It can't get simpler than that!

If you buy one of these two cameras, then you should set up some hands-on training sessions for staff to learn how to use them. Have your class take pictures and upload them to Flickr. Have them make a simple video and upload it to YouTube. Teach them how easy the process really is, and help get them familiar with it. Do this, and they'll be more willing to actually post pictures and videos.

Figure 13
The Flip video camera.

Training and Coaching on Improvements

Next, you should work on improving the skills of library staff that are actively creating content for the digital branch. For example, you can regularly read blog posts that staff write and make suggestions for improvements. This task can be yours as the digital branch manager, or it can be a blog team leader's job.

I have scheduled regular times to read blog posts on our digital branch. When I read them, I critique them and suggest improvements if needed (librarians at my library tend to be above-average writers, so not much is needed) and also pass along positive feedback. When I do suggest improvements, they might include structure suggestions (e.g., "Please link to the article you're quoting"), reminders to point to our content via a direct link (e.g., "Make sure to include a link to something in our collection that relates to your blog post"), or a how-to-write-for-the-Web type of suggestion (e.g., "Your paragraph is way too long. Please use shorter paragraphs, and more people will read your article").

With video, you can make the same types of suggestions. Most likely, when someone starts out making videos, they will forget to add some finishing touches, like music beds, a fade-in and a fade-out, or credits at the end pointing to your digital branch (and listing the URL). Kindly point these types of improvements out to staff. This is a great way to improve content on your digital branch.

Touching Base

At Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, we have about twenty different blogs. Each one has a team of bloggers assigned to it, and those bloggers hold regular meetings to touch base with each other and come up with new ideas. This is a great way to keep everyone on the same page.

I hold occasional meetings with the blog team leaders, and I meet with the blog teams on occasion as well. I also will meet with a variety of staff interested in doing things on the website. This allows me to stay on top of what's happening of what's happening in our digital branch and to stay connected with people interested in participating. I have an overall, system-side, long-range view of where the site is going and what our goals are for the digital branch, so I can share that knowledge with staff to help give them ideas of where we're headed.

Modeling the Way

As a manager, one of your tasks for the digital branch is what my library calls modeling the way. Modeling the way, simply stated, is to do a task as an example for others in the library. For example, modeling the way might mean a manager posting to a blog. This doesn't necessarily mean that every manager has to take on leading the

Web push for their library's digital branch. After all, in many libraries, the head of reference doesn't always work the same number of hours at the desk as everyone else, right? Managers have different jobs than nonmanagerial staff. However, for the digital branch, modeling the way by actually doing some of the work of the digital branch can be a great example to set for staff. As a manager, you might have a good directional idea for a blog, so if you can provide examples of blog posts, you can point staff to those posts and content and then ask for more of the same.

For example, as digital branch manager, I will sometimes find a blog that needs more content and add some to the mix. Sometimes I will pick up one of our video cameras and make a video post to show how I want videos to be done and also to show how much time should be needed to do both.

Creating a Style Guide

You will also need a style guide. Just as a magazine has a style guide to stay consistent, your website needs a style guide for consistency. If your library is big enough to have a marketing department, you might need to match your Web style guide with their print style guide. When I created our style guide in Topeka, I worked with our marketing director to create a style guide that works both on the Web and in print format.

A style guide should always be changing, just as style on the Web is always changing. The sidebar will give you a good idea of what's needed in one. I went much further and added other nonstyle information to help guide staff in writing.

Sample Digital Branch Style Guide

General Guidelines for Blog Posts

Post Frequency/Length

- Frequency
  - Two posts per week for each Subject Guide.
  - Posts in the Services section as needed.
- Length
  - Length should be sufficient to cover the topic—a short paragraph will not give readers the proper context. However, it is best to keep posts as short as possible while still covering all necessary information.

Formatting

- One space between sentences—not two!
- Avoid ALL CAPS.
- Use a spell checker.
- Break a post into small paragraphs rather than one large chunk of text.

Post Titles

- Keep them short, snappy, and descriptive.
- Capitalize every word except articles and conjunctions (e.g., *a, and, the*—like a book title).

Internal Post Structure

- "Please use bulleted lists whenever possible.
- Please use subheadings whenever possible.
- Whenever possible, use images that compliment the article, as these attract more readers.

Specific Words—Be Consistent with These Terms

- e-mail (with a hyphen, all lowercase)
- website (all one word, all lowercase)
- webpage (all one word, all lowercase)
- Web (uppercase *W*)
- Internet (uppercase *I*)
- our library—first reference is "Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library." Second reference is "the library."
- Our website is "the Digital Branch."
- Refer to our 'Neighborhoods'—the different sections of our page—by their full title (e.g., the Travel Neighborhood, the Health Information Neighborhood)

Summary of Post

- Each post should have a summary. There are two ways to do this:
  - Create a summary paragraph in the summary box.
  - Leave the summary blank. The beginning of the post will automatically be used as the summary.

