

Introduction to Social Media Optimization

Setting the Foundation for Building Community

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Social media optimization (SMO) is a programmatic strategy for building and engaging community. By following this series of interrelated principles for creating and sharing content through social networks, the library can become an active voice in a thriving community. With SMO, your library's unique personality emerges on social networks, thereby activating a rich multitude of community interactions.

SMO fundamentally offers a framework for connecting with people. SMO benefits your library and your community of users by establishing a plan for creating and sharing relevant and meaningful content. The primary goal of SMO for libraries is to encourage social media engagement and content sharing through the major social networks that constitute our users' learning and research environments. The primary outcome of SMO is an engaged community of library users. An engaged community can then generate many secondary effects, including increased Web traffic to library pages and increased library resources usage, as well as establishing and reinforcing the library as a trusted member of the community.

As an overall concept overview, it will be helpful to outline what SMO is and what SMO is not. Content is a key element of SMO. 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. While content is a central element of this strategy, SMO is more than just content, and more than

marketing the library. While those aspects are well represented within SMO, the underlying focus is grounded in a sense of community. In this way, SMO is not just about the library pushing out content, but about being active on social networks to the benefit of your community. SMO offers a wide-reaching and flexible structure for connecting with users, listening to the community, and building relationships. SMO encourages the library to develop and demonstrate a genuine interest in the community for the benefit of both the library and the library's users.

This issue of *Library Technology Reports* is intended for beginning and intermediate social media practitioners who wish to implement an effective method for sharing content and building community. Our discussion primarily centers around the social networks of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and we also touch on Tumblr, Pinterest, Google+, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat, and Yik Yak. The terms *social network* and *social media* can be applied both to these specific platforms and to the work of SMO in general. We focus our usage on the terms *social network* and *social networking*, though we also employ the term *social media* in more colloquial settings, especially when communicating directly with our community through these platforms.

The five principles of SMO are closely intertwined and often share complementary concepts. In the chapters of this report, we sequentially present and discuss each principle separately. Given this structure, we wish to emphasize that SMO will most effectively be

Table i.1. Social Media Guide—outline

Guideline	Definition
Community Focus	The target audience for your social media community building
Goal	The overall mission and purpose of your social media activity
Values	The values that you wish to express and present through social media
Activity Focus	The types of activity you wish to cultivate
Tone and Tenor	The style of communication
Posting Frequency	How often you will create and reply to social media posts
Posting Categories	General categories to help shape your social media content creation
Services and Resources	The specific services and resources you highlight and amplify through social media
Ongoing Series	Specific categories to help shape your social media content creation
Posting Personnel	Assigned roles and responsibilities

implemented by combining all five principles together.

This introduction begins by outlining the five principles of SMO, then proceeds to detail a fundamental first step: implementing a sustainable model for building and engaging community through social networks.

Principles of SMO

Principle 1: Create Shareable Content

The principle *create shareable content* begins by identifying and creating Web resources that can be shared via social networks. These might include items from a digital collection, or news articles that are relevant to your community. This principle also includes practical planning for creating and sharing Web content across multiple platforms.

Principle 2: Make Sharing Easy

The principle *make sharing easy* means putting tools in place to encourage sharing content at the point of use. This principle will help reduce barriers to sharing by taking advantage of sharing features built into many major platforms, such as Facebook Open Graph, Twitter Cards, social buttons, and hashtags.

Principle 3: Reward Engagement

The principle *reward engagement* involves actively monitoring community interactions on social media and recognizing and rewarding users who engage with library content. We can listen to users by monitoring community conversation through library mentions, use of hashtags and geotags, and references to information needs. By showing personality and the human side of the library, we can generate goodwill and engagement in our community.

Principle 4: Proactively Share

Libraries can be some of the best promoters of content by *proactively sharing* our resources and services

through social networks. This begins by understanding the interests of the community through methods such as focus groups and surveys, then following through with library-led interactivity and content sharing.

Principle 5: Measure Use and Encourage Reuse

Measuring use recognizes that users want to share, repost, and embed resources into multiple social networks and that libraries can utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to measure the use of content. Libraries can furthermore *encourage reuse* by developing a culture of sharing and reuse in the community. The application of this principle can help create a self-sustaining community of engaged users who regularly use the library and its spaces, services, and collections.

Creating a Plan for Sharing Content and Building Community

Creating a strategic and sustainable plan for sharing content and building community is a foundational first step toward social media optimization.

Since 2012, we at the Montana State University (MSU) Library (in Bozeman, MT) have developed and maintained a cohesive and adaptable plan for building community with SMO. This strategy—which we call our Social Media Guide—has been critical for understanding our community and shaping our content to match.¹ The plan is framed around ten guidelines (table i.1).

