

Principle 2

Make Sharing Easy

Doralyn Rossmann

The second principle of social media optimization (SMO) is *make sharing easy*, which espouses the ideas of providing simple ways to share website content on social networks, making the socially shared content readily findable through searching social networks, and rendering the shared content in a way that is engaging visually or auditorily. Here, we discuss three methods to achieve these goals: offering social share buttons and social share button counts, using hashtags for social network campaigns, and implementing social media cards to enhance content sharing on Twitter and Facebook. Underlying each of these efforts is the opportunity to engage with and build community through meaningful and easy connections to the content users who decide to share.

Social Share Buttons

To make sharing easy, tools need to be added that encourage users to share content at the point of use. For example, social share buttons placed on a webpage make one-click promotion of a page easy through social networks. These buttons usually include a small icon associated with that network and, when clicked, open up the platform selected (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest) where the content can be posted.

Using the guidelines from the chapter on Principle 1, *create shareable content*, the MSU Library presents social share buttons on the pages we consider to include shareable content, such as our digital collections, blog, and articles and databases pages. The presence of social media share buttons serves a purpose beyond offering a means for users to share library content on social networks. Consider that these buttons send a cue to users that the library is active and

Make sharing easy represents the second of five SMO principles:

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

Developer Sites for Most Common Social Networks

Facebook

<https://developers.facebook.com/docs/plugins/like-button>

Twitter

<https://dev.twitter.com/web/tweet-button>

Pinterest

<https://developers.pinterest.com/tools/widget-builder>

reachable via social networks, which may lead users to engage in these networks with the library beyond just a social button share. Social buttons offer the opportunity for users to share library content with their community, and they introduce and reinforce that the library is also a part of that community of sharing. The chapter on Principle 5 includes an in-depth discussion of evaluating social share buttons.

Each social network manages how information gets shared to its feed differently. Generally, every

```

<ul class="social-icons">
  <a class="twitter" onclick="_gaq.push(['_trackEvent', 'Share Buttons',
  'Click', 'Twitter-msu-photos']);" href="https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?original_
  referer=http://arc.lib.montana.edu/msu-photos/item/233&source=tweetbutton&tex
  t=Freight Wagons and Montana Hall, 1898&url=http://arc.lib.montana.edu/msu-photos/
  item/233&via=msulibrary" target="_blank">
    <li class="icon-twitter"></li></a>
    <a class="facebook" onclick="_gaq.push(['_trackEvent', 'Share Buttons', 'Click',
    'Facebook-msu-photos']);" href="https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=http://arc.
    lib.montana.edu/msu-photos/item/233" target="_blank">
      <li class="icon-facebook"></li></a>
      <a class="pinterest" onclick="_gaq.push(['_trackEvent', 'Share Buttons', 'Click',
      'Pinterest-msu-photos']);" href="http://www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button?url=http://
      arc.lib.montana.edu/msu-photos/item/233&media=http://arc.lib.montana.edu/msu-
      photos/objects/thumb-parc-000233.jpg" target="_blank">
        <li class="icon-pinterest"></li></a>
      </ul><!-- end social <ul> -->

```

Figure 2.1
HTML for adding social share buttons with Google Analytics outbound event tracking

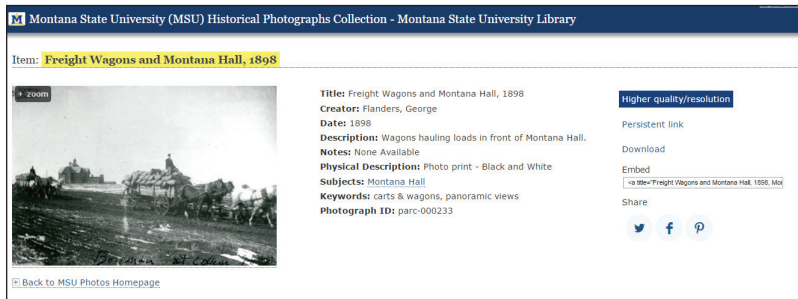


Figure 2.2
Social share button on a MSU digital collection page (lower, right-hand side)



Figure 2.3
Prepopulated information when Twitter share button is clicked in MSU digital collection object

Prepopulated Share Button Information

Ideally, the content produced from clicking on these buttons is branded so that the sharer can have prepopulated information in the content of the share, thus making sharing easy. This information might include the social account name associated with your organization, a title you have crafted, a simple URL, and any other information that you think would make an eye-catching post for the user. The developer sites discussed in the previous section provide guidance in how to populate these shares on the associated platform. Figure 2.3 demonstrates how a clicked social share button for Twitter could look before the tweet is posted.

