

Social Media

Abstract

Chapter 6 of *Library Technology Reports* (vol. 48, no. 6) “*Running the Digital Branch: Guidelines for Operating the Library Website*” by David Lee King discusses the use of social media to support the digital branch, including reasons to use social media to connect to customers and specific social media tools. The chapter examines goals for social media use and best practices.

I’ll take a wild guess that most of you reading this issue of *Library Technology Reports* use social media. Maybe you keep up-to-date with friends and family through Facebook, or perhaps you use Twitter to stay connected to other librarians. There are probably some local businesses you know that use social media to attempt to connect with you (and increase your business at their store). Librarians and libraries can also use these social media tools to connect with customers.

And Why Should We Do This?

Is it really worth the effort? You may wonder. What are the benefits of using social tools in a library setting? There are many reasons to use these tools. And many of those reasons mirror the reasons why practically any organization might want to use social media.

Listening

Listening comes first. Before your library starts “talking back” online, you should set up some listening tools to see and hear what your customers are saying about you, your services, and your local community.

Listening tools are easy to establish. For starters, create a search in Twitter for your library’s name

(e.g., *topekalibrary* and *topeka library* for TSCPL). Save that search in Twitter. Now, whenever someone uses those keywords in a Tweet, you’ll see it (assuming you revisit that search in your Twitter reader of choice).

Next, you can do an advanced Twitter search—for the word *library* and the name of your town or city. Save that search, too. This information shows when someone uses the word *library* in your vicinity (which means that they may be talking about you and your library).

You can set up similar searches in Google Alerts and subscribe to those alerts via e-mail or RSS. When a new search result appears, you will be notified.

Google Alerts

www.google.com/alerts

Using Twitter and Google Alerts helps you learn what customers say about you and the library and how they’re interacting with your organization. Use this information as an informal focus group. Once you’re comfortable with social media, start answering questions that pop up, which leads us to the next reason why your organization should use social media—communicating with customers.

Communicating

Social media is called “social” for a reason. It enables communication. Using social media tools through the acts of friending and following gives your organization direct access to your customers. This is HUGE. If people choose to follow you, it’s because they like your organization and they want to stay updated. Your library needs to follow through and provide interesting information for those customers.

Answering

You should also answer questions as they arise. There are two types of questions—direct and indirect. Direct questions are asked by a customer via social media. Your role, obviously, is to answer the question.

There are also indirect questions. These are questions someone asked their friends via social media, but didn't ask you. You might have seen the question because you follow the person or through the listening tools you created. Either way, seeing the question gives you a great opportunity to answer it.

Sharing New Stuff

Have a new service at the library? Have a fun event coming up? Share it via social media. Tweet it, make a short YouTube video about it. Add it to Facebook Events. After the event is over, share pictures of the event in Flickr, Facebook, and Twitter. People who missed the event may see the posts and want to come to the next one. If it's a service, share what you're doing and why—and invite people to use it.

Sharing Staff and Personality

It takes real people to answer questions. When real people talk to customers, their personality comes out, quirks and all. This also holds true with social media. And that's okay. Because sharing a little personality here and there makes you seem real, and people like that.

The other side of this idea is training. Some staff will be comfortable being themselves online in an organizational setting, while others will need some training on how to interact in a positive, purposeful manner when using an organizational social media account.

This leads us to the last reason—being “alive.”

Being “Alive” Online

When an organization actively participates in social networks, it shows that someone is interacting with customers. Everyone would agree that asking a question and receiving no response does not encourage someone to ask another question. Why bother? Responses make your social media account seem alive and worth following. Assuming you do a good job at it, it also makes the library seem active and worth following.

Social Media Tools to Use

Now let's look at the benefits of specific social media tools.

Facebook

TSCPL uses Facebook. I will boldly suggest that your

library should be using it, too. A recent study found that over 51 percent of Americans age 12 and up use Facebook.¹ Facebook has over 900 million users and is still growing. Locally, this means that a majority of your library's customers use Facebook. Can you think of a better way to reach a majority of your library's customers with a tool that provides a direct connection to those customers for free? Probably not.

What can a library do in Facebook? Facebook offers many ways to connect, including status updates (called Facebook Stories), uploading photos and videos, commenting, and liking something. You can create an event, create a group around a topic, or create a page around an organization. You can link to nearly anything—even e-mail and private messaging. So much to do on one little site!

