n an effort to reach as many patrons as possible, many librarians over the years have worked hard to leverage their social media accounts, both as promotional tools and as communication resources. As many library users (especially teens, young adults, and first- and second-year college students) are migrating to more interactive and private networks, an interest in reaching these demographics has been increasing in the library community. At the forefront of these conversations are photo- and video-sharing heavy hitters Snapchat and Instagram. Some professionals are at the beginning stages of deciding whether to add these platforms to their social media repertoires, while others are seeking ways to effectively incorporate digital book talks, #BookFaceFriday hashtags, and custom library geofilters. To get a window into these inner workings no matter what stage of the decision-making process you are in, I decided to feature some trailblazing library professionals to get their take on Instagram and Snapchat. While many of the topics outlined in this chapter will be discussed in-depth in later chapters, I wanted to start this report by featuring a summary of what an effective library Instagram and Snapchat presence looks like.

For this chapter, I interviewed 11 library professionals from nine different libraries. Some individuals I spoke with manage both Instagram and Snapchat, while the majority handle one of the two. To preserve the anonymity of the participants and the flow of the chapter, I refer to each individual using their library’s @handle. Listed below are the libraries that participated, along with details including library type and the platform on which I focused my interview:

- @acclibraries — academic library with an interview focus on Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/acclibraries)
- @CMCLibrary — public library with an interview focus on Snapchat (https://www.snapchat.com/add/cmclibrary) and Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/cmclibrary)
- @libraryul — academic library with an interview focus on Snapchat (https://www.snapchat.com/add/libraryul)
- @librariesluc — academic library with an interview focus on Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/librariesluc)
- @NCSULibraries — academic library with an interview focus on Snapchat (https://www.snapchat.com/add/ncsulibraries)
- @NISDStevenslib — high school library with an interview focus on Snapchat (https://www.snapchat.com/add/nisdstevenslib) and Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/nisdstevenslib)
- @TheRLPL — public library with an interview focus on Snapchat (https://www.snapchat.com/add/therlpl)
- @orillia_library — public library with an interview focus on Snapchat (https://www.snapchat.com/add/orillia_library)
- @topekalibrary — public library with an interview focus on Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/topekalibrary)

Why Instagram/Snapchat?

If we had a mission statement, it would be to never ever hear a student say, “Oh man, I’m graduating next week and I didn’t know you had that.”

— @NCSULibraries

For almost everyone I spoke with, the rationale for adding a platform stems from a desire to reach a population...
or communicate a message that they were not able to beforehand. As @orillia_library summarized it, “Right now teens are using Snapchat, so that’s what’s working.” Similarly, @TheRLPL wanted to find a way to reach tween-young adult age groups, as they had seen a drop in teen attendance at their programs and a decline in teens and twenty-something interaction on Facebook. They now use Snapchat to, among other things, highlight their ability to “offer more of what teens enjoy and need from the library.” @acclibraries added that in addition to reaching different demographics, Instagram allows them to communicate something new and different, being able to literally paint a picture of what the inside of the library looks like and add a lighthearted “human” element. Tapping into patron proclivities has paid off for @topekalibrary, with them hitting the 1,000 follower mark on Instagram in just a year and a half.

**Staff Management**

*Social media management is not an afterthought, but rather an area for concerted time and devotion.*

—@CMCLibrary

Deciding whether to add another social media platform to most librarians’ already full plates is also an important consideration. All but one of the librarians I spoke with handle social media as part of their established job responsibilities. With this structure, an additional platform has the potential to overwhelm someone who is already juggling a variety of different tasks, as @CMCLibrary expressed it: “I don’t want to say social media is my side job, but I’m at the reference desk and assisting patrons all day, so sometimes things fall to the side.” To help manage this potential pitfall, many participants intentionally carve out time on a consistent basis for social media. For example, each of the social media managers at @acclibraries tries to dedicate about one hour per week to ensure that content is consistently managed.

Another way some libraries set everyone up for success and ensure a steady flow of quality content is by dividing *tasks* by day or person or separating *platforms* by person. Task and platform division was easily adopted by @acclibraries, @CMCLibrary, @librariesatluc, @topekalibrary, and @NCSULibraries, who have established teams of social media managers. @librariesatluc designates one main person per platform, with all positions being supported by the library’s PR and outreach committee. Similarly, @CMCLibrary has designated social media liaisons who coordinate social media across departments or branches in the library. For them, specific days on Snapchat break down to one librarian managing #TeenBookTuesday, Wednesday nonfiction roundups, and Thursday announcements, and the other librarian posting graphic novel book talks on Mondays. Maintaining a certain level of flexibility is important for @topekalibrary: “We don’t do the thing that all the branding people say you’re supposed to do on Instagram; we let each individual staff member do their own thing.” @topekalibrary implements co-management of Instagram, comprising approximately eight people. @acclibraries has a “social media team” of six members and a designated team leader, with each person primarily handling one platform, but no person “owning” it. @acclibraries explained that this setup allows social media to be a fun and doable activity that supplements current librarian duties and functions and facilitates multiple voices.