Social Share Button Share Counts

Many sites include share counts below their social share buttons indicating how many times the item has been posted to Facebook, Pinterest, or other network. While it may be tempting to add a share count, it is important to consider the actual value (or possible reduction in value) by including a share count. In November 2015, Twitter deprecated the share count, as announced on its blog:

The Tweet button counts the number of Tweets that have been Tweeted with the exact URL specified in the button. This count does not reflect the

network has a preferred icon and guidelines for customizing the content that is shared in the post.

Figure 2.1 provides an example of code using PHP to produce buttons on a webpage for Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest. This local implementation is used for the MSU Library digital collections and can be adapted for other uses. Figure 2.2 demonstrates how this code is rendered on the MSU Digital Photograph Collection webpage for this item.

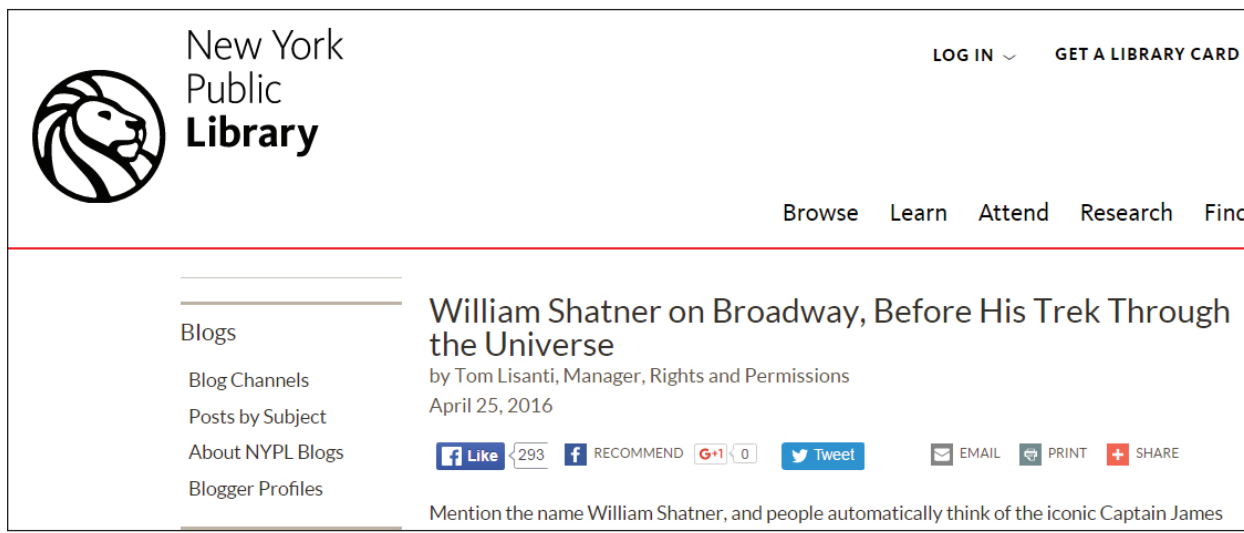


Figure 2.4
NYPL blog post with social share counts

impact on Twitter of conversation about your content—it doesn’t count replies, quote Tweets, variants of your URLs, nor does it reflect the fact that some people Tweeting these URLs might have many more followers than others.¹

As the Twitter developers noted, a count tells only part of the story behind content shared on social networks. For example, what message might a share count of zero convey about the value or popularity of content? Conversely, if you have content that you find is actively shared on social networks as indicated by referrer analytics such as Google Analytics, a share count can provide your community with an idea of what is popular. For example, New York Public Library has opted not to offer social share counts on its digital collections pages, but it does offer them on its individual press release, news, and blog pages (figure 2.4).² If your library decides to add social share button counts to some of its webpages, Figure 2.5 offers code examples to include such counts through PHP using JSON.

