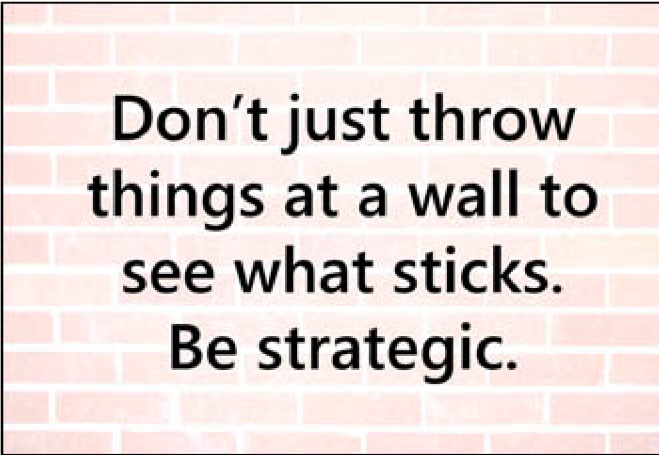


Introduction

This week we move past goals and ROI, and we'll examine what's involved in choosing social media platforms and developing a social media strategy for your library. Just as many libraries never created social media goals or figured the return on investment, many also have never been strategic about determining what will work best for them. Many began by posting lots of kinds of content in numerous places, hoping that something might "work." As we already know from Week 1, this is not an effective use of a library's resources.



**Don't just throw
things at a wall to
see what sticks.
Be strategic.**

Even if your library has great content, you want to thoughtfully consider where and how to post it to make that content as effective as it can be. Your library is much more likely to have a positive ROI if it is consistently using a strategy and not just figuratively throwing stuff at a virtual wall to see what sticks. The first step is to figure out which social media tool is best for your particular need. This will set you well on your way to effective social networking and to increasing the amount of engagement your content receives.

Which Tool?

Which social media platforms are the best fit for your library's goals? It's likely that you are not starting from scratch when choosing which tool(s) to use. Your library may already use Facebook or Instagram, for example, but new tools are emerging constantly, and even the demographics of existing tools can shift. When new tools are hyped by the media, it can be tempting for libraries to start using them, simply based on the anecdotal evidence that "everyone is doing it." This, however, is not a useful way to choose a social media platform. If your library is considering taking on a presence with a new social network or redistributing its existing presence to meet different goals, then there are some criteria to factor into the decision-making process.



Know the Audience

Libraries have a tendency to want to promote *everything to everyone*, believing that *everyone* is the audience for *everything* a library does. Any marketer, digital or not, will tell you that this is a fallacy. Promotion or engagement—of any kind—has to be directed. For example, you wouldn't advertise preschool storytime in the local city business newspaper. Those readers are the wrong demographic for the promotion. It would be far better to take out an ad in a local parents' magazine. The same logic needs to be applied when choosing a social media platform. The problem with social media, however, is that the demographics for particular platforms are not as obvious as the demographics for a business newspaper or parents' magazine.

It can seem that everyone is on XYZ social media site, especially when you read about its amazing growth over the past six months. A quick look at other libraries' sites may reveal a particular social media icon that seems to appear everywhere except on your library's site. If every other library seems to be using XYZ, shouldn't yours, as well? Don't jump on the bandwagon just yet! You don't know the decision-making process that went into another library's use of that social network. Amazing growth doesn't mean that XYZ is useful for your library. Think of it this way: if a new social network captured 90% of the shoe aficionado market in six months, would your library suddenly start posting there?

There is a lot of information out there about which platforms are best for what kind of demographics. Below, you'll find a quick summary to help break down current trends for each of the major networks.

Facebook

Facebook is the largest social network in the U.S. and now the most ubiquitous of all of the current existing networks. However, unless your library is willing to commit some actual money to boosting posts, the reach of your library's content will be almost non-existent, even with users who have opted into receiving it. Not only are users typically inundated with content in their feeds, Facebook has made

significant changes in the past several years. Now, posts that are boosted (paid for) will rank significantly higher and have more reach, while those that are free (especially those from business or organizational pages—not personal profiles) may not be seen at all. While this is a disappointment to many, it should not be a surprise. Once Facebook became responsible to stockholders, it was a matter of time before it began to truly monetize current functionality. Other things to consider about Facebook are:

- It's a great tool for people to see "behind the scenes" at your library (for example, photos of new arrivals waiting to be processed, or photos of staff working in non-public areas, maybe getting ready for an upcoming program).
- Visual content (i.e., non-text) ranks higher in site's news feeds and is more likely to be seen.
- It demands less immediacy than some other platforms, such as Twitter.
- There are 1.57 billion active mobile users.

The article [Top 20 Valuable Facebook Statistics](#) offers many more Facebook statistics.