Regarding Snapchat, @NCSULibraries has implemented the unique approach of allowing students to manage the account. @NCSULibraries maintains a larger staff and designates social media management and oversight to the larger library marketing and communications department, which consists of five full-time staff members. @NCSULibraries explained that the primary rationale behind adopting a “student-run” Snapchat account is to create space to get those who best understand the platform involved, stating “Snapchat is the thing that makes me and my team feel old, and it’s just not intuitive to us.” @NCSULibraries also added that the student workers have the benefit of being able to put on their résumé that they ran a major social media platform for a fairly large organization. For those on a smaller team where duties cannot be easily split up, it is helpful when those managing Snapchat or Instagram are naturally interested and/or avid users themselves. This was the case for one library professional at @librariesatluc, who originally created and managed the Snapchat account, but later handed the reins over to a librarian who was more of a Snapchat user.

Regardless of whether the platform is managed by one person or multiple people, community contribution and collaboration are always encouraged. @librariesatluc explained that non-social media managers in the library periodically send content to the Snapchat and Instagram manager to be sent out and promoted. Participants mentioned using an internal Listserv, email, intranet file service, or Google Drive for these purposes. @CMCLibrary tries to make content creation as easy as possible, allowing liaisons to post content directly to a platform or send it to a social media manager or coordinator. Additionally, while individuals need to have been a librarian or library staff member for at least a year to help manage a platform, @CMCLibrary does open it up to volunteers and community members by allowing them to send content to the library for possible inclusion.
Account Logistics

Before creating any social media account, it is important to have some preliminary best practices and guidelines established (see chapter 2). The creation of guidelines is mainly administered by managers during the onboarding process; they cover topics including privacy, how often to post, what days and times to post, and so on. However, as @CMCLibrary pointed out, since social media is constantly in flux, these guidelines are always changing as well.

To Follow or Not to Follow? And Other Patron Privacy Issues

Snapchat has a more “closed network” feel than Instagram, allowing users to send snaps to specific users, groups of users, their entire contacts list, or their Stories (with custom, live, and public options available). Also, depending on a user’s settings, one user might not be able to send others individual snaps if they do not follow the user. This can be particularly inhibiting for librarians seeking to add another communication channel for reference services. As a result, many librarians wrestle with whether or not to add patrons back as friends. Some participants I spoke with have a strict “no-follow” policy on Snapchat, especially in the case of public libraries. @CMCLibrary also carries this no-follow policy over to employees, stating that they do not follow employees back or @mention them in any posts to preserve everyone’s privacy.

Other libraries were a little more flexible in this area. On Instagram, @topekalibrary recommends libraries follow patrons back to help build community and, from a pragmatic standpoint, boost algorithmic exposure. To bypass the follow/not follow quandary, @orillia_library stated that they add everyone back but do not look at the content, explaining that they send everyone a snap that reads: “Thanks for following us. Just so you know, we won’t ever view your stories. We only view messages that are sent directly to us.”

Another common privacy issue surrounds posting photos or videos featuring individual patrons. For some, consent involves a verbal agreement with individuals, with the library asking the patrons if they can post the picture or video on social media after taking it. @topekalibrary has general terms and conditions on their website that states that groups of three or more patrons may be photographed or videotaped in the library; when there are fewer than three individuals in a photo, the library utilizes a simple video release form. @acclibraries takes a hybrid approach, operating under their institution’s blanket policy that photos can be taken for publicity purposes when students are on campus, but also getting verbal confirmation.

Account Promotion

Participants implement a variety of tactics to attract new followers on Instagram and Snapchat. @NISD-stevenslib recently moved from the school district’s middle school to the high school and has recently created all new social media accounts. To get the word out, they utilize visible signage in the library and bookmarks featuring their Snapcode and username as well as face-to-face discussions as students visit the library. (If you don’t know what a Snapcode is, don’t worry; we’ll cover that in chapter 3.) Similarly, @TheRLPL features its Snapcode and username, using the graphic design web tool Canva, on both visible signage and digital assets, which they cross-post on other social media channels (see figure 1.1 for an example of a cross-posted promotional Snapcode). Cross-promotion for @CMCLibrary also includes Snapchat information located in the “bio” section of their YouTube and Pinterest accounts. @orillia_library likes to combine both digital and face-to-face methods to promote their account, choosing to AirDrop® their Snapcode at events such as their local comic con as well as passing out swag such as buttons and bookmarks. @libraryul enlisted help from groups and departments with more established Snapchat accounts and student connections, such as the Students’ Union. @orillia_library and @libraryul also solicited the assistance of teen advisors and student peer advisors to help get the word out.