#Hashtags for Campaigns

Another effective strategy to make sharing easy is the promotion of hashtags around collections or communities. Hashtags consist of a number sign (#) and a word or a string of words without spaces between them. Some hashtags may be already established, such as those used by your institution, city, or state. For our library, these commonly used hashtags are #Montana-State, #Bozeman, and #Montana. When #Montana-State is added to our posts, our content is introduced into a high-profile stream of posts and is more likely to be seen and shared. Posts with #Bozeman and #Montana help surface information to people interested in

those regions when the library shares content specific to the city of Bozeman or the state of Montana.

There is an opportunity to be creative with hashtags associated with new endeavors. The MSU Library joined with other Montana organizations for two social network campaigns. The first was hashtagged #MontanaRides. This campaign was run during the month of May 2015 and focused on means of transportation in Montana whether mechanical or animal. Partners in this effort included the Montana Historical Society, the Montana Memory Project from the State of Montana Library, Montana Tech, the University of Montana, and Montana State University. We identified common elements across institutions that might lend themselves well to sharing through social networks and would be of interest broadly in follower communities. With the summertime travel season approaching and the shared desire in our communities to explore the American West, the idea of #MontanaRides was born. Before settling on this hashtag, we did a search of common social networks to see if this hashtag was already in regular use, which it was not. Sharing in this campaign included digitized photographs and manuscripts from existing online collections and content digitized for this campaign, which were then added to existing collections (figures 2.6, 2.7, 2.8).

This campaign saw some participation from other groups and individuals in the forms of likes and shares as well as some individuals and groups who used the hashtag in their own shared content. Even the governor of Montana, Steve Bullock, took note of our social collaboration (figure 2.9).

In that initial campaign, we found that it was helpful when the other entities participating in the campaign reshared our posts to reach a broader community. We also found that, while the followers of

```

<?php
$persistentURL = 'http://arc.lib.montana.edu/msu-photos/item/196';

function getTwitterCount($persistentURL){
    $twittercount = json_decode( file_get_contents( 'http://urls.api.twitter.com/1/
urls/count.json?url=' . $persistentURL . ';' ) );
    return $twittercount->count;
}

function getFacebookCount($persistentURL){
    $facebookcount = json_decode( file_get_contents( 'http://graph.facebook.com/' .
$persistentURL . ';' ) );
    $facebookShares = 0;
    if (isset($facebookcount->shares)) {
        $facebookShares = $facebookcount->shares;
    }
    return $facebookShares;
}

function getPinterestCount($persistentURL){
    $pincount = json_decode( file_get_contents( 'http://api.pinterest.com/v1/urls/
count.json?callback=receiveCount&url=' . $persistentURL . ';' ) );
    $pinShares = 0;
    if (isset($pincount->count)) {
        $pinShares = $pincount->count;
    }
    return $pinShares;
}

function getSocialCount($persistentURL){
    return getTwitterCount($persistentURL) + getFacebookCount($persistentURL) + getPint
erestCount($persistentURL);
}
?>

<p><?php echo getSocialCount() ?></p>

```

Figure 2.5
PHP code for adding social button share counts

the Montana Historical Society were enthusiastically engaging with old photographs, it was more challenging for our library to work that type of content into our regular social network streams at a level any more than we already share that kind of information. As described in our research study in the introduction, we found that our primary social network community consists of MSU undergraduate students and, to a lesser extent, graduate students, faculty, staff, and alumni. They tend to engage with posts about events in and around the MSU Library building, such as our therapy dog visits during finals week and poetry readings, information about cool tools like Go-Pro cameras for checkout, photographs of our employees in action, and shout-outs to student and faculty research and service. While our users may enjoy an occasional old photograph, we find that they unfollow us or do not engage with such content if there are more than a

couple of those kinds of posts within any given week.

