

# Landscape of Social Media for Libraries

This chapter explores the most important social media tools in use by libraries today. Will this list change by next year? Very possibly—social media is still expanding and morphing. However, there are some tools that have matured enough to have staying power (and the attention of your customers).

Here are the most used social media channels currently in use in libraries.

## Facebook

Many libraries are using Facebook, and it should be considered essential in today's social media landscape. As we learned in the last chapter, 57 percent of US adults are using Facebook.<sup>1</sup> It makes sense for libraries to set up shop with a Facebook Page since a majority of customers are already using Facebook.

What are libraries sharing on Facebook? They are sharing two types of content:

- **Library news.** Libraries are sharing about themselves—what's happening at the library, what will happen, and what recently happened. For example, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library recently purchased and unveiled a new bookmobile. The library shared about the new bookmobile (figure 2.1) through its Facebook Page: "This beauty is 37 feet long and 94 inches wide. Come see its grandness for yourself tomorrow during our Bookmobile Grand Opening. Come to the library's parking lot at 9am for a chance to be the first person to check out on

the new Sherlock Holmes-themed bookmobile. Fun!"<sup>2</sup> To date, this post has received sixty-four Likes and eleven Shares.

- **Fun stuff.** Libraries are also sharing what I'm calling "fun stuff." These are light-hearted or humorous posts that one often finds on Facebook. These types of posts tend to make people smile and click the Like button. That's the goal. The more often a Facebook user interacts with your library's Facebook content, the more Facebook's content algorithm decides that the user enjoys that content. Then Facebook will allow more of your library's content to be shown in the person's Facebook news feed. That means more of your library's Facebook Page content—the library news and the fun stuff—will be shown to your Facebook Page followers.

## Twitter

Twitter is another useful social media channel for a growing percentage of your community. Although Twitter's user base is much smaller than Facebook's—around 16 percent of your community uses Twitter<sup>3</sup>—it's still worth exploring.

Who are your Twitter users? According to Pew Research, Twitter has "particular appeal to younger adults, urban dwellers, and non-whites."<sup>4</sup> Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library's Twitter followers run the gamut from teens with smartphones, to young professionals, to the homeless. It's a fun and interesting mix of people who like sharing and discussing quick snippets of information and news.



**Figure 2.1**  
Topeka's Facebook Post about its new bookmobile

What should you share on Twitter? Many libraries share current information and news about their library—that “what’s happening now” type of content. Twitter is a popular “breaking news” tool, whether that breaking news is about a major world event or about the amazing pizza restaurant down the street from the library.

Kansas City Public Library (Kansas City, MO) recently shared this Tweet (figure 2.2): “Weird Al’s newest album is available on @FreegalMusic with your @kclibrary card! <http://kclibrary.freegalmusic.com/artists/view/1...>”<sup>5</sup> This Tweet coincided with Weird Al Yankovic’s new music release that was featured pretty prominently in many online outlets, including YouTube.

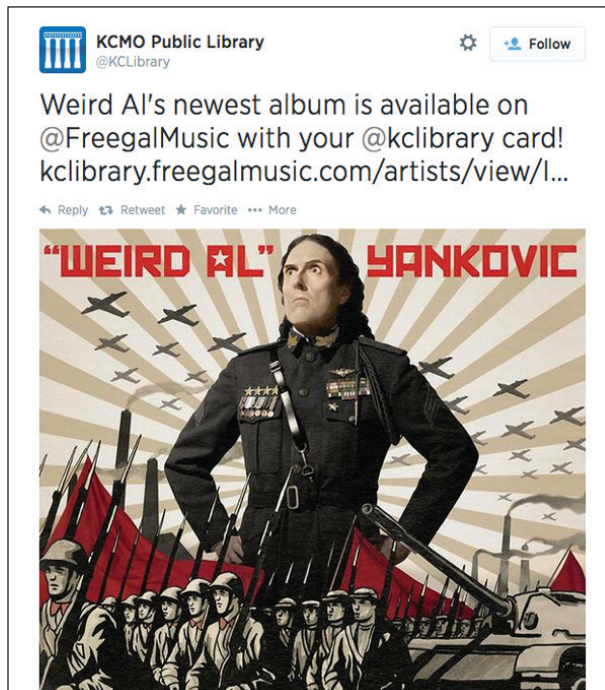
Kansas City’s Tweet is a great example of how to share content via Twitter:

- It was a posting about a timely news event.
- It focused on fun, entertainment-based information.
- The library connected the event (and its Tweet) to a library database (in this case, Freegal).
- The post seems to have been successful. Kansas City’s Twitter followers Retweeted (shared) it with other Twitter users.

