

Social Media Teams

Now that we have learned about social media channels and their use in libraries—why we should use social media channels, how they work in libraries, and some tips and tricks for posting—let’s turn our focus to getting the work done.

In this chapter, we will look into the nuts and bolts of running a successful social media channel for the library. What does it take? How do you get it done? Are there ways to make it easier for staff?

What Does It Take?

What does it take for a library to successfully run a social media channel? We have already covered some aspects of this question in previous chapters, but the information bears repeating. It takes three things:

1. great content
2. knowing your audience
3. consistency

Let’s look at each of these.

1. Great Content

We have already discussed having great content, so I won’t say a lot more about it here. I will, however, say this—content really is king. It is the most important part of your social media channel. I frequently receive questions from libraries about their Facebook or Twitter presence. They mention problems their library is having with social media, like “We’re just not getting anyone

visiting our page” or “We’re an academic library—students aren’t interested in friending the library.”

What’s the real problem? There could be several, but the largest issue usually revolves around content. The content these organizations have created is simply not interesting enough to their fans and followers, which is why that content is not receiving more attention and interaction. Usually, their content feed is full of marketing and PR-related material, often describing an upcoming event the library is holding or a new service the library is creating.

Posting this type of content is fine in small doses, but it shouldn’t be the sole focus of your library’s content strategy. When the library focuses primarily on marketing content, the posts are similar to a billboard or an ad. What do people usually do with billboards and ads? They ignore them.

The simple solution? Stop posting primarily marketing content! No one’s reading it, and it’s wasting your valuable time. Instead, ask your customers what types of content they’d like to see using that social media tool. Then figure out a plan to start posting that type of content. Do this, and your interactions and reach will increase.

2. Knowing Your Audience

Another problem facing a library’s social media channel is that the organization simply doesn’t know its audience (figure 4.1). The library probably does know the customers who visit the building as well as departmental and service-oriented audiences. Librarians know their regulars.



Figure 4.1
You need to know your audience

On social media channels, however, some libraries haven't figured out who their audience is yet. They also might not have examined demographics for the library's service area and determined who the audience is that the library wants to reach.

The easiest way to figure out if you know your digital audience is to look at your library's strategic plan. Are there any large, system-wide goals to reach a certain segment of your community? Perhaps your library wants to reach out specifically to young professionals or teens. If so, you can tailor your social media posts to reach that population segment.

For example, my library has a strategic goal of helping children ages 0–5 get ready to read by kindergarten. Obviously, we're not going to go after a 3-year-old on Twitter! But it makes a lot of sense for us to start attempting to reach young parents, ages 20–35. That age category also fits nicely with another goal, which is to help small businesses in the area grow and succeed. Why? It's the same audience. Young parents are also the young entrepreneurs in Topeka. If we tailor content to that age group, we'll have a better chance of reaching them.

“Friending” is another angle to use to assess your audience. Some libraries tend to friend me. While I love it that people and organizations want to friend me, I am not their customer. They might also friend ALA or a library in another state.

Instead of friending other libraries, known library writers and bloggers, and national library organizations, a library needs to really narrow in and focus on just its service area. A university library needs to friend students, faculty, alumni, etc. A public library needs to friend people in its community.

3. Consistency

The final thing that can cause a library social media channel to fail is inconsistency. Library staff don't regularly post. Thankfully, this is another simple thing to fix. Figure out how many posts you want to create in a given amount of time (for example, a day or week), and then assign the work and schedule it. Put it on your calendar if you're having trouble remembering to do it.

Yes, we're all busy, and some things get prioritized more than others. But if you have created a social

media channel for your library and expect customers to visit and interact with the content they find there, then you have to actually post.

Creating a Social Media Team

Libraries divide the work of posting to social media in different ways. One really successful model is the team-based approach. You will get more done if you have a team to do the work.

Why should you set up posting in a team-based format? There are a few reasons. The most obvious reason is to make posting to the social media channel much easier for all staff involved with the project. The task of creating and editing images, creating status updates, and replying to comments and questions can be much easier if there is more than one person responsible for the tasks.

Using a team-based approach also gives the library an easier way to cover all parts of the week. For example, because of scheduling, it might be easier for “Mary” to post on Mondays, but on Thursdays she doesn’t work because she has a weekend shift. Assigning someone else to Thursdays brings consistency to the number of posts throughout the week because there will be new posts on Thursday just like any other day.

