Principle 4

Proactively Share

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People have to know a resource exists to use it. Libraries can raise awareness of all the resources and services they have to offer by using the social media optimization (SMO) principle of *proactively sharing* through social networks. Proactively sharing involves your library being active on social networks by regularly sharing content that you think will resonate with your community. Libraries can be some of the best promoters of their own material when using an intentional and well-planned approach to this sharing. Additionally, libraries can proactively share content produced by others to build awareness of resources and services and to engage community. The chapter on Principle 1 discusses approaches for identifying and creating Web content that is relevant and meaningful to your community. Here, in the chapter on Principle 4, we discuss 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.

Local Social Network Surveys

Before your library proactively shares on social networks, it is useful to have a sense of the networks people use, how often they use them, and why they use them. Groups such as the Pew Research Center regularly conduct large-scale, national studies on use of the Internet, mobile and desktop platforms, and social networks, which give readers a good sense of trends across the United States over time.[1] To gain insight into needs and trends unique to your library's community, you can create your own social network survey

Proactively share represents the fourth of five SMO principles:

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

that is designed for your community and that asks the questions you would like to explore.

At the MSU Library, we have conducted surveys in 2013, 2014, and 2015, using the freely available Google Forms, with a few adjustments to questions each year based on declining and emerging social networks.[2] Responses averaged 130 people per survey year, largely consisting of undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty. We shared an invitation to take this survey through our Facebook and Twitter accounts and with a carousel slide on our library's homepage.

Our intent with this survey was to understand which social networks our community uses, how often each social network is used, and how our users might expect to connect with the library via social networks. This information, in turn, could help us determine where and how to direct our efforts with social networks, decide how often to post and visit each network, understand who from our community is active on each network, and know what kind of posts and interactions will match our community's expectations. Figure 4.1 illustrates which networks our community uses by network and year, and figure 4.2 shows frequency of social
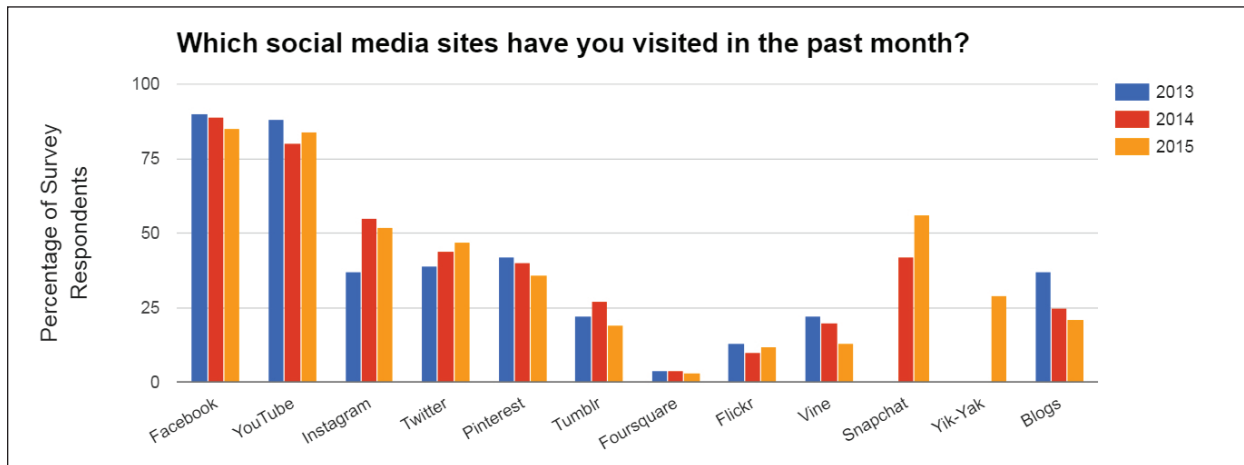
Which social media sites have you visited in the past month?