## YouTube

Most people don’t really think of YouTube as a social media channel, but it is. YouTube includes socially shared content, friends and followers, Favoriting, rating, sharing, bookmarking, and commenting—all very much in the realm of a social network.

YouTube is not a small, niche social media channel, either. It has a huge user base—enough to make it



**Figure 2.2**  
Kansas City Public Library Tweeted about Weird Al Yankovic

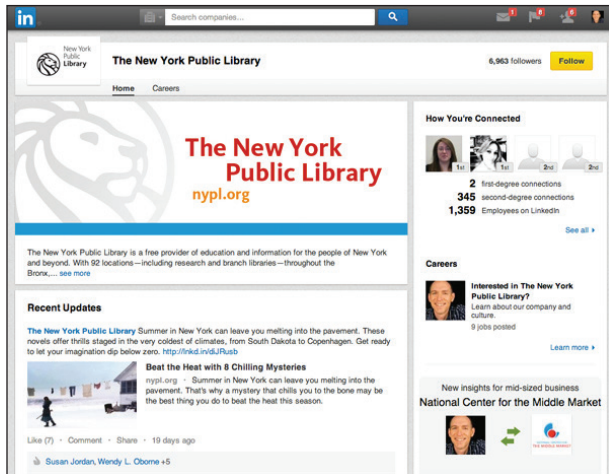
the second largest search engine in the world. Fifty-one percent of US adults use YouTube.<sup>6</sup> Among younger adult audiences, there’s a stronger reach. According to Nielsen, YouTube reaches more US adults ages 18–34 than any cable network.<sup>7</sup> That’s a pretty amazing statistic, since YouTube has existed for eight or nine years, while cable television has been around for approximately thirty years.

What are libraries sharing through YouTube?

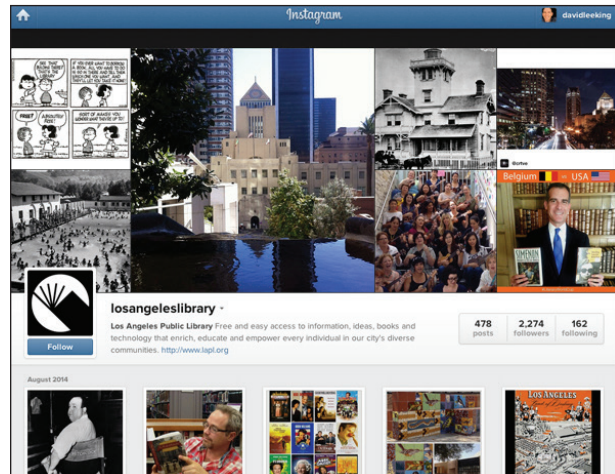
- **Reference and entertainment.** Want to learn something fast? There’s probably a YouTube video about it. Want to listen to a new song? Increasingly, YouTube is where bands put their newest music (lyrics-only videos), even before the official music video is created.
- **Library information.** YouTube is also a great place to post library-related instructional videos.
- **Social content.** YouTube is a social network, too. So if you post videos, there’s a good chance people will follow your channel and comment or Like your videos.

## LinkedIn

LinkedIn is well known as a business-focused networking tool. Nineteen percent of US adults use LinkedIn to post their job history and their resume and to connect with like-minded people.<sup>8</sup> It’s also turning into a growing social network. A LinkedIn user can reach out to



**Figure 2.3**  
New York Public Library's LinkedIn company page



**Figure 2.4**  
Los Angeles Public Library's Instagram account

others for job and work leads and can create a group for focused discussions.

Libraries can use LinkedIn to connect with the professional community in their service area. Make sure to post useful business and finance-related content on your library's LinkedIn page. Set up discussions about a business or marketing book (and offer the book to the group).

Make sure to set up a company page (figure 2.3) for your library, too.

## Tumblr

Tumblr is a quirky blog-like social media tool that has been growing in popularity. For adults, it takes a back seat to other social media tools; 4 percent of US adults use Tumblr.<sup>9</sup> Teens and younger adults use it slightly more often.

