

Principle 1

Create Shareable Content

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The work of social media optimization (SMO) begins with *creating shareable content* for the Web. SMO aims to build community and engage users by creating compelling content that generates user-initiated sharing through social networks. To unlock this potential for community growth, creating shareable content is the first step. The chapter on this principle starts by describing the defining characteristics of shareable content and concludes with a discussion of a comprehensive strategy for creating content across multiple channels and platforms. Our discussion of Principle 1 includes approaches for identifying and creating Web content that is relevant and meaningful to your community. In our discussion of Principle 4, we detail methods for gaining insights about your community through surveys, focus groups, and experimentation and how to use that information to determine what, where, and when you proactively share on social networks.

Defining Shareability

Two key characteristics define identify shareability: technical structure and community relevancy.

Technical Structure

From a technical perspective, shareable content will be in digital form and published on the Web with a unique Uniform Resource Locator (URL) that can be accessed through a web browser or a mobile application. This basic technical structure allows content to be accessed, shared, and tracked through unique Web addresses. The URL—a fundamental aspect of the Web—is a critical component to shareability. An item

Create shareable content represents the first of five SMO principles:

1. **Create Shareable Content**
2. Make Sharing Easy
3. Reward Engagement
4. Proactively Share
5. Measure Use and Encourage Reuse

of Web content can be shared through social networks only if it can first be located at a unique address on the Web.

Shareable Web content is typically created through one of two methods: either by digitizing existing analog content, or by publishing content that was born digital. *Born digital* is a term describing content that originated in a digital format, such as an image from a digital camera or a digital video recording. Your library may already have produced and published many forms of share-ready digital content, including

- digital collections items
- blog posts
- institutional repository items
- e-mail newsletters
- videos
- staff directory pages

Figures 1.1–1.6 demonstrate various types of shareable content. Each example features digitized or born-digital content that can be accessed, shared, and tracked through its own URL. Discussions about the other principles of SMO demonstrate how this content appears when socially shared.

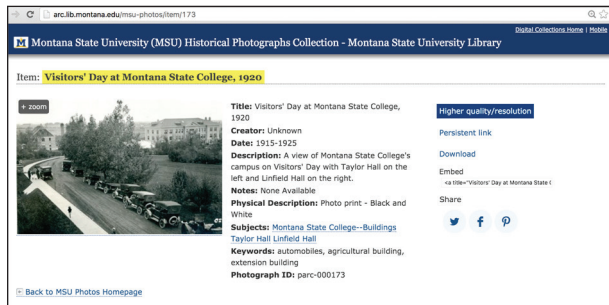


Figure 1.1
Item page from the MSU Historical Photographs digital collection

It's not always easy to identify content that your library could produce for social sharing. Major national libraries often have robust digital content that is well suited for sharing on social networks, and looking to these libraries can provide inspiration and content for your own program.

The New York Public Library (NYPL) is a stellar example of a national library that offers a great diversity of digital content and social networking inspiration. The digital mission of NYPL was recently expressed by Ben Vershbow, the director of NYPL Labs: "We see digitization as a starting point, not end point. We don't just want to put stuff online and say, 'Here it is,' but rev the engines and encourage reuse."¹ The work of SMO aligns with this vision of digital content, with a first step of creating shareable content and working ultimately towards the broader goals of encouraging sharing and reuse and building engaged communities of library users. The NYPL achieves its digital mission by producing and publishing digital content and then sharing that content through social networks—but it doesn't stop there. The NYPL also wants to help others find, share, and reuse its content. The NYPL Public Domain collection, which features more than 180,000 digital objects, is a veritable font of shareable content that is free to access, share, and reuse through social networks or any other digital platform.² The NYPL's Public Domain digital collection is just one example that your library can draw from to create shareable content.