Tags

- Tags are usually keywords that are descriptive of the content of a post.
- Use two or three descriptive tags for each post.
- Tags should be different from a category. For example, a post could be in the Books subject guide with a category of Sci-Fi and have tags like *Steampunk, Robots,* and *Mars.*

Links

- For book titles
  - — Make the book title the link text.
  - — Don't include the URL with the book title.
    - Do this: *The Hobbit* (where *The Hobbit* is the text used for the link).
    - Don't do this: *The Hobbit*–http://catalog.tscpl.org/asdfhasdf/etc.htm (where *The Hobbit* is NOT the link text, but the URL is also used as the link text).
- For Other Links
  - — When linking to webpages or blog posts, make the webpage title or the blog article title the link text.
  - — Refer to the link within a sentence, like this: "Topeka has a great library that everyone should visit." (In this sentence, *great library* would be the link text used for our library's URL.)
  - — Another example: Don't write, "You can read the full report here." Using words like *here* or *click here* is generally bad practice. Instead, say, "The charity released a report, which said . . ." (The phrase *a report* is the link text and is incorporated within the sentence.) This type of internal link reads better.

Citing/Attribution

It's important to give proper attribution to sources, even online. Here's how to do it:

- Blog posts, newspaper articles, other websites
  - — See the Links section above for linking.
  - — When you quote someone else's text, make sure to link to the original source.
  - — With the link to the original source, reference the site. For example, say "Here's a lovely article on the Topeka Avenue bridge project (from the *Topeka Capital Journal*)." *Lovely article* links to the specific article, and *Topeka Capital Journal* links to the newspaper's main site.
- Images
  - — If using an image from Flickr, Photobucket, or some other photo-sharing service, include some type of attribution or pointer back to the original photo at the end of the article (e.g., "Photo courtesy of JimBob." *JimBob* would link back to the original photo).
  - — Use photos with a Creative Commons license when possible.
- Videos
  - — Include some type of link, attribution, or pointer back to the original video (e.g., If you use a video from YouTube, link back to the YouTube video)
- How much of a quote can I use?
  - — The U.S. Copyright Office FAQ on fair use (www.copyright.gov/help/faq/faq-fairuse.html) says this: "It is permissible to use limited portions of a work including quotes, for purposes such as commentary, criticism, news reporting, and scholarly reports. There are no legal rules permitting the use of a specific number of words, a certain number of musical notes, or percentage of a work."
  - — Don't quote the whole thing!

Featured Section

First Feature Box

- The first feature box is called "Featured," and links to big programs, events and special features of the library. The box will be populated by PR and event resources.

Other Feature Boxes

- The other feature boxes include Books, Research, Movies & Music, Gallery, Kids, and Teens.
- These sections usually focus on content (although Gallery, Kids, and Teens boxes can post about a program).
- Handouts, booklists, and links should be part of that post. No programs with registration and limits should be posted here.

Comments—What to Do with Them?

- Respond.
  - — Thank them for their comment.
  - — Add something if possible. Point to another similar book, a link on our site, etc.
  - — If it's a question, answer it.
  - — If it's a criticism, answer it—or refer it to someone who can respond appropriately.
  - — If the comment is negative, don't repeat it! Respond without repeating the negative question or comment.
  - — In general, don't edit the comment. Usually, it's better to correct in another comment.
- Edit the comment only if it
  - — has "inappropriate" words (that our automatic naughty word filter didn't catch).
  - — is derogatory.
  - — has an unrelated link.
  - — uses poor grammar (sounds like they don't really know the language).
- Delete
  - — spam comments. For example, this is a spam comment: "I have checked that really there was great information regarding that. There was another also–http://healthbeautyproduct .blogspot.com." Usually spam comments include links to unrelated websites.
- If you don't know what to do, ask the web team to read the comment.

Creating a "Voice"

- Write in a conversational tone.
  - — Goal is to start conversations.
  - — If you wouldn't say it in conversation, don't write it.
  - — Write in a "friendly" tone, just like you do at the reference desk.
- Use active voice. For example, don't write "The tree was struck by lightning." Instead, write, "Lightning struck the tree."
- Use inverted pyramid writing style (explanation at Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inverted _pyramid).
- The first couple of sentences of your post display as the summary and appear in various places on our site as teasers to the whole article—so make them snappy!
- Write in present tense when possible. For example,
  - — Don't write, "The book signing will be held next Tuesday"
  - — Instead, write, "The book signing is next Tuesday"

How Can I Get a Conversation Started?

Here are a couple of ideas on getting conversations started on your blog.

- Take part in the conversation.
  - — Read blogs and area newspapers that allow comments.
  - — Read blogs in your area of expertise.
  - — Leave comments on those blogs, linking to your post in the comment.
  - — Also link to those blogs in your post.
- Focus your posts on goals.
  - — Before you write, answer this: "What do you want the reader to do?"
  - — Provide a call to action (i.e., tell them what you want them to do).
  - — Ask for a response.
  - — Point them to other content (like books in our catalog).