Twitter

Twitter is a social media platform that is more "of the moment" (synchronous) than other media. If your library uses Twitter you will need to be very consistent about posting and responding, and you will need to use relevancy and personality to engage your audience. To really stand out, your library will have to develop a unique voice and not just promote programs. The library will need to interact with others on Twitter more than might be necessary on other social tools. Twitter is best for "of the moment" news and for ongoing conversations with others. Also, it is often imperative to re-post the same message repeatedly, in order to have it seen. Other elements of Twitter to consider are:

- Best for breaking news and updates
- Very conversational
- Many niche groups; much narrower appeal than many other social media channels
- Struggling with a problem of inadequate growth

This Statista article offers more statistics and facts about Twitter.

Pinterest

Pinterest is primarily a retail phenomenon. While a few libraries have reported success using it, Pinterest primarily drives traffic to retail sites. It is best for visual content that people like to curate (collect). Photos of library events are not good candidates for Pinterest, but photos of new releases, new furniture or equipment, or even a collection of bookmarks found in books that are returned might be. If considering Pinterest, think about :

- Predominantly female audience
- Heavily favors recent content over popular content
- Very fast growing network, especially when compared to Twitter
- Unlike many other social channels, new (female) users continue to use Pinterest, without the high drop-off rate after signing up that is seen with other channels.

Instagram

Instagram is a platform for visual content only, including videos less than 15 seconds. Your library's content will be part of the user's ongoing stream of content and will most likely not receive a lot of comments (but it may get "likes"). Consider:

- Clickable hashtags
- Links in comments are not clickable
- Best for photos that are cute, funny, or interesting
- More than 75% of Instagram's user base is outside of the U.S.
- User base is fairly evenly split between males and females

Get lots more Instagram facts from Search Engine Watch's article [23 Up-to-date Stats and Facts about Instagram You Need to Know](#).

YouTube

YouTube is the second-largest social network in the U.S. It reaches more adults between the ages of 18 and 34 than any cable network. Since Google owns YouTube, YouTube videos rank high in Google search results. If your library is seeking engagement on YouTube, you will need to create unforgettable videos. Videos shouldn't be longer than 1.5 minutes. This is the recommended amount, even for most instructional videos. People's attention spans are often going to be challenged by anything longer, and they will probably leave your video to find something they consider "better" (shorter) if yours takes too long to get to the point. Things to consider are:

- Best for videos that demonstrate library services
- Best for videos up to 90 seconds
- May require higher production values and additional effort and creativity to stand out
- YouTube skews more heavily male: 62% male, 38% female

For more YouTube statistics read [34 Mind Blowing YouTube Facts, Figures and Statistics – 2016](#).

Google+

Google+ is a social media platform that is considered more formal and professional than Facebook. Hashtags on Google+ have much more value than on Facebook. (Facebook hashtags exist, but they have mostly been a failed endeavor.) While Google+ does have some devoted communities, in general it has been considered to be only mildly successful as a social network. Be sure that the demographic you are attempting to appeal to actually has a presence there, as many do not. In considering Google+, think about:

- Linking to content on your library's website for best results
- How being part of Google's own network helps drive traffic
- Considered best for business-to-business (B2B) promotion and bloggers
- Majority of users are male

For more Google+ statistics, read [Google Plus Demographics & Statistics](#). For more information on choosing a social platform, see [The Zero BS Guide to Choosing a Social Media Platform for Business](#).

Don't Forget the Goals

When you choose a social media platform, it can be easy to have thoughts such as, "Hey, Pinterest would be great for showcasing our knitting group's projects!" Before you proceed, however, ask yourself, "Is promoting the work of your library's knitting group one of your social media goals?" If not, then you are essentially looking for a problem for your solution.

While you need to know your audience, it's even more important to know your goals. It doesn't really matter if photos of finished knitting projects get a ton of likes on Facebook. If it doesn't do anything to connect with the genealogists your library was targeting, then it is wasted effort. Don't get caught up in the numbers if they are not helping you meet your goals.

Picking the appropriate social media platform means focusing on what your library is really trying to achieve. No matter how much hype a network gets, it's useless to your library if it doesn't do something to help it achieve an end goal. Once you set a goal, then you can compare that goal to the best uses and demographics for each tool. If the local genealogists are on Facebook, then that is where you need to be. If you're trying to connect with your local teen community, you may find that your best bet is actually Tumblr or Instagram. It is essential to match the goal to the social media network and to the audience.

A lot of what you just read addressed some very broad guidelines for various social media networks. For the most part, these hold true (at least for now!), but there are always exceptions. For example, when I delivered training for librarians in California several years ago, the general teen population in the U.S. was heavily involved with Facebook and considered MySpace dead and irrelevant. When I began conversing with California librarians, however, they told me that many Latino teens in their communities were connecting on MySpace. As I don't live in a state with significant Latino populations, the popularity of MySpace was a surprise to me. It taught me never to assume that national trends necessarily apply everywhere.

You need to find out where your target audience is online. You can certainly start with national demographic data, but you'll probably need to dig deeper. If you're looking for genealogists, start by figuring the average age of the genealogists with whom your library usually works. Then, figure out which tools are strongest for that demographic. Are they mostly male or female? Gender, too, will factor in. Once you have this information, you can begin searching that network for relevant groups or accounts that mention genealogy or related topics in your area.