Figure 4.1
Social network survey: recent visits
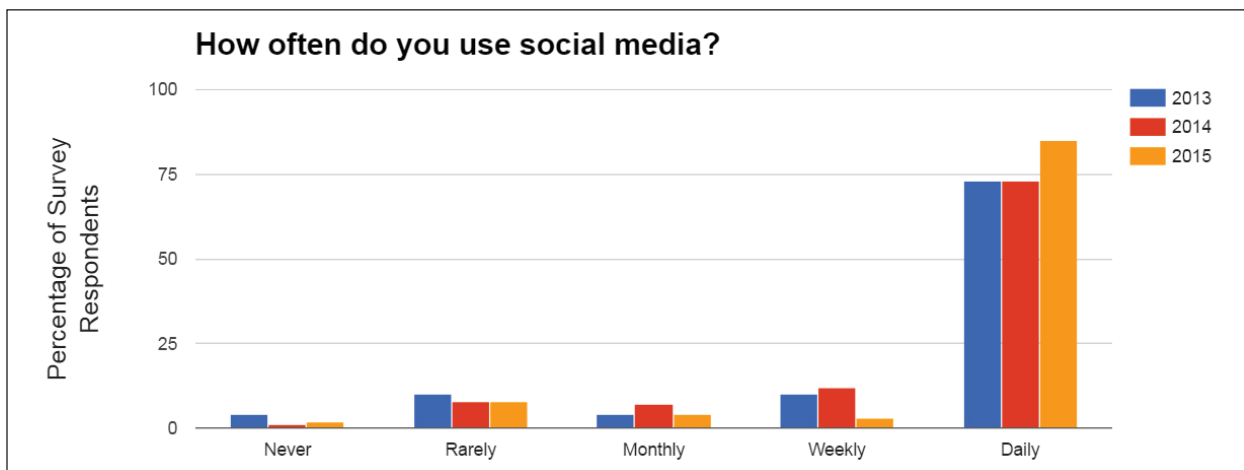
How often do you use social media?

Figure 4.2
Social network survey: frequency of use

network use. Notice that Snapchat and Yik Yak were not significantly present in the conversation in 2013 as they were only launched in 2011 and 2013 respectively. By 2015, both networks showed notable adoption by our community. Resultantly, we have explored the library using both Snapchat and Yik Yak, but have not found a way to connect easily with our community as an organization on these networks, as they are more oriented towards individual interactions. We have found that our community does not expect to connect with us through those social networks, either. Also note that daily use of social networks by our respondents has increased year-to-year (figure 4.2).

Results from these surveys informed our decision to continue our efforts on Facebook, Twitter, and You-Tube. We have deprioritized our efforts on Pinterest and have increased our efforts on Instagram given our community's use of these networks and level of interest in connecting with us in these venues.

Local Social Network Focus Groups

To understand further what, when, and where we should proactively share on social networks, we turn to local focus groups, which can offer insights and context into the reasons, motivations, and interests associated with users' participation or lack of participation in different social networks. We conduct occasional focus group sessions with MSU students to gain additional insights into our social network survey results and the motivations and expectations for students interacting on these social networks. Using our social networks, we put out calls for students interested in participating (figure 4.3). Then, using snowball sampling, we ask those students for recommendations of other students we could invite to participate in these groups.

While questions vary from year to year depending on the current state of social networks, we typically ask questions such as these:

- What is your year in school?
- What is social media?
- How has social media changed since you first started?
- Which social media platforms are you active on and how active?
- Why and how did you decide to start your activity on social media?
- How has social media affected your social life?
- Does your use of social media enhance in-person engagement?
- How do you perceive the difference between commercial accounts and nonprofit/education accounts?
- How did you decide who to engage with and how extensively?
- What are your thoughts about advertisements appearing in social media?
- Do you feel a greater sense of community with MSU through social media?
- How did you first hear about the library's social media?
- How do you perceive the tone of the library's social media messages?
- How do you perceive the character of the library's social media?
- What do you expect from building a relationship with the library on social media?