Taking what we learned from the #MontanaRides campaign and from what we know of our user community, The #MontanaRides campaign participants decided to try a second campaign using the hashtag #Montanimals. Here our library expanded the content from historical library photographs and manuscripts to include the breadth of library services and collections offered in hopes of creating more interest in our community. The Montana Historical Society continued its focus on historical photographs, which are the types of posts it already regularly shares. At MSU, we shared photographs of MSU Library employees' pets; we posted images of book and DVD covers from library collections relating to animals in and around Montana; we shared links to Montana animal topics in MSU theses and dissertations found in MSU's institutional repository, ScholarWorks; and we shared

historical photographs of animals from our digital collections. While the Montana Historical Society's followers largely expect historical materials, expanding this campaign's focus at MSU allowed us to follow our Social Media Guide more closely in posting the kind of content our community regularly experiences through our social networks and, as a result, we saw



Figure 2.6
Montana Historical Society photo shared on Twitter with #MontanaRides



Figure 2.7
University of Montana photos shared on Facebook with #MontanaRides



Figure 2.8
Montana State University photo shared on Instagram with #MontanaRides

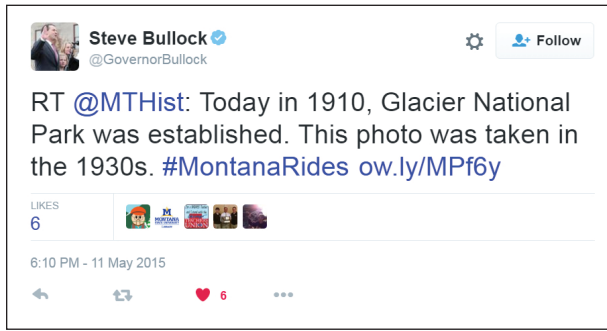


Figure 2.9
Twitter share from Montana Governor Steve Bullock



Figure 2.10
Twitter post of URL of page with no Twitter Card



Figure 2.11
KBZK news article using Twitter Summary Card with a thumbnail image

more engagement with posts in this campaign.

Social Media Cards

Another means to *make sharing easy* is to embed Facebook Open Graph and Twitter Card tags into the code of webpage headers to control how content is displayed when shared through these networks. Twitter’s official documentation states: “With Twitter Cards, you can attach rich photos, videos and media experience to Tweets that drive traffic to your website. Simply add a few lines of HTML to your webpage, and users who Tweet links to your content will have a ‘Card’ added to the Tweet that’s visible to all of their

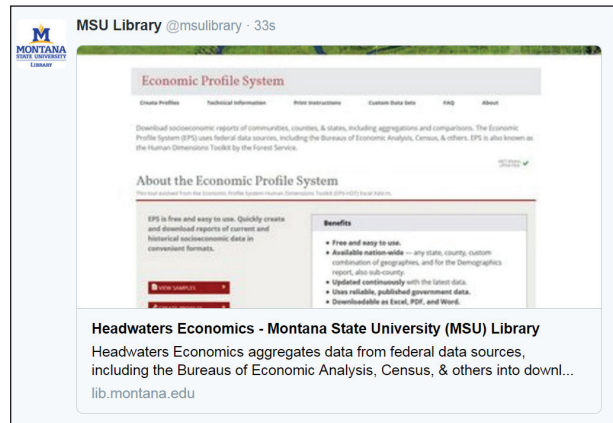


Figure 2.12
MSU database page using Twitter Summary Card with a large image

```
<meta name="twitter:title"
content="Alexander Street Press Video
(cross-searchable platform) - Montana
State University (MSU) Library">
<meta name="twitter:description"
content="This platform enables users
to search across all of the library's
current Alexander Street Press
streaming video collections.">
<meta name="twitter:image:src"
content="http://www.lib.montana.edu/
resources/meta/img/screenshots/600.jpg">
<meta name="twitter:url" content="http://
www.lib.montana.edu/resources/about/600">
<meta name="twitter:card"
content="summary_large_image">
<meta name="twitter:site" content="@
msulibrary">
<meta name="twitter:creator" content="@
msulibrary">
```