Topeka has a number of Facebook pages, including:

- main page
- Library Foundation page
- Art Gallery page
- Friends of the Library page
- Youth Services account

Twitter

Twitter resembles the status update part of Facebook because that's pretty much all you can do on Twitter. But Twitter is also quite powerful. Edison Research just published some research stating that 10 percent of Americans use Twitter, and over 89 percent of people know about it.²

Ten percent is a much smaller number than 51 percent for Facebook. But here's something to think about: who are those 10 percent of people using Twitter in your community, and are they worth getting to know? In Topeka, Twitter users are our community's activists, our “get stuff done” group, our young professionals, our journalists and broadcast media reporters. Okay—and me, too. Twitter gives us a direct line to their smartphones. Do we want to be connected to these people? Yes, we do. They are achievers, and they might help us achieve, too—if we get to know them.

TSCPL has multiple Twitter accounts that are used for different purposes:

- **Main account.** Represents the library in Twitter.
- **Art Gallery account.** Our art gallery.
- **Podcamp Topeka account.** For our annual podcamp unconference event.
- **Health and wellness account.** For our Health and Wellness blog.

Flickr

Flickr is well-known for digital photo sharing. It's a community built around photos and visual images of

all types. You can do a couple of things with Flickr:

- store photos
- embed photos elsewhere (for example, on your blog or website)
- use it as a huge visual search engine

TSCPL has one Flickr account that we use to upload library-related photos. Then we differentiate events or services through tags and sets.

Once photos are uploaded, visitors can comment, Like, and share the photo. They can also embed the photo on another website.

YouTube

We have one YouTube account that we use for all video-related activities at the library. With YouTube, do a little planning first. Don't immediately jump into creating a "singing librarians" video (says David, who has created more than one singing librarian video). Instead, figure out what types of content your customers would like to see—and then make videos that support that content.

We use YouTube for a variety of purposes, including:

- introducing people to the library and to our services
- showing events
- highlighting part of the building or a library service

Foursquare

Foursquare is a "places" social network that lets you share where you're visiting. If you have the most check-ins of anyone at any given place, you can become the "mayor" of that place on Foursquare.

I recently saw a statistic that said 5 percent of people in the United States use Foursquare.³ It might be more or less in your service area. But think about it this way: if you see a Foursquare sticker (see figure 6.1) in your community, then you should seriously consider setting up a Foursquare place and becoming the manager of that place for your library. This lets people check in to your library using Foursquare.

Goodreads

We are experimenting with Goodreads, which is a book-lovers' social network. For now, we use it as a way to set up virtual book clubs and for a "what's the library reading" list created by library staff who have Goodreads accounts.

Pinterest

A relative newcomer, Pinterest is basically an online scrapbook social network. Set up a Pinterest account,



Figure 6.1
Foursquare sticker in Topeka.

find something you like on the Web, and then "Pin" it to a board in Pinterest. That Pin gets shared by everyone who has friended you in Pinterest.

TSCPL has sixteen Pinterest boards, including Staff Picks: Books, Staff Picks: Movies, Staff Picks: Music, Teen Scene, Cooking Neighborhood, Library Lounge, Getting Crafty, Parents and Kids, Healthy Living, Library Stuff, Art and the Library, Home Neighborhood, Pet Neighborhood, Lawn & Garden Neighborhood, Fashion, and DIY.

Google Plus

We haven't done much with this newer social network yet. We have set up the account and have occasionally posted content to the site. We will plan to revisit Google Plus when it picks up a larger user base in Topeka.

Goals

Your library probably already has long-range planning in place. Maybe your library has created a strategic plan and a vision statement. When setting up social media tools and services, why not create some goals for those sites, too? The social media goals can line up with the library's goals.

Here's one example from TSCPL. The first paragraph of our vision statement says, "You know us—and we know you. We are on your speed dial—just like your best friend. The library is part of your daily life. We're friends on Facebook. You visit us in person and on the digital branch."⁴

Read between the lines and you can see quite a few digital branch and social media goals:

- We need to be excellent at phone and text reference services.
- "Friends on Facebook" means we need to be active in social media tools used by our community.
- Our digital branch needs to include social media.
- "Just like your best friend" means we need to be pretty transparent, giving ready access to our work phone numbers and e-mail addresses. We need to know our customers.

Another of TSCPL's strategic goals is to contribute to the growth and development of our community's families and children. We probably aren't going to reach a mass of children using social media since most sites require users to be age 13 or older.

In this case, our focus should be on connecting to parents. A majority of our Facebook users are females in the 25–45 age range, and many are likely young professionals and moms. This means we need to have goals for that demographic. We should post information related to their interests, which includes things to do with kids.

What's Working?

In Topeka, we are having success using social media in three areas:

- conversations
- fun stuff
- videos

Conversations

We have discovered something about our local customers: they like talking about books and movies. We are a library, after all. We post book and movie reviews on our Books Movies and Music blog and also in our neighborhood blogs when it makes sense (e.g., a business-related book review in our business blog or a cookbook review in our cooking blog).