From these discussions, we find that themes emerge such as interactivity and personality. On the topic of interactivity, one student focus group participant offered the following description: "On Facebook I think of it much more as a community, because it's more interactive and personal that way. Twitter for me is more receiving information. It doesn't feel community-based, more networked-based" (February 2013). This particular example of student feedback represents the challenge and opportunity of connecting with community through social networks. This student associated personal interactivity on Facebook with feelings of connectedness and community, whereas Twitter usage was characterized as one-way reception of information. Through the practice of regular personal interactivity with users and optimizing content for shareability on these networks, the opportunity is present for libraries to be a part of community-based social networks. This concept is put into practice as described in the chapter on Principle 3 by rewarding engagement. In fact, another focus group participant eagerly sought that kind of institutional Twitter account, saying that she wanted "a Twitter account that was more than just updating you on events, but that was more inviting you in and creating that community" (February 2013).

As a result of interactivity on social networks, people may feel a greater connection to their community.
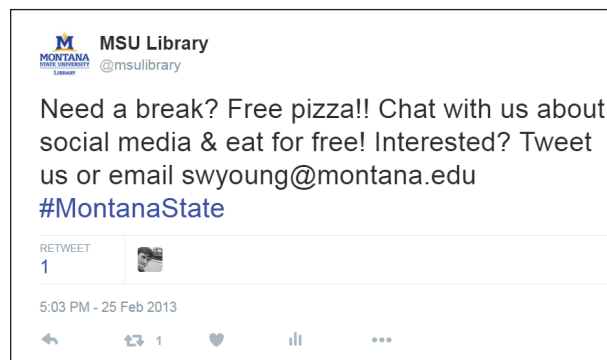

> **MSU Library**
> @msulibrary
>
> Need a break? Free pizza!! Chat with us about social media & eat for free! Interested? Tweet us or email swyoung@montana.edu #MontanaState
>
> RETWEET
> 1
>
> 5:03 PM - 25 Feb 2013

Figure 4.3
Twitter invitation to participate in social media focus group discussion

Another student focus group participant told us, "I never expected to have established personal connections with people on Tumblr, but I ended up doing it. That was pretty cool!" (December 2013). This student used Tumblr as a method to connect with information and, by being active in this environment, made connections that might not have otherwise occurred. This comment suggests that people can develop unexpected relationships through experiences via social networks.

Another theme, personality, is revealed in the comments of several students: "Organizations are sort of notoriously bland on their social media accounts, because everything you say represents the entire organization and it's very hard to be edgy or funny when you have the organization's face attached to it" (February 2013). A second student observed, "If you have a Twitter account, you have to give people a reason to follow you. I think a lot of entities at MSU don't understand that. The library does an awesome job. You guys give people a reason to follow you. You're responsive. You're clever. Interesting. And it's not just event updates. And I'm serious. I really admire all of the social media at the library" (December 2013). When we asked one focus group, "How important is the idea of personality for social media?" a participant responded, "It's essential." Another person from the same group stated, "It's huge. Which again, I think, coming back to campus and coming back to the library, the library . . . has personality, and that's why people follow it" (December 2013).

The themes of interactivity and personality that emerge from our focus groups reinforce the need to implement SMO in all of its forms. While it is important to *make sharing easy*, it is also important to listen to your community and learn what shared content is meaningful to them. Likewise, while *creating shareable content* is useful for getting information onto social networks, the library will also want to *reward engagement* by community members. *Proactively sharing,* the principle explored here, is easier when you

understand your community and the entirety of their experience through social networks.

Posting Categories and Schedule

With a better sense from the local surveys and focus groups of how your community is using social networks and what it expects of the library, your library can move to a consideration of what will be of interest for you to proactively share with your community and what may be tiring or unwanted in their social network streams. As discussed in the chapter on Principle 3, users may initiate engagement with the library on social networks. Here, consider that you also want users to discover the library on social networks through its proactive sharing efforts.