One of the best ways to find out where your audience is connected, however, is to ask! If you know of a local group for genealogists, try directly asking the members about the social media tools they use. After all, there's nothing as good as getting the answer right from the horse's mouth. Interviewing people directly can also be an opportunity to connect those members directly to the genealogy-related services

your library may be trying to promote. Let them know that your library would like to use social media to help keep them updated about new genealogy materials, services, and programs. Chances are the group will be happy to let you know where they congregate online.

Time to Get a Strategy

So, your library has goals, and you know which platform(s) you plan to use to achieve those goals. Now it's time to figure out how to meet those goals.

Start by Listening

Imagine you're going to a party and you really don't know anyone there. Would you just jump into the middle of the room and start yelling random bits of information? If you're like most of us, probably not, yet that's what many libraries have done. They show up on a particular network and just start promoting things, hoping it will somehow be of interest to those around them.



Let's go back to the party example. What are people at the party talking about? This is where you want to start: join an existing conversation and then find useful things to say about the topic of that conversation. It would be rude to interrupt and start talking about nothing but yourself. Find out what people are interested in, and then figure out ways to offer interesting content around those topics. Listening is a huge part of effective social media usage. Remember, the least interesting people at the party are those who only talk about themselves. Listening gives your library a chance to better understand the particular culture of a network and to find opportunities to interject itself in useful ways. For example, if your genealogy audience is discussing how expensive it is to use Ancestry.com, this would be a prime opportunity to mention that your library provides access for free inside your building.

Listening to your online communities is critical. If someone asks your library a question or makes a comment online, first you need to know that that has actually happened and second, you need to be prepared to respond (quickly). Otherwise, it's much like ignoring someone who is standing right in front of you and talking to you at a party. People expect a timely response when they directly address your library online.

It is likely that there are also relevant online conversations that aren't being directly addressed to the library. How do you find them? One way is to set up automated notifications through Google Alerts. Google Alerts send you email updates of the latest relevant Google results (web, news, etc.) based on searches you save. Set notifications up for various keywords that may be relevant to the audience you're targeting with social media. In the genealogist example, you could set up alerts for certain words such as "ancestry," "heritage," or even words related to community landmarks or local families. You may get a fair number of results that aren't useful, but it's better to spread the net wide and not miss potential conversation opportunities.

Editorial Calendars

I will be the first to admit that this is one of the most challenging aspects of social media. Whether I blog, tweet, or post to Facebook, I'm constantly struggling with the question, "What do I post today?" Sometimes a useful post or article handily presents itself and I share it. On Twitter, it's usually not

difficult to find an existing conversation and add something. However, when it comes to creating original content, it can be difficult to think of what to post, especially when you sit down in front of the computer knowing that you should probably post something.



A consistent posting schedule is critical for effective social media usage, yet just posting stuff for the sake of posting isn't going to help the library achieve any goals. This is where a content strategy comes in. We have already discussed the importance of targeting content to a particular audience, on an appropriate platform. Now, it's time to fine-tune that so that you can post quality content routinely.

What you really need is an editorial calendar. Magazines have used these for decades, to plan which articles will be posted in which issue. According to Pam Moore, the CEO and founder of Marketing Nutz[1] it can:

- Help you focus on needs of your audience
- Help you inspire and connect with your audience
- Help you provide value to your audience
- Force you to think further than today and tomorrow
- Help you integrate across various social media platforms by creating a consistent message
- Allow you to leverage content across various social media platforms to reach different audiences, increasing your ROI by creating content once and using it many times
- Streamline resources, to prevent duplication of effort and to make sure everyone knows which topics should be receiving the current efforts
- Drive internal teamwork by allowing everyone involved to know the goals ahead of time and allowing them to focus on those collectively
- Make it easier to brainstorm ideas, since thinking up innovative posts is likely to be simpler if a topic is clearly spelled out
- Create a consistent method for generating new content
- Help set expectations with your audience (for instance, if your library always posts to Facebook on Tuesday, patrons will expect and look for that)
- Help you create loyal, brand evangelists

The editorial calendar your library uses can range from very simple to more complex. It could simply be a list of what's going to be posted on which network when. It could also include items such as which audience is being targeted, the actual post title, and which goal the content is geared towards achieving. To get you started, see the Supplementary Material page for some template options.

Conclusion

The reality is that your library simply cannot be everything to everyone online at once. When choosing a platform, think goals first, then audience. As tempting as it might be to jump on a network that seems popular, that network may have nothing to do with what your library is really trying to achieve in social media.

Those who succeed in social media don't do so accidentally; planning is critical. Listen first, and get a feel for the online community (network) on which your library plans to engage.

Then plan accordingly. An editorial calendar is a library's best bet for building a consistent voice and presence on any given platform. While it might seem like a lot of work up front (it is!), the effort is well worth it in the end. Next week we will be looking at the actual writing of social media posts and what works (and what doesn't).



This week's assignment options provide you with an opportunity to apply the concepts and tools from this week's reading to your own library. You can:

- Choose the two social platforms that are the best fit for your library's social media goals, and discuss why they are the best fit
- Create an editorial calendar for at least one month

What to Do Next: Proceed to the Week 2 Assignment Options.