We completed each step of the guide and implemented the full set of guidelines for Facebook and Twitter (table i.2).

In order to assess our guide, we developed a research study that examined our content and our community.² Through this study, we found that our content clearly influenced the composition and engagement of our community. To determine this, we analyzed the types of posts that generated

Table i.2. Social Media Guide—Montana State University Library

Guideline	Facebook	Twitter
Community Focus	Undergraduate student population; greater Bozeman community	Undergraduate and graduate students; other MSU units/departments; library and information professionals and organizations
Goal	Increase undergraduate and community awareness and use of library services and resources; cultivate an inviting online personality; create a Facebook page that can serve to extend the library's services and community activity.	Build an online community of library supporters via social media engagement, accomplished through regular interactions with students and others on Twitter; form partnerships through mutual support of other MSU entities via Twitter; engage and connect with other libraries, librarians, library organizations; increase awareness of library services, resources.
Values	Intellectual curiosity; information sharing; undergraduate learning; book reading; use of web-based information-related technology; community building; friendly and accessible library service	Availability to help students; care/concern for followers; professional engagement; scholarly research; specialized library services and resources
Activity Focus	Emphasis on information sharing while remaining responsive to social interaction	Emphasis on information sharing and social interaction
Tone and Tenor	Welcoming, warm, cheerful, energetic	Welcoming, warm, cheerful, energetic
Posting Frequency	1–5 posts per day, with monitoring of subsequent interactions	5–10 posts per week, with regular monitoring of subsequent interactions; no automatic posting; tailor wording of posts for community and 140-character limitations; commenting on other's Twitter posts, Retweeting, and favoriting as appropriate
Posting Categories	Announcements, events	Events, news, and other content that focuses on matters important to students who use the library; original library content
Services and Resources	New books, instructional sessions, periodical highlights	Ask-a-librarian, library databases, institutional repository content, copyright and author services
Ongoing Series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion: faculty and staff recognition, library-related news articles • Community building: One Book One Bozeman, banned books, MSU news and events • Interactive: question posts, library- and university-related quizzes 	Blog posts (ideally 1 per month), "Tip of the Week," Services and Resources: new databases, current databases and guides, ask-a-librarian
Posting Personnel	Members 1 & 2 of Social Media Group	Member 3 of Social Media Group

user interaction on Twitter, as measured by likes, retweets, and replies. We studied our content and community according to two time periods: before we implemented our Social Media Guide and after we implemented our guide.

Before the guide, our social network posts were mostly automated via RSS feeds from our blog. Our social network activity was entirely one way with virtually no interactivity with our followers. With this broadcasting style of communication, our social network content during this period was bland and lacked a personality or a point of view. And in studying our follower community during this pre-guide period, we found that most of our followers were local and regional businesses, and very few of our followers were from our target audience of university students. During this pre-guide period, we ultimately found that our content was drab and that our community was disengaged.

Once we implemented our Social Media Guide, we altered our approach to social network content

creation to include a dynamic and inviting style of communication that was characterized by interactivity and personality. In this post-guide period, we dedicated one librarian specifically to Twitter who regularly created posts that offered a personality-rich point of view targeted at our student population. In this way, we transformed our content and—in turn—transformed our community. We had identified our campus's undergraduate community group as our key members, and so we shaped our content to match their interests by tuning in and listening to their perspectives through social networks. Our hand-crafted posts presented a point of view that was in touch with our community, often responding to our community's interests and values. We also formed an internal library committee—the Social Media Group—to help guide and support our social network activity. The Social Media Group comprises four librarians and one library staff member who meet biweekly to discuss and strategize for social networking.

After we studied our follower community during

this post-guide period, we found that most of our followers were students and that many businesses had chosen to stop following our library's account. In fact, in the pre-guide period, only 12.5 percent of our posts generated an interaction, as measured by like, retweet, or reply. During this period, nearly 50 percent of our followers were businesses, and only about 6 percent of our followers were students. In the post-guide period, 46 percent of our posts generated an interaction, and nearly 30 percent of our followers were students. Given our goal of building an engaged community of student users, we considered these outcomes to be a major success.

In sum, setting a plan for social networking is essential, and our Social Media Guide represents an

effective model that can be adapted for SMO-driven content sharing and community building. A plan of this kind thus represents the initial step of SMO and sets the foundation for successfully implementing the five principles of SMO.

Notes

1. "Social Media Guide," in "Social Media at Montana State University (MSU) Library," Montana State University Library website, accessed May 3, 2016, <http://lib.montana.edu/about/social-media/#guide>.
2. Scott W. H. Young and Doralyn Rossmann, "Building Library Community through Social Media," *Information Technology and Libraries* 34, no. 1 (2015): 20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.6017/ital.v34i1.5625>.