

How to Connect with and Communicate with Customers

So far, we've learned about why social media can be a useful tool to help a library connect with customers. We've also scanned the current landscape of social media channels and discussed what channels libraries are using.

Now let's roll up our sleeves and start using them! This chapter will discuss tips and tricks libraries use to connect to customers using social media—particularly creating connections, starting and continuing conversations, and effectively sharing library news.

Personal Accounts versus Library Accounts—There's a Difference!

These days, most people use some form of social media to stay in contact with family and friends. They might also use it to keep up-to-date on their favorite hobby or pastime. Social media is a great professional information-gathering and networking tool, too, and many of us use it for that as well.

Because of this, we are familiar with the process of posting content to a social media channel. However, representing a library on a social media site that was originally created to represent an individual can be tricky. How do you represent the library, but also

make personal connections with your customers at the same time?

Content Really IS King

The first, most important part of setting up an organizational social media channel is not your banner, the color scheme you use, or the images displayed on your social media page. It's the content. The content you present under the moniker of the library will make or break your social media channel.

Unfortunately, many libraries have not yet mastered this crucial step. The easiest way to turn followers into engaged fans—fans who interact with your posts (Like, Share, comment, click links, etc.) and hopefully your library—is to create compelling, interesting content.

How do you do that? It's not as hard as you'd think. Here are ten tips, hints, and tricks for turning your library's social media content into something that your customers will want to engage with:

1. Be relevant.
2. Be consistent.
3. Pay attention to different tools and different rules.

4. Share the library's story.
5. Be human.
6. Type like you talk.
7. Be helpful.
8. Think short.
9. Be visual.
10. Encourage audience participation.

Let's explore each of these tips in more detail.

1. Be Relevant

You have to be relevant to your audience to engage them, and there are at least two ways to think about being relevant. First, you need to know who your audience is or what customers your library wants to focus on. You could focus on the people who are friending or following your social media channel. Most likely, they are already library lovers. They might already use the physical library, and they liked the content they saw on the social media channel.

The fact that they're library lovers is awesome because you don't have to convince this group that the library is great. They already believe that. Don't pretend these fans are new library users!

Instead of posting content to try to convince them about something they are already convinced about, post content that your "insiders" would like. Provide them with tips on new books or new videos the library just purchased. Share about a new service of the library. Is there a big author event that your favorite customers would be interested in? Share that information on your social media channel.

You can also share expert tips with this group. For a library, expert tips might be things like shortcuts on library use, better ways to search for (and find) something in the ILS, or how to set up alerts on a subject or author.

The second way to think about your audience is to focus on your library's strategic plan and on the demographic groups that your library is strategically trying to reach. For example, one of my library's strategic initiatives is for every child to be ready for school. Using social media, the library might target young parents ages 20–35. We would create content for that age and lifestyle demographic. Having a specific target audience in mind when you are creating content really helps narrow your focus and ultimately helps to make your social media content more interesting because you're no longer trying to be everything to everyone.

2. Be Consistent

Lack of posting consistency is another major reason why many library social media channels struggle to gain followers and engagement. When the library isn't

using social media channels consistently, postings tend to be sporadic. Other content (like phone number or hours) might not get updated quickly, either.

Being inconsistent with posting can happen for a variety of reasons. Maybe one person was assigned the task, and that person found another job. Then no one was assigned to do the Facebook posting for six months. Or possibly it's just not a high priority in the library. A staff member was assigned to post to Facebook, but that person is too busy (aren't we all?). If it comes down to choosing, he or she will choose to do first the things the boss has prioritized as important. And social media is not it.

The easiest way to fix posting inconsistency is to simply schedule the task of posting. If your library's goal is to post once a day and you're not getting to it, just schedule that task in your calendar (and then make sure to follow through).

3. Pay Attention to Different Tools and Different Rules

As you post it's important to remember which social media channel you are using and to post accordingly. You might have different groups of users following you on different social media channels, so your posting style might need to adapt to each group. For example, you might have young moms following you on Facebook, but your audience in Twitter is primarily young professionals. On LinkedIn, those young professionals' managers might follow you. In Tumblr, you might have those managers' teenaged kids following you. Make sure to adapt your content to each of those groups.

Also, each social media channel has different rules built into the system. Twitter allows 140 characters; Facebook allows more. Tumblr is more blog-like, and YouTube needs a video (plus a title, description, and tags). So content about the same library service can vary greatly in social media based on posting rules and content requirements for each channel.

