

Effective Use of Social Media: Connecting with Community Leaders, Social Services, and Patrons

An interactive online presence is a key component of any library's outreach strategy. A multi-pronged approach is best to reach the largest cross-section of users—think of it as diversifying your social media portfolio.

The primary social media tools used by libraries are Twitter, Facebook, and blogs, but there are also other options, depending on the nature of your services. You could post photos of library events or new books on Flickr, create a Goodreads account for your library book club, or put a Microsoft Excel tutorial on your YouTube channel.

Connecting directly with influential community members can help them realize the library's community role. LinkedIn, for example, can be a way to move from your immediate advocates into a wider layer of potential advocates.

Go where your desired users are—and keep in mind that they may be moving. The people who faithfully used MySpace six years ago are probably on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ now. If you're operating on multiple platforms, make sure you link them together—you can have your Twitter posts posted to Facebook as well; you can put links to all your social media accounts on the blog and library web site. [HootSuite](#) (free for its basic package) can also help you manage multiple social media accounts from one platform.

Social media can be an excellent, low-cost outreach tool—but it does take time and effort. If you don't have the staff to dedicate to upkeep of social media, consider recruiting one of your interns to do so, or ask your Friends of the Library.

Of course, your legal and community regulation limits may be more readily met in some media than in others. You may wish to formulate a social media policy for the library so employees know what posting guidelines are. (See the link below for a sample policy.)

Three potentially effective social media formats: Blogs, Facebook, Twitter

Blogs

Blogs are web sites that take the form of separate entries—posts—and mimic the journal form. You can use them to easily post web content about your library and its programs. You can get free hosts for your blogs at [Wordpress](#) or [Blogger](#). If possible, however, host your own blog on your own web site. Common content for library blogs includes discussions of new books, events, classes, services, and volunteer opportunities.

Make sure you enable RSS feeds so that users can keep up with updates—and make sure you update often. Frequent updates will keep users coming back to your page, as well as help with your site rankings in most search engines. If your site isn't showing up in Google searches, [submit the web address to their crawler](#).

Facebook

Facebook is used by just over 40% Americans,¹ and 84.3% of libraries use Facebook as an outreach tool.² Some new technologies can help facilitate library Facebook presence; in 2011, SirsiDynix began promoting a Facebook application specifically for libraries that “will let patrons search a library's catalog and place holds, among other features, as well as share and ‘like’ library materials on Facebook, without leaving the social network.”³ The [weRead app](#) is similar to Goodreads, in that it allows a user to share one's bookshelf with friends.

To keep your Facebook page fresh and help insure that people follow it, post regularly—but only when you have something to say. Common content for library Facebook pages includes photos, a fully filled out information section about hours and location, and postings about library events or news.

Articles in library magazines, such as *American Libraries*, are providing reports of and advice on using Facebook. For example, a recent *Library Journal* article noted that at several libraries, such as Multnomah County Library and Cuyahoga County Public Library, have found it effective to host reader's advisory events on their Facebook pages.⁴ Staff members were active in these events, contributing comments and facilitating discussion as well as promoting the event beforehand on both Facebook and Twitter.⁵ Facebook can be used in real-time (as in these RA events), or asynchronously, depending on the patron group you're interacting with and the type of conversation you want to have. For real-time discussions, prior promotion will be key, and should be done both virtually and physically, at your library. Facebook status updates should incorporate questions, not just

¹ King, D. (2011). Facebook for Libraries. *American Libraries*, 42(5/6), 42-45. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

²ALA. Social Media, Libraries, and Web 2.0: How American Libraries are Using New Tools for Public Relations and to Attract New Users — Third Survey November 2010. <http://www.ala.org/news/mediapresscenter/americaslibraries/socialnetworking>.

³ ALA Tech Overview: Focusing on Patrons. (2011). *Library Journal*, 136(13), 16. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

⁴ Rua, R. J. (2011). MISSION CONNECT. *Library Journal*, 136(8), 26. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

⁵ Rua, R. J. (2011). MISSION CONNECT. *Library Journal*, 136(8), 26. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

statements, to incite discussion.⁶ As with all social media, the goal is participation, not just notification.

Twitter

A microblogging site, Twitter is a quick method of outreach, but one that requires conciseness. You can learn the basics at [Twitter 101](#) at Twitter's site, or watch a [how-to video](#) at Howcast. Use tools like [bitly](#) to shorten links in Twitter posts. Familiarize yourself with Twitter conventions like @ (for retweeting) and # (for tagging). Twitter can be used for humor ("Twitterature," for instance, reduces major literary works to tweets. A compilation of these summaries has been compiled into a [book](#) by Alexander Aciman and Emmett Rancin) or calls to action (for example, a library tweeting that they need help with book sale) or just to share information (as by announcing that a library program starts in an hour)

Examples of effective social media use by libraries:

- The Hennepin County Library in Minnetonka, MN utilizes "Bookspace, the library's internal social network that includes a blog, book lists, and other readers' advisory tools, and maintains profiles with thousands of followers on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube."⁷
- ChiliFresh has released Connections, which is now used in Salt Lake County Library Services, and "lets patrons create personalized bookshelves, chat with and send messages to other patrons, and take part in book clubs and forums," and can be integrated with Facebook and Twitter.⁸
- Some great examples of blog use include the [Austin Public Library Blog](#), the [Van Meter Library Blog](#), the [Blue Mountains City Library](#) and the [Ann Arbor District Library](#) blog.
- Some great examples of Facebook pages are those of the Columbus (OH) Metropolitan Library, The British Library, and the Seattle Public Library.
- Libraries actively using Twitter range from large institutions like the [Library of Congress](#) and the [New York Public Library](#) to smaller institutions like the [Homewood Public Library](#) in Alabama.

⁶ King, D. (2011). Facebook for Libraries. *American Libraries*, 42(5/6), 42-45. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

⁷ Social Media Maven. (2011). *Library Journal*, 136(5), 43. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

⁸ ALA Tech Overview: Focusing on Patrons. (2011). *Library Journal*, 136(13), 16. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

For further information and tips, check out the ALA's [Social Media Working Group](#) or the blog [Social Networking Librarian](#). [@SREE's Social Media Guide](#) also offers an excellent compilation of non-library-specific tip sheets and articles.