Figure 2.13
Twitter Card HTML for page shared in figure 2.12

followers.”³ Without Twitter Card HTML in a webpage, tweets will just include the link shared and any text and images the user adds manually. Facebook, on the other hand, will attempt to fill in information in a shared link if there is not Facebook Open Graph HTML in the page being shared. As Facebook’s documentation notes, “Without these [Open Graph] tags, the Facebook Crawler uses internal heuristics to make a best guess about the title, description, and preview image for your content. Designate this info explicitly with Open Graph tags to ensure the highest quality posts on Facebook.”⁴ In essence, adding Twitter Cards and Facebook Open Graph tags to the HTML of your library’s webpages allows your library to control how



Figure 2.14
AcousticAtlas.org Player Card with audio and text added to tweet itself

content is displayed when that content is shared over social networks, thus allowing you to tailor your content to your community. Both Twitter and Facebook provide an overview of how to structure this markup:

Twitter

<https://dev.twitter.com/cards/getting-started>

Facebook

<https://developers.facebook.com/docs/sharing/webmasters#markup>

Twitter Cards

For greater context in this discussion of Twitter Cards, figure 2.10 shows how a link without Twitter Cards in the page shared would appear in a tweet.

This link is rather meaningless without clicking on the link for more information. To make sharing easy, a little bit of HTML markup can go a long way. The content of Twitter Cards displays in addition to the 140 characters within the tweet itself. While we know that our pages have Twitter Cards on them, others who share our pages may not be aware of this coding or that we have it installed until they post the URL to Twitter. Since installing the Cards, we have heard from some members of our community who noticed the change and indicated that they wish more sites provided this markup since it allows for more content per tweet. One drawback to Twitter Cards is that, in some browsers and devices, the user must click the View Summary link in the tweet to expand the post and view the Card. Other browsers and devices display the information automatically in the post. There are several types of Twitter Cards and, here, we cover types of Twitter Cards that

```
<meta name="twitter:card"
content="player">
  <meta name="twitter:title"
content="Elephant seals, males and
females, (0000824), Acoustic Atlas
Recording - Montana State University
Library">
  <meta name="twitter:description"
content="Vocalizations of elephant
seals at Piedras Blancas rookery
(California).">
<meta name="twitter:image:src"
content="https://acousticatlas.org/img/
proxy/2013-02-28-01-36500_orig.jpg">
  <meta name="twitter:url"
content="https://acousticatlas.org//
item/824">
  <meta name="twitter:player"
content="https://acousticatlas.org/meta/
inc/twitter_player/player/container.
php?identifier=aa0000824.mp3&image=img/
proxy/2013-02-28-01-36500_orig.jpg&show_
artwork=true&visual=true&origin=
twitter">
  <meta name="twitter:player:width"
content="435">
  <meta name="twitter:player:height"
content="300">
```

Figure 2.15
Twitter Card HTML for page shared in figure 2.14

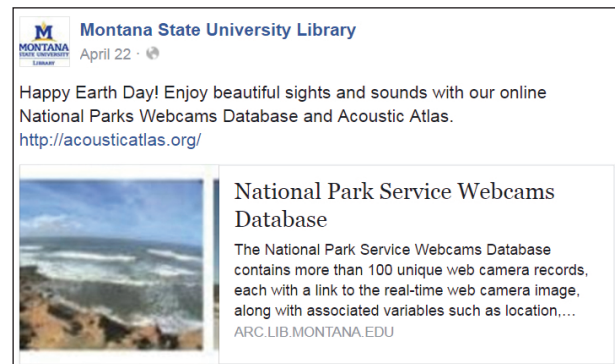


Figure 2.16
Facebook post of page that includes Open Graph tags

will likely be of greatest interest to libraries.

Twitter Summary Cards

Summary Cards include a title, a description, and the name of the Twitter account associated with the site (such as @msuLibrary). You can either use a Summary Card that has a thumbnail image, as seen in figure 2.11, or you can have a large image, as seen in figure 2.12. Figure 2.13 shows the HTML code for the Twitter

Card in figure 2.12.