Content Creation Tips and Ideas

A photo with just a book on a shelf isn’t going to get a whole lot of engagement; we need someone holding that book.

—@acclibraries

It is important that those seeking to use Web 2.0 technologies such as Instagram and Snapchat avoid using them in a Web 1.5 manner. Jackson and Lilleker coined the term Web 1.5 to describe an extensive use of Web 2.0 architecture of participation without maximizing its inherent democratic structure. One of the key differences between Web 1.0 and 2.0 is that rather than being solely consumers of content, users become both consumers and participants. So, rather than merely broadcasting information, librarians creating successful content are embracing all the elements of Web 2.0, including diverse and creative text, audio, and video content; the incorporation of user-generated content, live stories, commenting/sharing/liking, linking, #hashtagging, @mentioning,
that not only do students engage with the snaps online, but some individuals visit the library with the sole purpose of checking out the highlighted book. @CMCLibrary also incorporates themed days including #TeenBookTuesday, but rather than use Snapchat to record the video, they capture content using a professional-grade camera, post it on YouTube, and then share a link to the YouTube video on Snapchat. This approach was prompted by Snapchat’s unpopular interface update last year that resulted in fewer views from their followers. As with @NISDstevenslib, @CMCLibrary has found that these features usually result in a fast turnover of the highlighted book (which are also on display in the library).

@orillia-library creatively sneaks in readers’ advisory by creating BuzzFeed-style personality or quiz prompts, such as “What book should you read based on your star sign?” or “Tell us your favorite horror movie, and we’ll recommend the next video game you should check out.” In a very Web 2.0 fashion, they also make things interactive, such as creating a truth-or-dare game on Snapchat based on the book Truth or Dare? @TheRLPL also likes to incorporate more than just books in readers’ advisories and book talks and also features music and DVDs as they arrive on the shelves monthly.

**Topic: Library Services/Programming/How-To**

Probably second most important from a marketing standpoint would be the promotion of library services. This content often includes what @libraryul and @TheRLPL listed as how to find or reserve a book, get a library card, cite a reference, or connect to the library remotely, as well as some need-to-know information such as library closures, weekend services, and so on. On Snapchat, @libraryul likes to use the URL feature (see chapter 3) for these purposes. However, unfortunately, some platforms are not as amenable as others to this type of pragmatic posting.

@librariesluc lamented that Instagram posts focusing on library programming generally do not perform as well as campus beauty shots (see the Library and Book Beauty Shots section below) but revealed that the recently released Instagram Stories have provided a more organic place for this content. @acclibraries, also an avid Instagram Stories user, reported that the library strives to keep things relevant, focusing on student success and making students’ lives better.
**Topic: Recurring Content**

Holidays; recurring celebrations or “tentpole” days or events; and weekly, monthly, and yearly themes can be great ways to interest users. @topekalibrary jumps on #ThrowbackThursday by spotlighting various subjects from their local history department. @CMCLibrary cultivates some FOMO (fear of missing out) during their annual comic convention (Cape Con) by posting videos on Instagram Stories. @CMCLibrary also mentioned posting videos on Instagram from monthly cooking classes, which feature a local chef from the community, maximizing reach by @mentioning the local business. This content is also cross-posted on platforms such as Pinterest, which creatively involves a branded recipe pin. This approach has let them move from “just a library in Cape May County to being global.”

@CMCLibrary’s Cape Con  
https://capecon.cmclibrary.org

CMCL Cooks on Pinterest  
https://www.pinterest.ch/cmclibrary/cmcl-cooks

Finals week is always popular in the academic sphere. @NCSULibraries likes to snap locations where they are giving out cookies, coffee, and study “survival kits” with fun gifts and snacks, using the opportunity to encourage students to follow their account. @acclibraries supports ACC’s Support Center through the management of a small semestery textbook services program for financially eligible students and makes sure to share that information on Instagram so those individuals can stay in the know. They also jumped on the Textbook Hero movement and created a fun campaign involving a READ-style poster photoshoot that highlighted classroom faculty offering open-access textbooks as part of ACC’s OER initiative (see figure 1.2). On the public library side of things, summer reading programs regularly provide a bevy of content to post. @CMCLibrary cited examples of a video showing how badges were created and posts displaying the prizes they were giving away. @topekalibrary added that incorporating pictures or videos of animals is always a good bet for garnering interaction with their summer reading posts. To make things interactive and encourage teens to report on their summer reading progress, @orillia_library created a leaderboard called “beat sneaky Pete,” in which students would try to read more books than the top summer reader, cleverly dubbed “Sneaky Pete.”