NYPL Labs
www.nypl.org/collections/labs

Community Relevancy

Once content is digitized and published on the Web, then it's time to determine which content will engage your community and encourage users to share through social networks. In practice, this means identifying relevant content that adds value to the conversations of your community. Community relevancy and

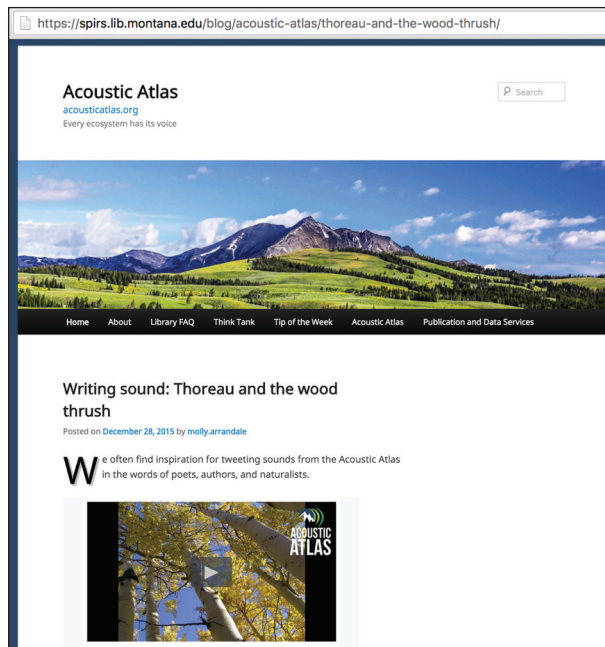


Figure 1.2
Blog post for the MSU Library's Acoustic Atlas digital collection

content shareability are tightly linked, as content is most shareable and engaging when it is relevant to the interests of the community. Understanding your community is therefore an essential component of SMO. Our discussion of Principle 4 offers detailed methods for gaining insights about your community's interests that can help shape your sharing strategies.

We can also look to other libraries as models for identifying relevant content, and here again the NYPL provides outstanding practical examples. NYPL's community has shown enduring interest in historic maps of New York City, and NYPL is fortunate to hold extensive collections in this area. The NYPL Facebook page therefore regularly posts content related to maps (see figure 1.7 for an example).

NYPL Facebook posts featuring map-related content typically generate high levels of engagement, as measured by likes, shares, and comments. In this way, NYPL has identified digital Web content that is relevant and engaging to its community.

Shareable content is therefore defined by these two key characteristics:

- digitized and published on the Web at a unique URL
- relevant to the community

Content Strategy

Once you have identified and created shareable content, we can expand the scope of this SMO principle to include a broader view of your library's Web content.



