

# How We Operate the Digital Branch

## Abstract

*Chapter 4 of Library Technology Reports (vol. 48, no. 6) “Running the Digital Branch: Guidelines for Operating the Library Website” by David Lee King discusses how to create teams, leverage meetings, and set goals. A variety of digital branch teams are discussed, including social media teams. Meetings that are necessary for running the digital branch and digital branch goals are also described.*

I get asked about the operation of our website all the time. People ask me questions like these: How does your library create the content on the site? Who builds the site? Is the design work done in-house or off-site?

In this chapter, I will answer those questions. You will probably notice our strong team-based structure. Anyone working at the library can (with supervisor approval) work in some way on the digital branch. In fact, involvement is encouraged. With twenty-four blogs, many static pages, and quite a few social media outposts, we need a lot of people to create content, make regular updates to that content, and create and continue conversations in the social space.

Operating effectively takes a team . . . and meetings . . . and goals. This chapter will look at each of these factors as they apply to the digital branch.

## Teams: Who’s in Charge of the Digital Branch?

A lot of the 225 employees at TSCPL have responsibilities in the digital branch. That said, there are people who have oversight of a variety of web-focused activities at different levels. Here’s what our “digital branch org chart” looks like.

## Digital Services Director

I’m the “branch manager” of our digital branch. So I have ultimate responsibility for what happens on the digital branch and for direction of the site. I act as editor-in-chief of digital branch content and direction. I meet with content creators and social media teams to help set direction and goals for each blog or static section of the site. I continually look for emerging Web trends to incorporate into the site. I also meet with departments to figure out next steps for their content. I create some content myself.

We consider the IT department part of the digital branch, so I manage that department as well (with the help of a day-to-day supervisor of the department). The digital services director is a system-wide, long-range planning role.

## Web Team

Our web team consists of a web developer and a web designer. These two staff members design our websites—both front and back ends. This team works on the library’s digital facilities—back-end coding, front-end design, database work, APIs—the daily nuts and bolts of the site. These staff members build new sections of the site and meet with staff to ensure the digital branch is meeting their needs. The web team also constantly makes improvements to the site so it stays modern and functioning well.

## Creative Group

The creative group is a multidepartmental team at TSCPL with a focus on marketing, PR, and the Web. The group is made up of the digital services director, the web team, our marketing and communications

department (manager, graphic designer, and communications editor), a public services staff member who focuses on digital content services, and our events and programs manager. Our deputy director usually attends, and the library director attends occasionally.

The creative group discusses current and upcoming projects and works to make them better. It looks at different sections or services offered on the digital branch and improves those sections. For example, the creative group might look at the About the Library section of our website and make suggestions and improvements.

Once the group has agreed on needed improvements, the web team incorporates those changes into the site. Another week, the group might review the library's Facebook page. The creative group will look at statistics and current status updates sent to the site, make suggestions for improving user engagement, and possibly set some goals for the page. Then, it might recommend a Facebook team to implement changes. The creative group is a fun team that helps forge a better digital branch experience for our customers.

### **Blog Teams**

We have about twenty-four blogs that are part of our digital branch. Most of our blogs are connected to part of our library's physical collection. In the physical library, we have arranged topic areas of content into what we call neighborhoods. We are still using Dewey as a call number system (instead of switching to BISAC as some libraries have done), but we have reclassified material so that, for example, all the health and wellness books sit together in the same area of the library with signage saying that this is the health neighborhood. Some neighborhoods have added attractions. For example, there's a blood pressure checker in the health neighborhood.

Each neighborhood has a small team of two to four employees who are in charge. Each team has an annual strategic plan for its neighborhood, called a service plan. The service plans contain yearly goals and direction for each neighborhood.

Each neighborhood has a blog on the digital branch, and each neighborhood team writes focused blog content. Blogs may point to new acquisitions, events happening in the library related to the neighborhood, and events happening locally (or even nationally) related to the topic. These blogs always point back to TSCPL, too (usually by adding a link to the new book or event mentioned in the blog post).

### **Departments**

Some areas of the digital branch are very departmentally focused (e.g., Youth Services or the Bookmobile). These specialized areas function much like the blog

teams—they set direction and are in charge of content for their areas of the digital branch. If there's a static page in the area (like the databases page or a departmental service like reader's advisory), we place a staff member in charge of that page. Every three to six months, that staff member revisits the page and checks it for accuracy. This person also makes any updates and suggests improvements for the page.

All of these teams work with the digital services director to set goals and to develop the site.

### **Social Media Teams**

Some of our social media sites also have teams in charge of them, and some of them don't. Here's a quick breakdown.

#### ***Twitter and Facebook***

Right now, Twitter and Facebook are run primarily by our marketing department and by me. This will change later this year. Our goal is to make these social media sites more team-driven, much like our blogs. Before we do that, we need to set strategy and gather those teams.

We have multiple Facebook and Twitter accounts, including a main "all library" account. We also have other accounts for our foundation, the Friends of the Library group, and TSCPL's art gallery. Those departments and organizations handle their own social networks with the help of the creative group.

#### ***YouTube and Flickr***

For YouTube and Flickr, we have a central username and password that we freely give out to staff when they're ready to post a video or a photo set. The digital services director monitors each site for comments and for friend requests.

#### ***Pinterest and Goodreads***

For Pinterest and Goodreads, we use our team-based approach. Each site has a separate team that creates goals for the social media tool, figures out what types of content should be posted to the group, and assigns people to create that content. The team leader makes sure everything is working as it should and sets up regular team meetings. We have also created a group e-mail account for each tool so that e-mails from the social network, friend requests, and comments come to that e-mail. Since it's a group e-mail, we can add each team member to the e-mail group, and everyone on the team receives those messages.

These two teams are working well. We will most likely move our other social networks to team-based approaches, too.

### **Other Social Media Tools**

Other sites, like Foursquare and Google Plus, are handled by the digital services director for now. If the usage of those sites continues to grow, teams will be formed to manage those sites as well.

## **Meetings**

We hold a number of meetings to keep everyone up to speed.

### **Creative Group**

The creative group that I discussed above meets weekly. During the meeting, we talk about things like marketing goals and projects, upcoming promotions, and website problems and improvements. We also talk about social media and the intersection of marketing and promotion with community-building needs.

The goal is to tie these topics together into a cohesive marketing and digital branch plan that is recognizable in print, in the physical building, in the community, and on our digital branch.

These meetings are also where we regularly review the website, section by section, as described earlier. We make improvements where needed, consulting with staff in the process.

### **Blog Teams**

Each blog team meets a couple of times a year. I am sometimes involved in those meetings, but not always. During the meetings, the team decides on content

direction and goals for its blog and discusses any difficulties or problems that have occurred.

The team also might discuss the service plan goals and programs for its content neighborhood. The digital branch is a part of that plan and includes what the team will write about and how it will connect with customers using the blog.

### **Departmental Meetings**

I also meet with smaller groups or departments as needed to focus on updates and new ideas for their part of the website. Often, the creative group will invite groups to our weekly meeting, too. In those meetings, we might create goals for a section of the site, decide what content is needed, and determine who does the work and maintains that part of the website.

## **Digital Branch Goals**

Our digital branch doesn't run without goals. However, we don't have many "digital branch-specific" goals for the website. That's because the library already has strategic plans in place, and our digital branch reflects what's going on in the larger library system.

For example, one goal of the library is to create more neighborhood collections. The digital branch aspect of that strategic goal is to create a blog and other webpages for the neighborhood. Another goal of the library is to create a digital gallery for our art gallery. That goal requires us to build an easy-to-use digital art gallery that has functionality both on the customer end and on the staff side.