Tentpole days and events (occurrences such as National Cat Day, National Best Friends Day, etc.) are effective ways to connect trending topics to library content. @acclibraries, who adopts a lighthearted playful approach, recalled a recent successful post in which they photoshopped a giant cat next to one of their reference librarians for National Cat Day (see figure 1.3). @librariesluc reported that they do a big push for voter registration, using the motivating hashtag #LoyolaVotes. One tentpole event that never disappoints in the library realm, National Library Week, was commonly discussed among participants. Building off of 2016/2017’s ALA Presidential Initiative, “Libraries Transform: The Expert in the Library,” @acclibraries created a video series entitled “Expert in the Library,” promoting their librarians’ different backgrounds, skills, and professional areas of specialization.

Figure 1.1  
@acclibraries READ-style poster example (Source: Austin Community College Libraries, [@acclibraries], “Textbook Hero Tina Buck,” Instagram photo, March 7, 2018, https://www.instagram.com/p/BgB--57DUjs/.)

Figure 1.2  
@acclibraries READ-style poster example (Source: Austin Community College Libraries, [@acclibraries], “Textbook Hero Tina Buck,” Instagram photo, March 7, 2018, https://www.instagram.com/p/BgB--57DUjs/.)
Milestone events and celebrations lauding various library, university, or city achievements were mentioned as popular ways to build hype. @topekallibrary reported they made sure to post during their celebration of “75 years of bookmobile service,” and @CMCLibrary had a video ready for when they reached 1,000 Instagram followers (adding that they waited until it was a bit over that amount to account for any unfollows). @NCSULibraries stated that it is also helpful to craft pre-event posts to build hype and encourage attendance.

**Topic: Library and Book Beauty Shots**

You can’t go wrong with your standard campus, library, or book “beauty shot,” especially on Instagram. @topekallibrary suggests incorporating photos that pop and are easy to see quickly (see figure 1.4). @librariesluc revealed that high-quality photos of campus or library life, such as the library building, the reading room, the stacks, a nice study space, or #lakeviews from their information commons, always play well. For inspiration on beauteous book arrangements, @CMCLibrary recommends following self-proclaimed bookstagrammer @james_trevino, who has a gift for creating visually impressive book arrays (see chapter 4).

**Tactic: Ask Questions**

Invitational phrasing is a useful way to interest your users and encourage interaction beyond simply liking a post. @CMCLibrary incorporates face-to-face and digital tactics, sharing an example that asked, “Who’s your favorite Harry Potter character and why?” on their whiteboard and invited patrons to write down or snap their responses. @orillia_library taps into nostalgia by asking their followers about their favorite kids’ book on #ThrowbackThursday. @acclibraries has found Instagram Stories’ poll feature useful for these types of questions (e.g., What’s the best movie adaptation of a book?), making sure to include a follow-up post with the results. One great resource for ideas in this domain is BuzzFeed, which has really mastered the art of crafting queries that speak to millennial and Gen Z audiences.

**Tactic: Tweak by Platform**

When composing content, it is important to either create posts specific to the platform or tweak the message if cross-posting. In general, what works on Facebook does not perform the same way on Snapchat and vice versa. This has to do with a variety of things including algorithms and the different audiences using each platform. (Snapchat skews younger while Facebook skews older.) @NCSULibraries explained while content on other platforms is more polished, Snapchat is more “on the ground,” requiring snaps showcasing what it is like to be a student in the library in real time. Limitations
can also be a barrier regarding cross-posted content. For example, @acclibraries pointed out that since Instagram requires videos to be sixty seconds or less, they create a one-minute cut for Instagram and a longer form video for YouTube, the website, their LibGuides, and the institution's content-sharing Listserv (rather than just creating a short video for all platforms).

**Tactic: Go to the Source**

What better way to understand what teens and young adults want than to go to the source? @NCSULibraries, @orillia_library, and @libraryul all seek the input from their target demographic by using an advisory board. The reason was stated by @NCSULibraries: “We’re all a bunch of middle-aged white dudes, so we need to ensure that we are representing other voices and perspectives.” @orillia_library also likes to feature teen volunteers in snaps, revealing that allowing “teens [to] see someone their own age featured” is more viewer-friendly and “helps encourage them to share content with their own contacts.” Also libraries do not have to pursue the opinions of their target demographic directly from patrons, but can simply garner intel from people of a similar age. For example, one interviewee recalled that when she first started Snapchat, she asked her niece to show her the basics.