4. Share the Library's Story

Remember to share the library's story using social media. You can do this many ways. Share milestones; did your library recently build a new wing or buy a new bookmobile (figure 3.1)? Share that information with your followers. Share what's cool or exciting about it. Share why it's important. Share customer stories as you share library news to show why your customers are excited about that new service.

Share what's going on behind the scenes at the library. Share pictures of staff. Share awards. Why? These are all parts of the library's story, and your customers enjoy getting the inside scoop about a place they enjoy.

5. Be Human

One of the hardest things to do when posting content as a library or organization is to post library-related information . . . and make that content sound “human.” Why is that? Most of us have not adapted our writing styles from more academic (which we learned in college) and business-focused (which we learned in high school) to a more modern, casual, conversational style of writing. Many of us are still more comfortable creating bookmarks, brochures, and press releases that use a highly polished writing style.

That worked fine for twentieth-century, print-based marketing, but in a social media channel, there are better ways to write. Social media tools were created for people to connect, which requires a highly casual, conversational writing style. If your social media content sounds like a brochure or an ad, you will be ignored.

There’s an easy cure for this; it’s in the next tip.

6. Type Like You Talk

The easiest way to create that conversational style of writing is to type like you would talk. Some of us do that automatically (that’d be me, to the bane of my editors). For those of us who struggle to write informally, there’s an easy trick to quickly create more conversational-sounding content. Simply type whatever it is that you want to say, and then read it out loud. If it doesn’t sound like something you’d actually say to a friend or a coworker, rewrite until it does.

Also, as you are writing, pretend that you are talking to a friend, a coworker, or a familiar customer. This will help you create a more conversational writing style.

Just remember that you’re still at work, representing your library. The goal is “business casual”—not “weekend casual.”

7. Be Helpful

Another way to make the library’s social media posts seem more human-sounding is to simply be helpful. If you are answering a question that has come up or are helping customers navigate a new service or database, you will sound friendlier because you are being helpful.

You might have to be more proactive here to let customers know they can ask questions. For example, you might post the fact that customers can ask you questions via Twitter or Facebook and that you will answer those questions. You can also use an open-ended question or a fill-in-the-blank style of question to prompt followers to respond.

If a social media channel has direct or private messaging, make sure customers know they can use those features, too. Not all customers want their questions to be seen (and responded to) by other customers.



Figure 3.1
Topeka’s Tweet about its new bookmobile

8. Think Short

One thing social media is *not* is long. And that makes sense. Since social media tools provide ways to hold online conversations, it makes sense that you’d keep your posts short. Usually, an individual talks for a short period of time in a conversation, and then the other person involved in the conversation shares to keep the conversation going.

Social media functions the same way. Some social media channels actually require short posts. Twitter, for example, allows 140 characters per post. When using Twitter, you want to keep your post shorter than that, if possible. You might need to leave room for a hashtag or a person’s Twitter name for a Retweet. In that case, instead of 140 characters, your Tweet should really be about 115–120 characters long. Now that’s concise!

Facebook posts can be longer. But posts between 100 and 250 characters, or less than three lines of text, get more Likes, comments, and Shares than longer posts. So just because you can write longer posts doesn’t mean you necessarily should.

You’ll want to make your YouTube videos as short as possible. There is not a hard-and-fast rule for video. As long as the video is interesting and moves along at a good clip, you can have longer videos. Usually, though, your goal is a video that is under three minutes.

9. Be Visual

Pretty much all social media channels have a visual component these days. Even traditionally text-heavy

tools like Twitter frequently include images or short videos that are posted alongside the Tweet itself.

This is good because people like pretty pictures. Make sure to include a visual element in your posts. Posts that include a picture or a video generate more engagement than a text-only post.

What should your images look like? Images for social media serve a couple purposes: (1) complementing the topic, and (2) making you click.

For an image to complement the topic, it simply needs some type of relation to the content. So if you're posting about a new book, include the book jacket as an image for the post. Even better would be a close-up of a staff member or a customer holding the book (people like seeing images of people).

The other goal is to motivate customers to click. Your goal is to get information out and also to have your readers engage with that content. That means getting your readers to click Like, to leave a comment, to click through to your website, or to click Share and share the content with their social media friends.

Work on making your images "clickable." To get some ideas, browse through popular Instagram images or popular Pinterest images. In general, most of these images use slightly saturated colors, have a single clear focal point, use bold visuals, and get up close to their subjects.

Video is similar. A post that includes a short video will elicit more engagement than a text-only post. So make that video interesting!