Tumblr can be a fun, popular place for animated gifs and visual-based posts for libraries. Tumblr is also a good place to be slightly irreverent (while remembering that you represent the library, so don't overdo it!).

## Pinterest

Pinterest is a great place to find interesting visual content. Fifteen percent of US adults use Pinterest<sup>10</sup>—mostly women. According to Mashable, almost one third of US women use Pinterest, while only 8 percent of men use the service.<sup>11</sup>

My library uses Pinterest to Pin interesting content that we find or that is happening in the library. We also Pin new books. By doing those simple things, we have almost two thousand followers on our main page and thousands of followers on each of our subject boards.

## Instagram

Instagram is a fun social media channel dedicated to sharing photos and short videos. Facebook recently bought it and has been making improvements to the service.

There are a lot of people using Instagram; 12 percent of US adults use the photo-sharing service.<sup>12</sup> People under the age of 29 are more likely to use Instagram.

What do you do with Instagram? You can do quite a lot, including taking a photo or short video and adding comments to each image. You can also add keyword-based hashtags to each photo, which makes your photo more findable.

Libraries can share photos of what's happening at the library—fun stuff and behind-the-scenes pictures (figure 2.4). You can also use Instagram to give your library a human touch—to share the human side of the library.

## Snapchat

Snapchat allows users to post photos and videos, add text and drawing to the photo or video, and set a content timer. This allows the user to share content that will disappear after a set amount of time.

Because of the more ephemeral content, Snapchat is more like a visual conversation that can be shared with friends. Snapchat has about thirty million active users, mostly teens.<sup>13</sup> If a library posts content that is similar in scope to Twitter and Instagram, it will be headed in the right direction.

## Vine

Vine is an interesting new tool owned by Twitter where users can take and share six-second videos.

Since Twitter owns Vine, this tool integrates nicely with Twitter posts. Vine isn't as popular as some of the other services we've examined. Just 3 percent of US adults use Vine.<sup>14</sup> The percentage is much higher for teens.

A library can use Vine to create visual content that's similar to the content in Instagram. Just remember that this content is all video and lasts only six seconds. Believe it or not, you can share a lot of content in six seconds! Try doing a six-second book review, for example. Creative limitations can be good!

## Google Plus

Google Plus (also known as Google+ or just G+) is Google's growing social network. Google had tried previously to create a social network—Google Buzz. It didn't take off and lasted only about a year. But Google Plus has been steadily growing in popularity. Currently, 14 percent of US adults use Google Plus.<sup>15</sup>

Content on Google Plus is very similar to what you would find using Twitter or Facebook. With 14 percent of your community there, Google Plus is definitely worth exploring further.

## Flickr

Let's not forget an oldie but a goodie, Flickr! Flickr is used by ninety-two million users worldwide<sup>16</sup> and is a great place to store and share photos online. It also has a strong, loyal social network.

Flickr is also very simple to use. Set up an account, upload some photos, Friend people in your community, and make sure to share those Flickr photos elsewhere, especially on your website.

## How Should a Library Post to Social Media?

There are definitely a lot of social networks for today's library to choose from. This chapter has only touched the surface by exploring the most popular ones. Thankfully, posting methods are similar in most of the social media channels listed above.

Make sure to create great, useful content. This is the hardest "rule" of social media and the one that will gain you the most traction in using social media for an organization. Share great content, and your customers will want to connect with you.

Besides great content, what else should be in that post? Here are some ideas:

- **What I'm doing.** Share what's happening in the library. You can also share something big that

recently happened at the library. For example, my library recently shared pictures of the ribbon cutting for our new bookmobile on Twitter and Facebook. Our customers liked that and commented on it.

- **Tips and tricks.** Share tips and shortcuts for using library databases or the library's ILS. Have a great way to discover new authors? Share that process with customers.
- **Photos and videos.** Make your library come alive online by sharing how it looks through videos and photos.
- **Entertainment and fun content.** Be fun or funny once in a while. Share silly stuff—especially in Facebook. That's how its news feed functions.
- **Networking and connections.** Finally, make sure to network and create lasting connections with your customers. Library staff already know how to do this in person. Do the same thing online. Friend people. Comment on what they're doing, and in general be helpful.

## Some Examples

Let's look at some examples of libraries that are using social media well.

**Facebook: Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library.** I love what my library is doing with Facebook. You'll hear more about our approach to content later on in this publication. But for now, check it out and browse around.