Our customers respond well to these posts. For example, on a post about steampunk, the blog post author listed a lot of steampunk books. Then we included "Your turn to talk" at the end of the post, and three people (myself included) added their own favorite steampunk authors in the comments.

TSCPL steampunk post

<http://tscpl.org/podcast/hush-a-podcast-from-your-library-episode-19-steampunk>

Fun Stuff

We love having fun on our digital branch! One of the ways we do this is to ask questions that garner responses via Facebook. On Facebook especially, people love talking to us about the books and movies they're reading and watching. Here's one example (also mentioned in chapter 3). We asked: "Good night folks. What book is on tap for bedtime tonight? Share what you're reading so our friends can decide whether they want to check it out."⁵ We received fourteen responses, most within two hours of our post:

1. "Minding Frankie by Maeve Binchy"
2. "Wild by Cheryl Strayed"
3. "MockingJay by Suzanne Collins"
4. "'Paris in Love: A Memoir' by Eloisa James... very good so far!"
5. "the wind through the keyhole. new stephen king. omg so excited! i am giddy! :)"
6. "Try to finish another chapter of I Was Carlos Casteneda [sic] . . . which is probably overdue now >.<"
7. "Im behind the times, im reading The Hunger Games."
8. "I haven't read it either Denise. I think I'm still on the waiting list for The Help and Something Borrowed. Random: I think the library needs a mascot..."
9. "I'm reading the third book in the Hunger Games series."
10. "Arcadia by Lauren Groff"
11. "The Borrowers for Emma and Wired magazine for me :)"
12. "I was in bed reading 'A supremely Bad Idea' by Luke Dempsey when you posted this."
13. "The Eden Prophecy by Graham Brown"
14. "The Hours Before Dawn by Celia Fremlin. One of the quietly suspenseful mysteries of the late 50's. Snagged if off ebay :-)"

Almost half of those were posted via mobile. Our customers like these types of fun, lighthearted status updates.

Videos

We are also having some luck with videos, for good reason. YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world, and people love watching and sharing short videos. If you can find a sweet spot with videos,

fun, and your content, you'll have videos that get watched.

Best Practices

Here are some best practices for interacting with customers using social media. These best practices are a starting place. You'll need to listen and see how your local customers respond to your social media efforts, and then adjust accordingly.

Listen

It bears repeating: you need to listen first. Create a couple of Google Alerts and Twitter searches focused on your library, and then start following them. Listen to what your customers are saying about you and about topics your organization is interested in, and figure out how to interact with customers and how to answer any questions that come up.

How Many Times per Day or Week

Once you have listened a bit, start posting to social media sites. You might start by posting one to three times per day and then adapt from there. If your customers respond, you might think about posting more often.

Team Approach

Developing a team approach will help your organization meet your social media goals. Don't assign one staff member to write all the posts, status updates, and responses to comments if you can help it. Yes, there are some smaller libraries that might need to have one person doing all social media, and that's fine. It can certainly work that way! Spreading out the workload, though, will give you more eyes watching and listening, and you'll have more staff participating.

One way to facilitate a team-based approach, or even just to consolidate some social media tools, is to use a tool like HootSuite or TweetDeck. Both services allow you to interact with a variety of social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn simultaneously. HootSuite goes a step further by letting you sign up multiple people to a corporate account. This is a quick way to have multiple staff members post to social media sites. Of course, the corporate account costs some money, too, which may be a factor, depending on the size of your team.

Strategy

Finally, make sure to create plans and goals for social media tools. As I said earlier in the Goals section of this chapter, you can't meet any goals if you don't have any goals. Ask your patrons what they want from your social media efforts, and then try to accommodate those ideas. Use your library's strategic plan and patrons' ideas to brainstorm your goals.

Notes

1. Tom Webster, "Facebook Achieves Majority," Edison Research, March 24, 2011, www.edisonresearch.com/home/archives/2011/03/facebook_achieves_majority.php.
2. Tom Webster, "Twitter Is Bigger Than You Think," Edison Research, April 24, 2012, www.edisonresearch.com/home/archives/2012/04/why-twitter-is-bigger-than-you-think.php.
3. Geoff Duncan, "Forrester: Only 5 Pct of Adults Use Geo-social Apps," Digital Trends, December 6, 2011, www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/forrester-only-5-pct-of-adults-use-geo-social-apps.
4. "Strategic Plan," Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library, accessed April 25, 2012, <http://tsopl.org/about/strategic-plan>.
5. "Good night folks" Facebook post, Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library, April 24, 2012, www.facebook.com/TopekaLibrary/posts/10150751221062976.