There are several steps involved in implementing Twitter Cards, so it can be useful to start by installing Cards on a single digital collection or set of webpages before installing them more broadly across your site. You will need to have a Twitter account handle (such as ours, @msulibrary) associated with your website, as this is a required element of a Twitter Card. Also, Twitter’s Web crawler, Twitterbot, will need to have access to your website so it can find and render the Twitter Card HTML you have included to allow it to appear in tweets. If your site has a robots.txt file, which is set to prevent indexing, it will need to have an exception allowing the Twitterbot to access your site. Twitter recognizes many of the tags from the Facebook Open Graph protocol, so if you plan to optimize your page for sharing on Facebook, you can reduce the number of duplicate tags by following the guidelines at the Twitter Card URL provided earlier in this discussion.

Once the Twitter Card tags have been added to your site, the freely usable Twitter Card Validator can render a preview of your card to make sure it looks the way you want.⁵ Player Cards, which provide the ability to play audio or video within the Twitter app or as a preview with a link to a player, will require that you request Twitter to whitelist your site. Other forms of cards do not have this requirement.

Our MSU Library Digital Historical Photos collection was the first to have Twitter Cards applied using the Summary Card with large image.⁶ We chose this type of Card because the focus of the database is digitized photographs with associated metadata about those images. Our experience sharing images from this collection via our library’s social networks suggested that it was very shareable content that might benefit from application of Twitter Cards and

Facebook Open Graph tags. More recently, we added these same tags to our paid database descriptions, as we want to make any social shares of these resources as robust and eye-catching as possible for our community and the extended communities of our users. The chapter on Principle 5 will explore analytics for this collection before and after the Cards were installed.

Twitter Player Cards

As noted earlier, the Player Card will play audio or

```
<meta property="og:title"
content="National Park Service Web
Camera Database">
<meta property="og:description"
content="National Park Service Web
Camera Database - Montana State
University (MSU) Library">
<meta property="og:image"
content="http://arc.lib.montana.edu/
national-park-service-webcams/meta/img/
thumb-national-park-webcams.jpg">
<meta property="og:url" content="http://
arc.lib.montana.edu/national-park-
service-webcams/index.php">
<meta property="og:type"
content="website" />
<meta property="og:site_name"
content="National Park Service Web
Camera Database - Montana State
University (MSU) Library"/>
```

Figure 2.17 Facebook Open Graph HTML for page shared in figure 2.16

Table 2.1. Comparison of social network sharing features

Network	Social Media Markup Option	Supports Social Share Buttons	As an Organization, Can Follow Others on Same Platform	Supports Indexing of Hashtags
Facebook	Facebook Open Graph	Yes	No	Yes
Twitter	Twitter Cards	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instagram	No	No	Yes	Yes
Pinterest	Automatically surfaces images, alt text description if on source page	Yes	Yes	Yes
WordPress Blog	Includes Twitter Cards and Facebook Open Graph	N/A	N/A	No
LinkedIn	Automatically surfaces images, alt text description if on source page	Yes	Libraries part of a bigger organization (such as a university) likely can't join. Library of Congress could.	No
Google+	Automatically surfaces images, alt text description if on source page	Yes: https://developers.google.com/+/web/share/#language-codes	Yes	Yes