In the chapter on Principle 1, we identify how your library can *create* content that is shareable by anyone active on social networks. In our discussion of Principle 4, we identify how your library can *proactively share* content with your community on its social networks. While you can gain insights through your surveys and focus groups into what to share proactively, additional insights can be gained through trial and experimentation.

Sharing Library Content

Principle 1 encourages the library to create content that is shareable on social networks, and this high-quality content can be a part of what you regularly post. Sharing content that your library has already produced and published can provide benefits to your Web properties and to your library. Social network sharing activity can drive traffic to your website, blog, or digital library. Sharing your own library's content can also be a great way to deliver news, current events, and historical interests to your community. For example, NYPL shared content from its own public domain collection on Facebook, and the post generated much interest and enthusiasm from its community, as is evidenced in the numbers of likes and shares (figure 4.4). More examples of sharing the library's own content can be found in the subsequent sections of this discussion as well as the other chapters in this report.

Posting Categories

As noted in the introduction, your library's social media guide can provide focus for your social network efforts. Identifying what posting categories of information you will proactively share is an important part of developing your guide. The MSU Library's Acoustic Atlas Twitter account represents the acousticatlas.org project, which is a database of sounds of animal species and habitats from across the American West. It

Figure 4.4
Facebook share by NYPL with high levels of social network engagement

presents a good example for illustrating posting categories. For this account, we identified many different categories for possible sharing by Acoustic Atlas on Twitter. The posting categories from the Social Media Guide are as follows:

- Heard on Campus #montanastate—recordings of wildlife that can be observed on campus.
- Funny, Weird, and Unusual Days—identify opportunities based on designated days.
- Sounds in the News—sounds paired with MSU, Yellowstone, and Montana-related stories.
- Birding Day—to highlight our extensive bird recordings and engage birding audience. Possible tie into Sacajawea Audubon's Twitter @SacaAudubon and monthly bird report in the Belgrade News @Belgnews and other MT Audubon groups, as well as Bird Note.
- Blog updates.
- Feature highlights: ringtones, downloadable sounds, etc.
- Yellowstone updates tied to our collaborative work.
- Sounds paired with quotes from authors (for example, inspired by our Jack London– and Ivan Doig–themed open houses).
- Blue/Gold Fridays.
- Funday—fun random sound from the atlas.
- Groups to engage/follow/retweet:
  - Audubon groups
  - Conservation groups

Figure 4.5
Acoustic Atlas sounds shared on Twitter for Blue and Gold Friday

Figure 4.6
Acoustic Atlas tweet for International Vulture Awareness Day

- FWP
- Regional national parks
- MSU student groups

Once you have identified possible categories to share proactively, you can establish when and how often these are shared through a posting schedule.

Posting Frequency and Schedule

One approach to sharing proactively can be to develop a posting plan to rotate through the kind of content of interest to your community. With this method, a variety of information can be shared with predetermined frequency. This posting schedule could also be incorporated into the social media guide, as discussed in

Figure 4.7
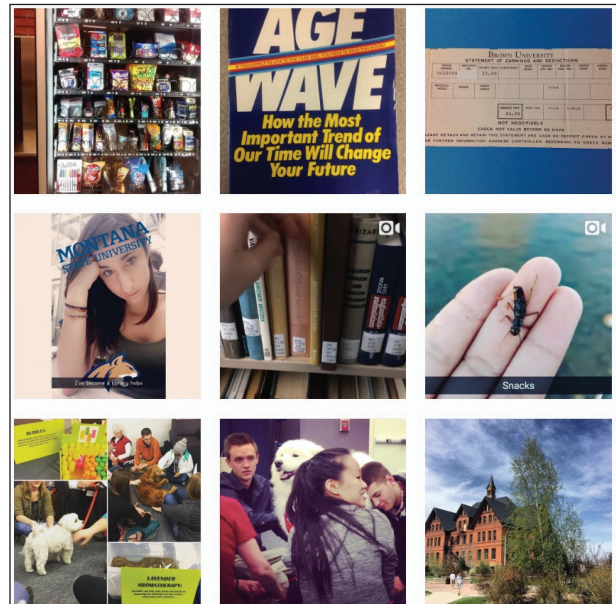Acoustic Atlas tweet for National Public Lands Day