And since social media can be a fun activity, it spreads the fun among more staff members than if just one person is doing the work.

Who should be on the team? This can vary by institution. At my library, we have a mix of team members on our social media teams. We usually include:

- The digital services director (me). I’m in charge of social media at the library, so it makes sense that I would be part of the team.
- Public services staff. This is essential. Public services staff—reference librarians, children’s and teen librarians, and circulation staff—are the ones who actually interact with customers on the front lines in the building. They work directly with customers and tend to know the answers to many library-related questions that come up.
- Marketing, PR, communications. Including staff from this area is also important! They are usually the “keepers of the library’s voice”—they promote a consistent image and brand. These people also know how to word “sensitive topics” in a way that makes the library look good. They are also familiar with the big-picture, system-wide library events that need to be publicized.

I strongly suggest that you do not have only marketing or reference or IT or managers running the social media channels exclusively, if possible. Any one of those departments can provide only part of the

library experience and has limited experience in other areas. For example, marketing doesn’t answer questions at the reference desk and doesn’t usually interact with customers on the floor. So marketing staff are probably not the best fit for everyday posts or for answering reference questions via Facebook.

On the other hand, reference doesn’t usually market upcoming events or new library services. Marketing does that, so it makes sense to have marketing continue that process.

Too Small for Teams?

If you work at a small library, you might not have enough staff to create a posting team. That’s okay: you can still get your work done! Instead of scheduling content for a team to complete, you might only have one or two people, or it might be just you—the director—who posts to social media. Make sure to schedule ten to twenty minutes a day to create some posts on your social media channels and to answer any questions that appear.

What Do You Post About?

Rather than posting about any random thing that comes up, it’s good to have some posting guidelines in place. These guidelines will narrow your content in a good way.

For example, my library has three broad areas we post about in Facebook. They are:

- **Reader’s advisory.** Here we post about new books, new movies, author information, etc.
- **Current events.** Here we post about current local and national news, entertainment news, etc.
- **Library offerings.** Here we post about events, classes, and new services.

You can see that we don’t post about everything the library does, and we don’t attempt to post items of interest to all age levels. By narrowing our focus to those three areas, we have made content simpler for staff.

How Do You Post?

As I have mentioned, the easiest way to post is to create a posting schedule and then to stick to that schedule. Assign staff members to each of those content areas and to a day of the week. That’s their posting day, and they will be responsible for two to four posts throughout the day.

The person assigned to post on that day will also be responsible for monitoring comments, private

messages, etc. If the poster receives a comment on one of the library's posts, he might reply to the comment with a thank you. If he receives a question about something, he might have to do some research or find the appropriate person to answer the questions and ask that person to craft the response, if needed.

Dealing with Problems

There will potentially be a host of problems that appear once your social media teams are created. Here are some of them:

Answering difficult people. Sometimes a customer will post a mean, untrue, or off-color comment or question on your social media channel. Before that happens (and it will happen), you need to decide: Who answers those questions? How are the questions answered (i.e., will you actually answer the question, or will you simply acknowledge the question by saying something like "Thank you for the comment")? Do you answer or ignore the question? In my library's case, the person responsible for addressing problematic responses is usually the digital services director—the person in charge of the social media team. Sometimes it's the head of marketing. Ultimately, it doesn't really matter who is responsible, as long as someone is assigned to it.

Different voices, one library. Sometimes, two people posting for the same organization will have very different tones of voice. They might use different

words, different punctuation, and different sentence structures for each post.

Some variation is acceptable, since multiple people on your social media team will be posting. Too much disparity in voices, though, can lead to a slightly disjointed social media channel.

This disparity can be improved by developing some guidelines for posts. For example, you can create a style guide for your social media channel or for the library's social media in general. In the style guide, you can specify things like the use of active or passive voice, how to use conversational language, or the use of smaller words and abbreviations. Offer training sessions on how to post to your library's social media channels can also improve posts.

Sick days! Someone at your library will get sick. If it's the day that employee is assigned to monitor social media, you'll probably need to find a temporary replacement.

Staff wanting to post other topics. If you have narrowed your posting topics, you might have some staff asking if they can post a random topic anyway. You need to know what to say when that occasion arises.

Too many staff volunteers. Social media teams are great when they're small. But social media can't really accommodate twenty or more staff. So, depending on the size of your organization, there might come a time when you have to say no—we're full. Not fun, but necessary.