What will you see? You'll see posts that are a mix of fun and library-related content presented in a way that involves our community. Our customers like to respond by adding comments and clicking Likes and Shares.

*Facebook: Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library*

<https://www.facebook.com/TopekaLibrary>

**Twitter: Kansas City Public Library.** Kansas City Public Library is doing a great job of sharing in-the-moment thoughts and content on its Twitter feed, and its customers seem to respond positively.

*Twitter: Kansas City Public Library*

<https://twitter.com/kclibrary>

**YouTube: Allen County Public Library.** Check out this library's videos! It has a great mix of interviews, kid and teen programs, and fun videos. Look hard enough, and you'll even find an interview with me in the video archive.

*YouTube: Allen County Public Library*  
<https://www.YouTube.com/user/askacpl>

**LinkedIn: New York Public Library.** Check out what New York is doing in LinkedIn. It's sharing what's happening at the library and information about its larger-name events. For example, it recently acquired Maya Angelou's archives and shared this information on LinkedIn. It received forty-two Likes and a couple of comments from that post.

*LinkedIn: New York Public Library*  
<https://www.Linkedin.com/company/new-york-public-library>

**Tumblr: Darien Library.** Darien Library does a great job connecting to young professional adults with its Tumblr account. What does the library share? It shares content like recipes submitted by staff, a video of a rabbit that discovered the library's garden, and fun book reviews, among other things.

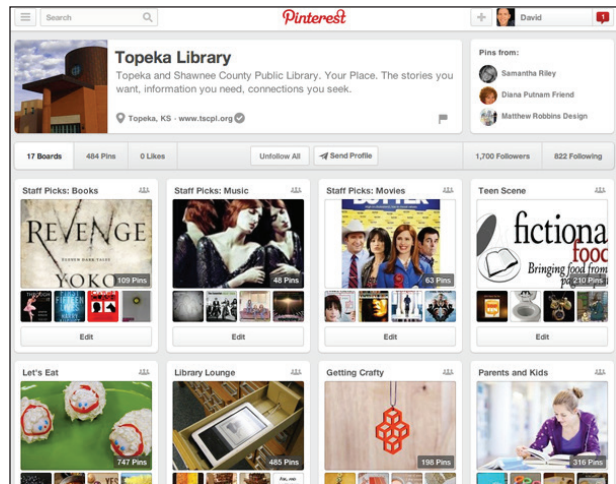
*Tumblr: Darien Library*  
<http://darienlibrary.tumblr.com>

**Instagram: Lloyd Sealy Library, John Jay College of Criminal Justice.** Check out what the Lloyd Sealy Library does; it's very focused. The library specializes in criminal justice, and you can tell by looking at its Instagram account. The account is full of old pictures of gangster mug shots.

*Instagram: Lloyd Sealy Library, John Jay College of Criminal Justice*  
<http://instagram.com/johnjaylibrary>

**Pinterest: Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library.** I'll also share what Topeka is doing on Pinterest (figure 2.5). We are sharing subject-related content that directly corresponds to the library's print collections. The library staff has arranged many of our materials into genre-related content called neighborhoods. Content that gets shared on Pinterest matches a genre neighborhood in the library building.

*Pinterest: Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library*  
<http://pinterest.com/topekalibrary>



**Figure 2.5**  
Topeka's Pinterest account

**Vine: Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library.** Yes, another one from my library. Hey, that's why I'm writing this LTR! Using Vine, we share quick snippets of what's happening in the library. We have also done some stop-motion animation and some quick book reviews. For example, we were closed for a week during an RFID migration project. During the week, we shared what staff members were doing using Vine videos (and other social media tools). Our customers loved watching.

*Vine: Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library*  
<https://vine.co/topekalibrary>

**Google Plus: New York Public Library.** With over 812,000 followers, I'd say that NYPL knows how to use Google Plus! Looks like the library uses it to share fun stuff and events and library information in an accessible, informal way. Nicely done.

*Google Plus: New York Public Library*  
<https://plus.google.com/+newyorkpubliclibrary>

**Flickr: Boston Public Library.** Flickr is still a really useful tool for photo and image sharing. And Boston Public takes full advantage of Flickr's capabilities. Boston shares archival photos using Flickr.

*Flickr: Boston Public Library*  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/boston\\_public\\_library](https://www.flickr.com/photos/boston_public_library)

## Notes

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