Figure 4.8
Search of MSU Library tagged location images on Instagram

the chapter 1. For example, the Acoustic Atlas account could follow this posting schedule on Twitter:

- *Monday*: Sounds paired with quotes from authors
- *Tuesday*: Sounds in the News
- *Wednesday*: Feature highlights—ringtones, downloadable sounds
- *Thursday*: Blog post or Yellowstone update reflecting our recording team in action
- *Friday*: Blue/Gold Fridays with #MontanaState hashtag
- *Saturday*: Birding day
- *Sunday*: #SundayFunday with random sound from the Atlas

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Figure 4.9
MSU Writing Center Twitter post with MSU Library mention

Figure 4.10
MSU Library Twitter post with MSU Writing Center mention

For example, the Friday posting schedule for Acoustic Atlas ties in with a broader effort. Fridays at MSU are "Blue and Gold Fridays," which reflect our school's colors and school spirit. The Acoustic Atlas has a number of blue- and gold-named animals, so we identified several pairs of these animals to highlight on Blue and Gold Fridays (figure 4.5). The #MontanaState hashtag is added to pull in anyone who follows that tag. #GoCats shows school spirit in celebration of our MSU Bobcats. Some example pairings include

- Mountain Bluebird (http://acousticatlas.org/item/311) and American Goldfinch (http://acousticatlas.org/item/16)
- Blue Grouse (http://acousticatlas.org/item/731) and Common Goldeneye (http://acousticatlas.org/item/143)
- Blue-winged Teal (http://acousticatlas.org/item/75) and Golden Eagle (http://acousticatlas.org/item/199)
- Bluethroat (http://acousticatlas.org/item/73) and Golden-Crowned Kinglet (http://acousticatlas.org/item/202)

After following this proactive sharing schedule for a while, you can identify which types of posts seem to resonate with your community and generate engagement, as evidenced by reshares, comments, click-through analytics, uses of the resources promoted, and so forth. Some posting categories may do better or worse on certain days of the week (e.g., people might be more interested in Yellowstone sounds on a Monday after they've returned from a Yellowstone vacation) or times of the day (e.g., 5 p.m.–6 p.m. might be a time when many people are commuting and are offline). For further feedback, you can engage people through surveys or in-person user testing to determine which kinds of posts people prefer.

Unusual Days

A subset of the posting categories is Fun, Weird, or Unusual Days, or days as designated by Days of the Year (or any other number of similar sites). These specific days can be incorporated into your posting plan. An example of days of possible interest for posting on the Acoustic Atlas Twitter account for the month of September 2015 includes
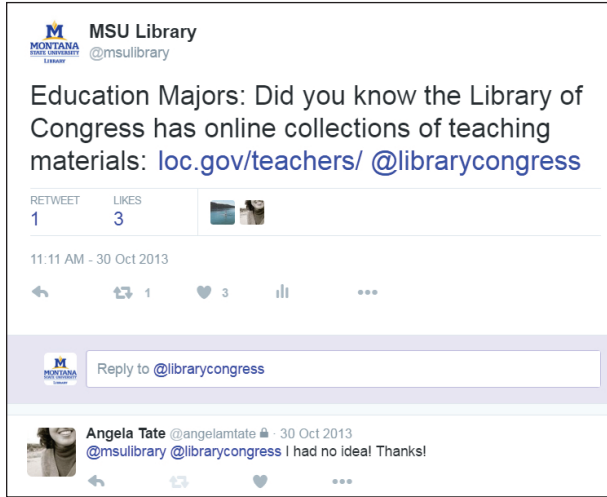
Figure 4.11
Twitter share of a freely available education resource