10. Encourage Audience Participation

There are some easy ways to start improving engagement through audience participation techniques. Here are some ideas:

Ask a question. People love answering! My library frequently asks our Facebook followers, "What are you reading?" (figure 3.2). Sometimes we use a slightly more creative version of that question, like "What's on your bedside table?" Guess what? Our customers love answering those types of questions!

The same type of question works effectively when applied to other topics, too. I have asked our Facebook customers what they'd want in a library Twitter account, for example.

Call to action. A call to action is simply the thing that you want your readers to do after they read your post. It's providing the "next step" to your customers (figure 3.3). Make sure to include a call to action as often as possible. This gives your followers something to respond to. For example, if you're talking about a new book or linking to a video book review, the call to action might be to check the book out of the library. If you are describing an upcoming computer class, the call to action might be to click the

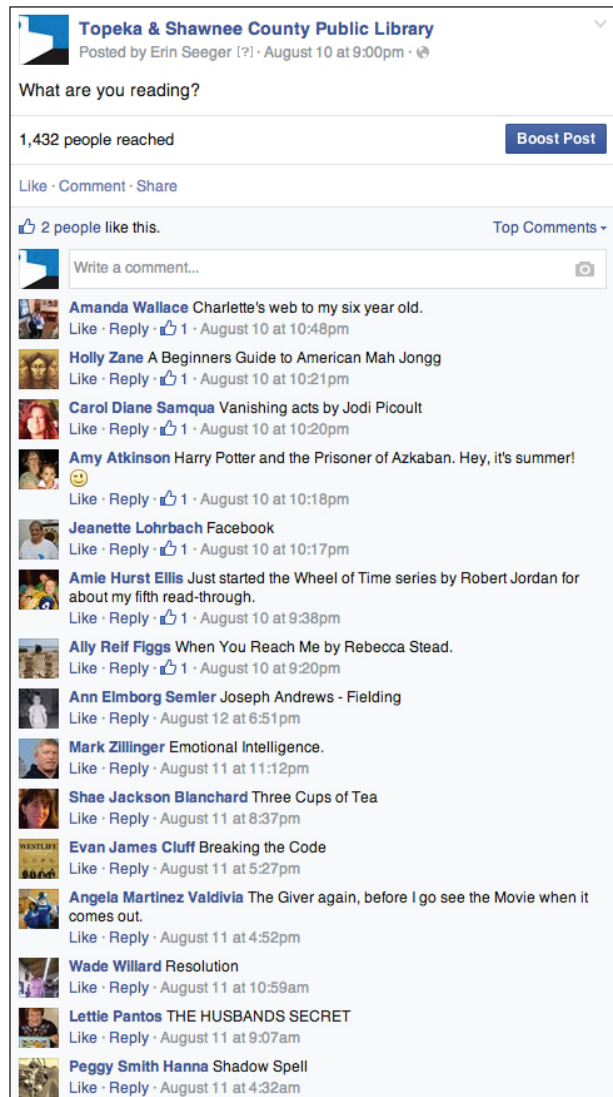


Figure 3.2
Topeka's Facebook Post asking "What are you reading?"

registration link to sign up for the class.

To have maximum impact, your call to action should be in the first ninety characters of the post. In Facebook, that's in the first three lines of text.

Quirks and Tips for Each Channel

Now that you have some general guidelines, tips, and tricks for posting to social media channels, here are some channel-specific tips.

Facebook

Facebook's algorithm for news feeds recently changed. This change affected a lot of organizations and companies because they experienced a huge drop in