Figure 1.3
Item page from ScholarWorks, MSU’s institutional repository

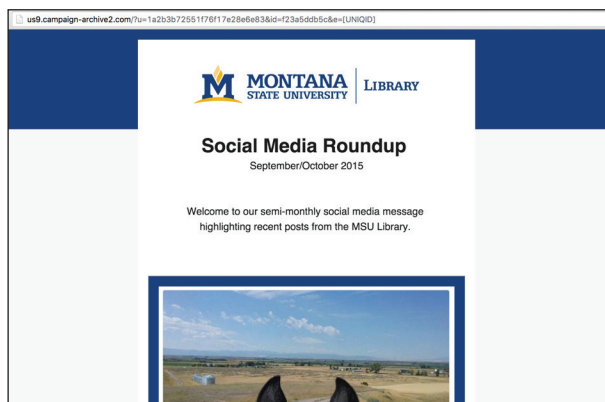


Figure 1.4
MSU Library social network e-mail newsletter

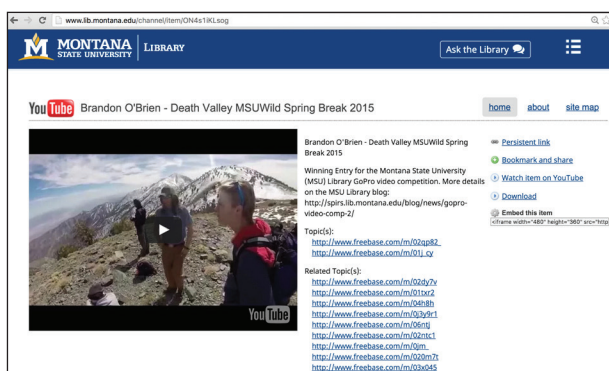


Figure 1.5
MSU Library YouTube channel

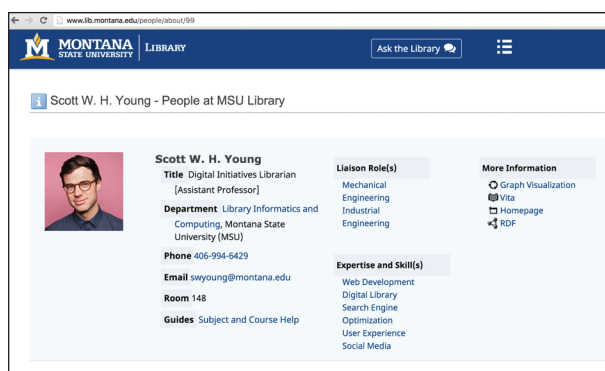


Figure 1.6
MSU Library staff directory

Content can include resources shared through the Web and through social networks, whether in a URL, a hashtag, a geolocation, an image, or the text of a social network post itself. Our users receive and read Web content in many different contexts and formats that are complexly interrelated. With a view toward the wide variety of Web content creation and consumption, both the library and its users will benefit from implementing a comprehensive and sustainable plan for creating content across channels and platforms.

For this more general model of content creation and planning, we can turn to the concept and practice of *content strategy*. Content itself is a central element of any organization’s Web presence. Content strategy plans for the creation, publication, and management of useful, usable content.³ In essence, content strategy provides a broad framework for creating consistently good content across your physical and Web spaces—social network content included.

Good content is defined by the following set of characteristics:⁴

- appropriate (right for user and right for the library)
- useful (content has a purpose)
- user-centered

- clear
- consistent
- concise
- supported with a sustainable management plan

The Social Media Guide, as described in the introduction, can provide a sustainable management plan for creating social content that demonstrates these traits. Articulating a sustainable strategy can help structure not only your social content, but also your Web content in general. An understanding of the full context of your Web content will provide a clear path forward for your social network content creation and community-building efforts. The Social Media Guide is just one model of a targeted content strategy. A broader strategy for your Web content can be shaped through a consideration of your library’s voice, values, and tone, and through a consideration of your users’ emotional perception.

Voice and Values

Any item of content that your library creates—an FAQ, a policy page, or a Facebook post—should be conveyed

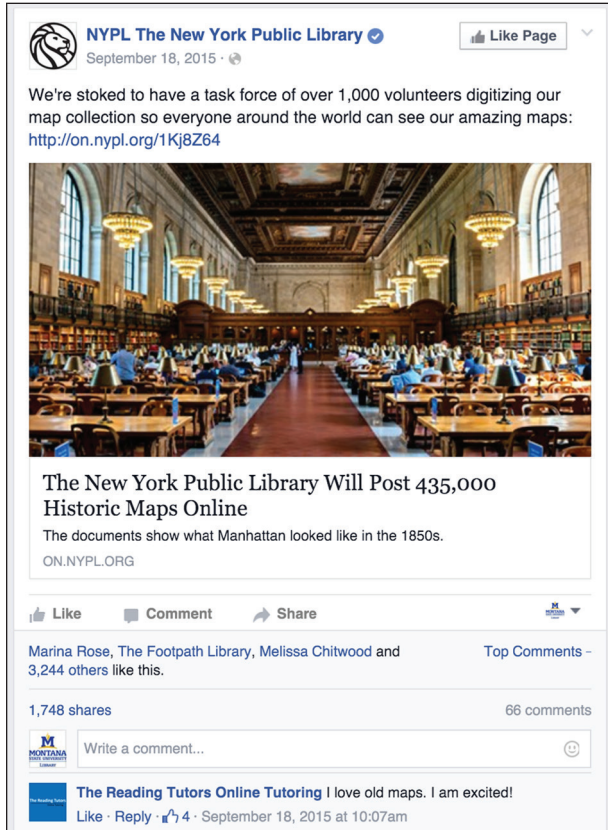


Figure 1.7
Blog post shared on Facebook by NYPL about digitizing maps

in the voice of your library and should communicate the values of your library. A combined expression of content and values defines the voice of your organization. While libraries in general can draw on decades or centuries of cultural identity, each individual library may wish to convey a unique set of attributes that are appropriate for unique contexts. In this way, the element of “organizational values” inherent to content strategy signals a larger visioning project for determining the mission, vision, and values of your library. If these elements are already in place, then the work of content strategy can easily be adapted to fit existing values statements. Otherwise, content strategy and organizational values can develop as a joint initiative.