Figure 2.18
Facebook share of Montana Newspapers

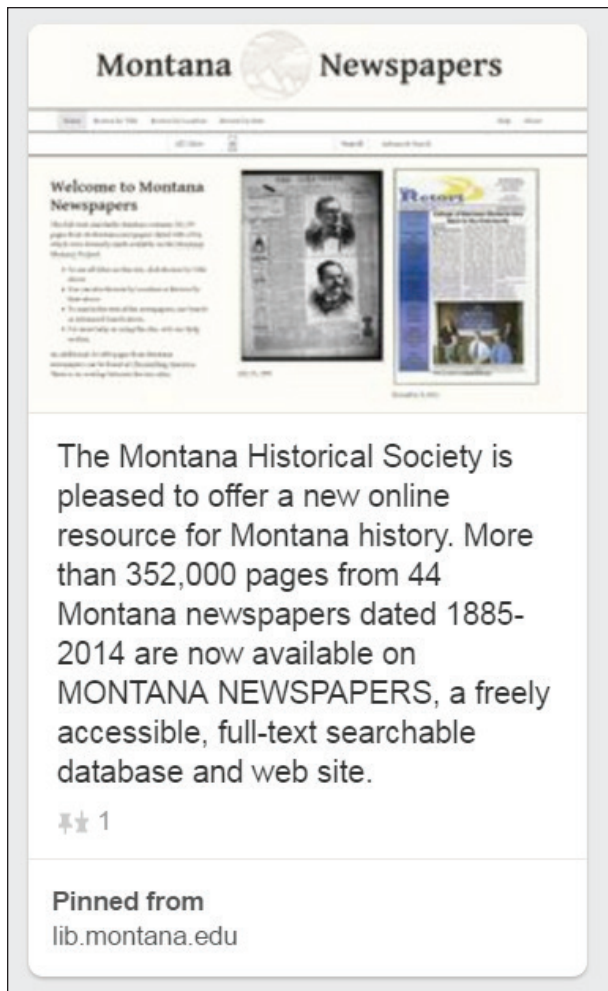


Figure 2.19
Pinterest share of Montana Newspapers

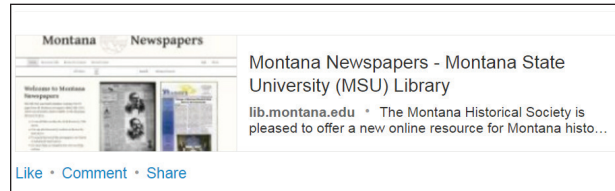


Figure 2.20
LinkedIn share of Montana Newspapers



Figure 2.21
Google+ share of Montana Newspapers

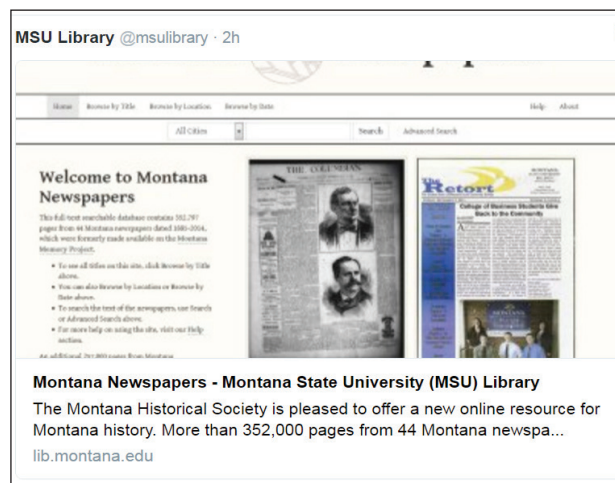


Figure 2.22
Twitter share of Montana Newspapers

video within the Twitter interface, making it much easier to share this content. Behavior of this type of Card varies by operating system and whether it is viewed through a mobile app or a web browser. The Twitter Player Card must meet certain guidelines, such as playing across multiple platforms (different web browsers, Twitter apps, etc.) to be whitelisted for playing on Twitter. As such, these Cards require more configuration than other types of Cards. Fortunately, Twitter offers guidance for setting up this type of Card.⁷ The web server hosting the audio or video must have a secure socket-layer (SSL) card on that server, thus producing a URL beginning with “https.” Additionally, the content needs to be in an MPEG-4 (.mp4) format. Finally, a player for your audio or video needs to be selected. Some players work across various operating systems and mobile device apps and browsers while others are optimized for specific systems.

Our library set up Player Cards for our audio collection, Acoustic Atlas, as seen in figures 2.14 and 2.15.⁸

Getting this type of Card working requires some trial and error because there are fewer examples of this format to reference since it is not as widely adopted as the Summary Card. The Twitter Developer Forums can be helpful in troubleshooting any issues and in selecting the audio and video hosting platform that best meets your library’s needs.⁹

Facebook Open Graph Tags

Turning to Facebook, the application of Open Graph tags to pages is a similar process to adding Twitter Cards. Open Graph includes basic tags and can have additional tags applied for audio, video, or location information. The tag “type” allows you to pick from one of twenty-four defined forms of information being shared such as an article, a website (figures 2.16, 2.17), a song, or a product. Like Twitter, Facebook provides a means to test your tags to ensure the display is how you expect it through its Sharing Debugger.¹⁰

For those sites using Drupal or WordPress for webpages, both sites offer plugins that make adding social share buttons, Twitter Cards tags, and Facebook Open Graph tags to pages easy:

Yoast plugin for WordPress

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/wordpress-seo>

Social Media module for Drupal

<https://www.drupal.org/project/socialmedia>

The chapter on Principle 5 provides an overview of analytics tools to gauge the effects of all of these efforts around making sharing easier.