Additionally, it is also helpful to seek the knowledge of various librarians to help diversify content and facilitate fresh ideas. @acclibraries solicits opinions and content from faculty librarians, staff, and students across all of their eleven campuses, stating that a lot of the job is more management than original posting. @librariesluc similarly seeks information from individuals at their smaller downtown campus, as they do not have the resources to manage social media at both locations.

**Tactic: Go with the Flow**

Flexibility is essential when it comes to creating engaging content. For @acclibraries, this includes hours outside of the traditional nine-to-five workday as well as increasing or decreasing posting as needed (which often happens seasonally, with less posting during the summer months and more during the fall and spring semesters). Being flexible also means not feeling guilty if you do not have content to post every single day. @NISDStevenslib reported they strive for consistent posting but do not worry about missing a day. This adaptability also means knowing when it is time to move on to something new. For example, @orillia_library noticed that static posts promoting their Nerf Battle event were not performing very well, so they switched to a video of actual teens using Nerf guns, which was much more successful.

**Tactic: Tap into In-Office and Community Talent**

You never know what librarians are capable of outside of their jobs; there’s a lot of untapped talent that sometimes we don’t even know about.

—@acclibraries

Users love it when libraries put a human face on their brand. One easy way to do this is to showcase the unique talents of your staff. @CMCLibrary recalled creating a fun video starring a librarian applying her past skills attained from color guard to use ribbons in an entertaining way. Even if you do not have the time to discover everyone’s hidden talents, you can promote library services with an “introduce the staff” series, which was recommended by @topekalibrary. Take advantage of the skills of library staffers, such as those who have a keen eye for photography, a talent for mid-level or professional-level graphic design, or an aptitude for putting together a hilarious meme. As @acclibraries pointed out, “You don’t have to have a degree in photography to take great pictures.”

**Tactic: Interact with Patrons**

*If a patron asks a question on Snapchat, be prepared to follow through fully; treat it like you would a regular reference desk session.*

—@orillia_library

It is important to note that whether you plan for it or not, patrons will most likely expect all your available social media channels to function as viable points of communication. This can come in the form of answering a formal reference question or just a comment to show you care. @topekalibrary recommends linking your Instagram account to Facebook to streamline these interactions, stating that they try to answer all comments and questions, even if just to say “thank you.” @orillia_library carries an iPad to answer as quickly as possible, even if it’s just a quick sticker, stating, “The faster you respond, the more interaction you get.” @orillia_library also discussed using the iPad for reference, placing holds for patrons, assisting with a research project, and so on. This is something that @libraryul is aiming to do on Snapchat, but has not quite reached yet.

**What’s on the Horizon**

*I would love the opportunity to just sit down and talk about the things that other libraries go through.*

—@CMCLibrary

After speaking with these gifted and forward-thinking library professionals, I learned about a variety of social media methods and tools that can be implemented to
serve their patrons. On the direct horizon, I anticipate more libraries will start to utilize Instagram Stories. @CMCLibrary, @acclibraries, and @topekalibrary all mentioned they are starting to experiment with Stories, which @CMCLibrary indicated involves relinquishing some control on the management side. As more and more people recognize the value of social media and start to create easily accessible ways to measure their return on investment, there might be more dollar amounts devoted to it as well. This might mean Instagram advertising forays and increased usage of event-specific custom Snapchat geofilters or lenses. One hope for the future expressed by @CMCLibrary was greater collaboration and idea sharing between libraries. @CMCLibrary stated that even something as simple as a phone conference or a panel or workshop at a regional library association meeting would be immensely helpful. Who knows, maybe a social media library conference or an ALA Annual social media panel will be offered in the future?!

In the next chapter, I will discuss some general best practices, apps, and resources you can use to boost your Instagram and Snapchat content. Then in chapters 3 and 4, I will drill down into content specifics that seem to perform especially well on each platform.

Notes

1. It should be noted that all of these libraries also manage additional accounts, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest. However, these platforms were outside the purview of this chapter and thus were not included.
2. The individual I interviewed from @librariesluc has since moved and is no longer working at @librariesluc.
3. AirDrop is an iOS service that allows you to easily transfer files between Mac or iOS devices that are within 30 feet of each other.
5. Graham Cormode and Balachander Krishnamurthy, “Key Differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0,” First Monday 13, no. 6 (June 2, 2008), www.ojphi.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2125.