I Have a Suggestion or Problem. What Do I Do with It?

Problems

- E-mail the Web team.
- Tell us what could be improved.
- Include links or descriptive text if possible.

Ideas for the Site

- E-mail the Web team and Digital Branch Manager:
  - — Include a description of the idea.
  - — The Digital Branch Manager will set up a meeting if needed and share the idea with the Web team, managers, etc.
  - — Remember—all ideas are great, but not all ideas will be implemented on the site

- Hold regular meetings
  - Discuss ideas.
  - Make suggestions to the Web team.

Staff Responsibilities

Blog Moderator

- Make sure there are two posts per week.
- Encourage writers.
- Check in with the Digital Branch Manager periodically.
- Accomplish each item listed below under Blog Authors.

Blog Authors

- Write posts.
- Check links.
- Respond to comments.
- Delete spam.
- Periodically touch base with blog moderator.

Digital Branch Manager

- Big picture development of branch:
  - Strategic planning
  - Trend watching
- Talking to internal groups.
- Talking to external groups.
- Mentoring digital branch staff.
- Developing new content areas and unique services and tools.

Web Team

- Webmaster/designer and Web developer
- Design new pages.
- Keep design fresh.
- Handle day-to-day operations.
- Do maintenance and upgrades.
- Build new features.

Continued Focus on Site Improvements

Once you've designed your digital branch, you're not done with it by any means; in fact, you have just started. Feel free to rest for a week or so after a major site overhaul, but the very next week, start looking for ways to improve it, change it, and update it. Here are some ideas on how to do that:

- Do *usability testing*. Once you have the site live, make sure your users know how the site works. Look for ways to improve their experience. One good way to do this is through a usability test. This doesn't have to be a big, formal test. You can run a number of small tests. For example, do a quick usability test for finding the database page. You can test where a link is and if people can find it, if they know what your wording for the link really means, and if they can navigate the page adequately to find an appropriate database.
- Let's not stop there. How about doing some *journey mapping*? Journey mapping doesn't so much test usability—instead, it helps map each step a user takes to get from point A to point B or C and is a way to discover each interaction the customer has with your site. Journey mapping also helps you discover whether patrons get confused at those steps. Once you have found those confusion points, your job is to improve the overall experience of each of those interactions.

  For example, let's look at getting to that database page. You would map out each touch point, or interaction—basically each time the customer has to do something, like click a link, make a decision, or interact with staff or the website—and then you can work on improving these points.

  It might look like this:

  - *Starting at the main page, where's the database link?* Make sure the database link is easily findable. This might mean making the link larger and placing it towards the upper left-hand side of the page.
  - *What is the name?* Make sure the words used for the text link make sense to your patrons.
  - *When I click, where do I go?* Is the next page a long page of links to oddly named databases (e.g., EBSCOHost), or does your database page have helpful "what

do I do next" instructions? Would this page make sense to someone with no experience mining article databases?

  – *If I get confused, is there an easy way to ask for help?* Does this page have a link to your library's Ask a Librarian service? Is there an e-mail address or a phone number within easy reach?

- Use *focus groups*. You can set up a monthly meeting with customers who are interested in the digital branch. Ask them to focus on certain areas of the site so that you can get improvement suggestions. You can also create a Web survey and ask for likes and dislikes. These types of things don't take much time to create but will give you good feedback—and ideas to improve the site.
- You also need to be *monitoring the online world* and learning new tools as they appear. I don't know how many library Web managers I've met who don't do this! I would suggest that all library Web managers read blogs about emerging Web trends. Find some blogs written by people you respect, whether it's a library blog or not, and start reading and learning. When something interests you, start playing with it. Try it out, test it, figure out how it works. Figure out if it can be incorporated into your website. If so, test it as a pilot project.

  This is how you test and add things like Twitter or YouTube to your library's digital branch. Your job is to play with toys, in a way. Test new technology, and incorporate the worthwhile.

  Innovation on the Web is not going to slow down any time soon. You need to speed up and be there, waiting for the changes. Even better—start making your own changes.

- Finally, always *promote your site* and always explore new ways to do it. You should consider having accounts for your library in all the major social networking sites out there today. Right now, that might mean Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, and Twitter. It really depends on your audience. If, for example, you know that a lot of your patrons frequent Facebook but not MySpace, you can probably focus on Facebook and ignore MySpace.

  Make sure that the keywords you use to describe yourself can be used to find you. For example, in Flickr and YouTube, we use *Topeka Library* to name ourselves and try to always put those two words as tags in every post. This way, people searching for *Topeka* and *library* or even just *topeka* will find us, our page, and our content.

  Make sure your library is discoverable in all major search engines, and make sure you're first for specific keywords. For example, when you search for *Topeka* in Google, we're in the first ten hits (on the first page), which is great. Also, you can check keywords people are using to find you. If there are any inconsistencies, make sure to have some good, solid content for that keyword.