To help clarify your library’s values and voice, completing a brief fill-in-the-blank paragraph can be an engaging and useful exercise (figure 1.8). This exercise involves filling in the blanks of a paragraph with the voice and values of your library. This approach can help surface differing views within your organization while also providing fertile ground for building a shared vision and finding a shared voice.

As content is often the first and last touchpoint encountered by a user, it will be to your library’s advantage to ensure that your content reflects your values and is expressed in your voice.

Fill-in-the-Blank Exercise for Voice and Values

Our library will be home to _____, _____ content that speaks with a _____, _____ voice, reflecting our organization’s commitment to _____ thinking.

When a user visits our site for the first time, they should immediately see that we are _____ and _____. When that user goes further into the site, they will also notice that we are _____ and _____.

When a user shares our content with peers and colleagues, they will say that we are a _____, _____, and _____ organization.⁵

Completed Fill-in-the-Blank Exercise for Voice and Values

Our library will be home to relevant, accessible content that speaks with a thoughtful, welcoming voice, reflecting our organization’s commitment to insightful thinking.

When a user visits our site for the first time, they should immediately see that we are approachable and engaging.

When that user goes further into the site, he or she will also notice that we are research-focused and innovative. When a user shares our content with peers and colleagues, they will say that we are a friendly, inspiring, and passionate organization.

Figure 1.8
Values and voice exercise (Source: Sarah Krzarich, “Content Strategy,” workshop, Designing for Digital 2016 conference, Austin, TX, April 7, 2016, <http://d4d2016.sched.org/speaker/sarakrzarich>.)



Figure 1.9
Screenshot from MailChimp’s Voice and Tone website

Tone and Emotion

With the voice of your organization established, you can turn to the tone of your content. *Voice* represents a stable organizational identity, while *tone* represents a flexible and context-dependent expression of your voice. Tone will be dictated by various contexts in which your users will experience your content: digital

Table 1.1. Content landscape matrix—blank

	Content Lead	Content Types	Workflows & Tools	End-User Goals	Internal User Goals	Tone
Website						
LibGuides						
Blog						
Digital Collections						
Institutional Repository						
YouTube Channel						
Social Networks						
Catalog						
Automated System Messages						
FAQ						
Hours & Events						

Table 1.2. Content landscape matrix—completed

	Content Lead	Content Types	Workflows & Tools	End-User Goals	Internal User Goals	Tone
Website	Scott	services, resources, policies, initiatives, directional (points to things)	CMS	Informational	Access and ease of use	Straightforward
LibGuides	Many	Course, Subject, Citation, Technology	LibGuides templating (non-strict)	Info / Research / Teaching	Autonomy Access Ease n' Speed	Accessible
Blog	Scott, Molly, Sara/Leila	Events, Database trials, promotional	WordPress	Informational / News	Promotion	Lighthearted
Digital Collections	Jason	Special Collections and Archival materials	Local CMS	Research / Public Curiosity	Access and Preservation	Scholarly
Institutional Repository	Leila	Publications	DSpace	Research	Access and Preservation	Scholarly
YouTube Channel	Jason/Scott	Video: events, tutorials	YouTube	Informational	Promotional / Event documentation	Lighthearted
Social Networks	SMG	Varies by platforms and account (see SM page)	Guides + various platforms	Interactive	Community building	Warm, welcoming
Catalog	Anne	Bibliographic records	Sirsi	Discovery	Workflow efficiencies	Academic
Automated System Messages	Varies	Notifications	LibAnswers, Iliad, Catalog	Informational	Informational	Varies
FAQ	Ryer	Informational	LibAnswers	Informational	Informational	Welcoming, Helpful
Hours & Events	Various	Events	LibCal	Informational	Informational	Welcoming, Inviting

signage, newsletters, e-mails, overdue notice e-mails, borrowing policies, and social network posts. Each of these contexts carries varying types and degrees of emotional response. For example, the experience of receiving an overdue notice may generate feelings of distress for the user, while reading a newsletter may be a more neutral or positive experience.