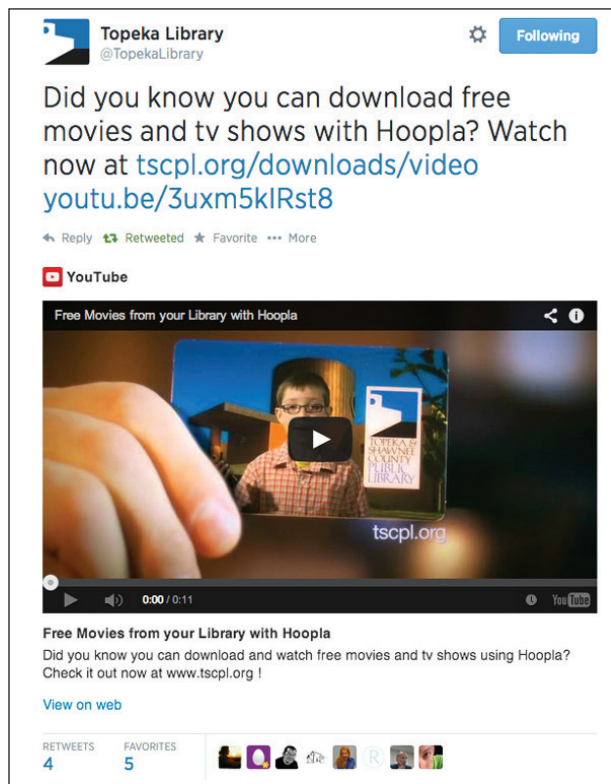


Figure 3.3
Call to action in a Tweet

engagement rates. Many Facebook Pages that primarily published viral content now have a significantly diminished Facebook reach.

I don't think this is really a big deal for libraries, but it can affect us in two main areas:

- Buying ads for Facebook Likes isn't as effective as it was last year. You can create a Facebook ad that invites people to become fans of your Page. My library has done this multiple times. Last year, we'd get forty to seventy Likes a day with the ad (we pay \$10 per day for these ads). Earlier this year, those Likes dropped to about ten to fifteen per day, and sometimes fewer than that. That's okay. It's still a useful tool because ten new fans are better than no new fans! It is good to be aware of the reason behind the drop, though.
- Content reach and engagement have dropped for some. Companies that focused on viral content have noticed the largest drop in engagement. Some brands have seen a drop in reach of 40 percent or more.¹

However, some companies and organizations are not experiencing this drop in reach. What are they doing that's different? They are creating useful content that their customers want to interact with. Here's

a simple Facebook formula to remember—*useful content = more engagement*.

Twitter

A great place to learn more about posting with Twitter is the company's business- and organization-based Twitter for Business pages. Twitter for Business includes a lot of best practices for brands and businesses to successfully connect to customers using Twitter.

Twitter for Business
<https://business.twitter.com>

Also, make sure to use the tools Twitter provides. Twitter tools include hashtags, in-post links, and link shorteners. When possible, include an image or video in your post. Create relevant hashtags. They are searchable, so if it's a useful one, people will probably use it.

YouTube

START RIGHT AWAY

Make sure the first fifteen seconds of your video is awesome and to the point because that's the most important part of your video. This is the amount of time it takes for a viewer to decide whether or not to continue watching.

So in the first fifteen seconds, don't waste time. Don't create a long introduction or use scrolling credits. If you can "just start" and jump right into the content, that's even better (figure 3.4). If you have to include a brand image, show it for five seconds, then start the video. Or include it off to the side of the video.

DON'T USE A SCRIPT

Don't script the video. My guess is that you are probably not an actor or a professional newscaster, so you probably sound very much like you are reading or have memorized a script. Instead, write what you want to say, or better yet just outline it. But don't memorize or read from your script. Instead, look the script over once or twice, then wing it. You will sound more conversational.

HAVE GOOD SOUND AND LIGHTING

Audio is a very important part of video quality. How can you improve a video's audio quality? Here are a few ideas.

Shoot up close. If the resulting video looks a bit too close to the subject, think about purchasing a wide-angle lens. Wide-angle lenses take in more of the



Figure 3.4
In Topeka’s most popular YouTube video, the content starts immediately

surrounding area, so they visually “push” the subject farther away.

You can also purchase an external microphone. Some of these can plug directly into your camcorder or digital video camera. Others will need an external audio recording source. Then make sure to sync the audio and video portions of the final video together into a new video.

Lighting. Another really important thing in video is the lighting. If you have great audio but poor lighting, your video will look unprofessional. Thankfully, it’s easy to achieve good lighting.

The least expensive form of lighting is the lighting you already have—the sun, windows, and overhead lights. Make sure the light source is shining toward or directly on the subject rather than behind the person.

You can also buy lighting. Cheap clamp-on shop lights can be found at any hardware store for \$20–\$30 and work great. If you need more options, you can buy simple or more complicated video and photography three-point lighting systems.

When it comes to video and audio gear, don’t overdo it. Your goal isn’t really professionally polished videos (although those are nice). Your goal is to be seen and heard without distracting viewers.

Note

1. Justin Lafferty, “Studies Show More Than 40 Percent Decreased Organic Reach on Facebook,” Inside Facebook, December 23, 2013, accessed August 15, 2014, www.insidefacebook.com/2013/12/23/studies-show-more-than-40-percent-decreased-organic-reach-on-facebook.