Optimizing to Share on Multiple Networks

Instagram does not allow uploading images to its platform from social media buttons via its API: Application Programming Interface. Its developer website notes,

At this time, uploading via the API is not possible. We made a conscious choice not to add this for the following reasons: 1. Instagram is about your life on the go—we hope to encourage photos from within the app. 2. We want to fight spam & low quality photos. Once we allow uploading from other sources, it’s harder to control what comes into the Instagram ecosystem. All this being said, we’re working on ways to ensure users have a consistent and high-quality experience on our platform.¹¹

The Instagram model raises questions about the sharing experience for libraries and their users differing across platforms. How can libraries optimize content to be shared on many different platforms, and which platforms are optimal for organizations? Table 2.1 provides an overview of the social network sharing within and across networks.

To illustrate how the same resource might display differently depending on the markup and the social network, figures 2.18–2.22 show the posts of the Montana Newspapers page across social networks. The MSU’s Montana Newspapers page includes Facebook Open Graph tags, Twitter Cards, an image, and a description (along with other elements for search engine optimization such as linked data elements, Schema.org markup, etc.).

As is evident, the display of each share varies by platform, but the inclusion of an image and a description of the resource makes for engaging, eye-catching, and informative displays of the resource. As for Instagram, there is no option to share a URL or an image through the native interface.

Conclusion

There are many ways to *make sharing easy*. Use of social buttons, hashtags, Twitter Cards, and Facebook Open Graph tags reduces barriers to getting Web content onto social networks. These strategies also help you connect more effectively with your community by providing fun, engaging content. We recommend you follow similar approaches to what we have presented in this chapter in considering where to employ social share buttons, to check potential hashtags, and to share your content through social networks so you can see how the content is displayed. Ideally, your community finds that it is easy to share your content and to engage with the information shared.

Notes

1. Michael Ducker, “Hard Decisions for a Sustainable Platform,” *Twitter Blog*, October 6, 2015, <https://blog.twitter.com/2015/hard-decisions-for-a-sustainable-platform>.
2. “Press Releases,” New York Public Library website, accessed April 27, 2016, <http://www.nypl.org/press>; “News,” New York Public Library website, accessed April 27, 2016, <http://www.nypl.org/news>; “NYPL Blogs,” New York Public Library website, accessed April 27, 2016, <http://www.nypl.org/blog>.
3. “Twitter Cards,” Twitter Developer website, accessed April 27, 2016, <https://dev.twitter.com/cards/overview>.
4. “Open Graph Markup,” Facebook for Developers website, accessed April 27, 2016, <https://developers.facebook.com/docs/sharing/webmasters#markup>.
5. “Card Validator,” Twitter Developer website, accessed April 27, 2016 <https://cards-dev.twitter.com/validator>.
6. “Montana State University (MSU) Library Historical Photographs Collection,” Montana State University Library website, accessed May 12, 2016, <http://arc.lib.montana.edu/msu-photos>.
7. “Player Card,” Twitter Developer website, accessed April 27, 2016, <https://dev.twitter.com/cards/types/player>.
8. “Acoustic Atlas,” Montana State University Library, accessed April 17, 2016, <https://acousticatlas.org>.
9. “Twitter Developers,” Twitter Developers website, accessed April 27, 2016, <https://twittercommunity.com>.
10. “Sharing Debugger,” Facebook for Developers website, accessed June 8, 2016, <https://developers.facebook.com/tools/debug>.
11. “Media Endpoints,” Instagram Developer Documentation website, accessed May 14, 2016, <https://instagram.com/developer/endpoints/media>.