- Chicken Month—September
- International Vulture Awareness Day—September 5
- Teddy Bear Day—September 9
- No News Is Good News Day—September 11
- Roald Dahl Day (inspiration for Fantastic Mr. Fox)—September 13
- Water Monitoring Day—September 18
- Coastal Cleanup Day—September 19
- First Day of Fall—September 23
- International Rabbit Day—September 26

Days of the Year
www.daysoftheyear.com

From this list of possibilities, sounds from the Acoustic Atlas database can be selected for proactive sharing, using the associated hashtag for that day (figures 4.6–4.7). These themes may be of interest to those already following the Acoustic Atlas Twitter account and may also introduce Acoustic Atlas content to those beyond the current follower community.

Sharing with Geotags

As discussed in the chapter on Principle 3, geotagging is a feature commonly available in social networks. Tagging a geolocation in a post, or "geotagging," offers opportunities for the library to share content and show library-related activities beyond the footprint of the library building. For example, the library can geotag any of the photographs it posts to Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter with the library's location, thus offering anyone else who searches that tag to learn

Figure 4.12
Twitter share of legislative information

more about library-related activity and to see that the library is active on those accounts.[3] Likewise, if the library proactively shares a historical photograph, the location of the image can be geotagged to make the information discoverable by others interested in that location. Figure 4.8 shows a subset of search results for the MSU Library location in Instagram, which includes four images posted by MSU Library and five images shared by members of our community. For anyone searching this tag, they get a sense of life in and around the library as presented by the library and its community. Geotags offer the library opportunities for getting creative by gamifying geolocations through treasure hunts and check-ins or by asking users to post a picture of themselves in action, which could result in a delivery of a prize.

Another benefit to geotagging is that it demonstrates to our community that the library is much more than a building. As library employees, we actively engage in other campus activities such as those events held at our student union, in teaching classes across our university, and in attending training and conferences. Adding geotags to our social network posts from these activities shows that the library is engaged across campus and across the library profession. Because these tags are searchable in the social network platforms, you can find other posts in the same location and reshare that content with your community, as you deem appropriate.

Engaging with Other Accounts and Sharing External Content

Engaging with Other Accounts

Library content may be produced in collaboration with other entities in your organization or may be of interest to specific entities. Many platforms offer the option to tag other accounts on the same platform. By tagging others on your post when proactively sharing, you draw attention to the post for that account

by notifying them of the tag. Consequently, they may reshare your post, reply, or follow back your library social network account, if they are not already following you. Of the major social networks, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook allow you to tag others or mention others in your post. For example, MSU Library regularly hosts a collaborative effort with the MSU Writing Center called "Write Night," and both groups regularly tag each other in posts on Twitter and Facebook (figures 4.9, 4.10).

In both of these examples, the library and the Writing Center retweeted the other's post, thus broadening the community of users who saw both tweets.

Sharing External Content

The library can expand its proactive sharing beyond library resources and services to external information that may be of interest to the community. This sharing can demonstrate that the library is listening to and is knowledgeable about a variety of information and services (figures 4.11, 4.12).

Conclusion

Sharing proactively means identifying content meaningful and useful to your community and surfacing that content through the social networks where you have identified users to be active and engaged. That effort starts by understanding where your users are present and where they might engage with the library. Proactively sharing also requires going beyond direct engagement and looking to referencing your library partners and geolocations to share where you are active. In doing so, your library has the opportunity to engage with community in the spaces and places where they live and work.

Notes

1. Pew Research Center website, accessed May 22, 2016, www.pewresearch.org.
2. Scott W. H. Young, Doralyn Rossmann, and Justin Shanks, "Montana State University (MSU) Library Social Media Survey," 2015, Montana State University ScholarWorks, http://dx.doi.org/10.15788/m26p43.
3. Jessamyn West, "Meta-Geolocation," *Computers in Libraries* 35, no. 8 (October 2015): 24.