Understanding your users is essential for creating good content. Your content can be made especially appropriate and useful through a consideration of the context-dependent emotional experience of your users. The e-mail newsletter company MailChimp has created a Voice and Tone website that neatly outlines the emotional contexts of their users, with corresponding guidelines for multiple categories of content (figure 1.9).⁵ A user can experience a range of emotions across different types of content.

By considering the emotional experience of users, librarians can create a comprehensive plan for appropriate user-centered content, including content shared through social networks.

Content Strategy in Libraries

A leading voice for content strategy within libraries has been Rebecca Blakiston, who in 2010 published a seminal article on content strategy for libraries.⁶ In the article, Blakiston detailed a comprehensive plan for the creation and sustainable management of Web content built around three key points of implementation:

- Assigning roles and responsibilities
 - In this step, the library establishes meaningful governance of content. Blakiston accomplished this by creating “content managers” corresponding to various teams and departments throughout her library. Likewise for social networks, creating a “social content manager” can help ensure the success of social networking.
- Establishing workflows
 - This step entails documenting the creation process around content. In the context of social networks, this could include an articulation of the personnel, tools, and procedure for creating social network posts. This documentation can be shared on the library intranet or other space accessible to all throughout the organization, thus allowing for a wider level of understanding and participation in content creation.
- Ensuring sustainability
 - Blakiston recommended specific strategies for maintaining the long-term success of content strategy, including implementing structures of accountability, staff trainings, performance metrics, and adaptability. These strategies are all applicable for social content creation as well. The Social Media Guide described in the introduction provides accountability and

adaptability, while assessment metrics (detailed in the chapter on Principle 5) can help inform decision making. Internal workshops and trainings with library staff can also help build awareness and support for Web and social content creation.

To lay the groundwork for the content strategy described by Blakiston, we created and completed a content landscape matrix at our library that maps the full range of our content tools, personnel, and workflows (tables 1.1, 1.2).

Creation of this table situates social networks within the broader context of our content landscape and helps provide the planning and documentation for sustaining content creation throughout the library and across multiple platforms. By following Blakiston’s model for content strategy, libraries can design and implement a wide-ranging and forward-looking plan for creating content.

Conclusion

The work of social media optimization begins with *creating shareable content*. This principle presents the concepts and practical guidelines for creating shareable content, which we define from both a technical perspective and a community perspective. First, shareable content has been digitized and published on the Web with a stable URL, enabling that content to be shared and tracked through social networks. Second, shareable content is relevant to its intended community. The principle create shareable content then extends to include a comprehensive strategy for creating content across multiple platforms. Implementing an in-depth content strategy can provide a sustainable action plan for all of your library’s content.

Notes

1. Ben Vershbow, quoted in Jennifer Schuessler, “New York Public Library Invites a Deep Digital Dive,” *New York Times*, January 6, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/books/new-york-public-library-invites-a-deep-digital-dive.html>.
2. “Public Domain Collections: Free to Share & Reuse,” NYPL website, accessed May 3, 2016, <http://nypl.org/publicdomain>.
3. Kristina Halvorson, *Content Strategy for the Web* (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2009).
4. Erin Kissane, *The Elements of Content Strategy* (New York: A Book Apart, 2011).
5. “Voice and Tone,” MailChimp, accessed May 12, 2016, <http://voiceandtone.com>.
6. Rebecca Blakiston, “Developing a Content Strategy for an Academic Library Website,” *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship*, 25, no. 1 (2013), 175–191, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1941126X.2013.813295>.