

# Using Social Media to Promote Your Library's Services

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## Abstract

Many people use social media to communicate with friends and colleagues and to share information. For example, Facebook and Twitter for chatting and keeping up to date; Flickr for sharing photographs; Google Maps for locations, directions and data mashups; Slideshare for exchanging presentations; YouTube, iTunesU and Vimeo for “how to” demonstrations and promotional videos. And all of this information can be automatically transferred and re-published on multiple platforms and applications. Furthermore Google, Yahoo and Bing now include social media in their search results. It makes sense, therefore, to ensure that you are using all of the options available to you to promote and encourage the use of your services. This presentation will suggest ways in which you can re-use material you may already have in order to reach more of your potential users. It will also look at devising strategies for social media, the technical and human resource issues that must be considered, and the skills needed to implement a social media strategy.

## Why you should be using social media

Social media, personal and professional networks have become an integral part of communicating and “publishing” electronic information and it is where an increasing number of people ask questions and share information. Google, Yahoo and Bing now include social media in their top results regardless of whether your search is on a current news topic, a scientific query, a person or an organisation. The top 20 results might include mentions on Twitter, a presentation on Slideshare, blog postings, videos, photos, a Facebook page and news stories. To ensure maximum exposure of their services, skills and expertise it makes sense, therefore, for an organisation to use every opportunity to get listed as many times as possible in as many search tools as possible, and in as many networks as possible. Your homepage is no longer the main page of your web site, it is the page that is first in Google's results list when a person searches on you or your organisation. It could be your Twitter profile, your Blog profile or a YouTube video. Social media also offers new opportunities and channels to communicate with users, respond to both positive and negative feedback, and to market the organisations services.

Once your information and content – often referred to as “stuff” – has been generated and uploaded to a social media site, there are numerous tools that enable you and your users to automatically re-publish that stuff on other sites and services.

## Getting started with Social media

Establishing a presence in social media requires thought, planning and **time** so it is important to develop a strategy before you start. This will inevitably change as you experiment, and user feedback and viewing statistics will determine whether or not your efforts have been worthwhile or if you need to adopt a different approach.

The easiest way to start is to look at what stuff you already have. Can it be quickly and easily adapted and loaded onto social media sites?

PowerPoint presentations produced for conferences, training events or outlining the features of a new online service for example can be loaded onto presentation sharing sites such as Slideshare.net, authorSTREAM.com, Slideboom.com. Previews or thumbnails of a single presentation or a collection of presentations – for example Slideshare’s “Presentation Pack” - can then be embedded on any web or blog page using code provided by the presentation sharing site. Similarly applications within Facebook and LinkedIn can be used to display and automatically update presentations as you add them to Slideshare.

Make photos of the library or information centre, events or staff available via Flickr.com or Google’s Picasa. Then whenever a journalist, for example, needs a photo to illustrate a story you can point them at your photostream.

You might have videos of conference presentations, guided tour of services or slidecasts of search techniques with voice-overs. Load them onto YouTube.com or Vimeo.com. (Note that slidecasts can now be put onto Slideshare.net). As with presentation sharing services, you can embed previews into your web pages and social media sites.

Instead of a static web page consider a blog for your newsletter, alerts and current awareness services. Blogs are a very quick way to publish news, and postings are picked up by the search engines within seconds of them appearing on the web. Blogs automatically generate RSS feeds to which your users can subscribe for the latest headlines, or the feeds can be converted into HTML code by a service such as Feedburner.com and then displayed on other web sites and blogs.

If you are not allowed to do any of the above on your official web page then set up a blog on Blogger or Wordpress, or create a start page such as Netvibes.com

But first define your strategy.

## **Your social media strategy**

You first of all need to decide what you want to achieve with social media:

- Make your content and information more easily accessible?
- Promote your organisation’s or department’s skills and expertise?
- Additional routes for communicating with your users?
- Reach a wider audience?
- All of the above?

## **Resources**

Most social media applications and web sites are free of charge or very low cost but you will still have to allocate time and people to it.

- How much time will it take to identify relevant content or activity and add it to a social media sit? Who is going to be responsible for each activity?
- How much time and effort will it take to manage, maintain and monitor? Although much of the ‘re-publishing’ of your stuff can be automated you will still have to check that everything continues to work smoothly and monitor usage, accesses and downloads. Someone will also have to be responsible for managing and replying to feedback and comments from users and visitors.
- Training. It is often claimed that social media applications are intuitive but staff will need time to familiarise themselves with features and may need training before they can make the most of the service and its advanced functions.

- Prepare guidelines for your staff summarising the features of the applications, 'etiquette' for each of the social media, and procedures for dealing with comments both negative and positive.

### **Draw a map of where and how the information is flowing**

It is very easy to automatically redirect stuff to a wide range of social media applications but if you are not careful you could find that you have set up an infinite loop! Draw a map of how the information goes. A rough sketch will do but make sure that you note what is used for each stage of the process, for example Twitterfeed to send your blog RSS feed to your twitterstream, and make sure you record user names and passwords. This serves both as a reminder to you and as documentation that can be passed on to others who are subsequently assigned to the project. For example:

- 1) PowerPoint presentation loaded onto Slideshare.net
- 2) Code obtained from Slideshare is included web site home and training pages so that the presentation is embedded on those pages
- 3) All Slideshare presentations are automatically added to the Facebook page using the Facebook Slideshare application
- 4) New presentations are announced on the blog. The RSS feed is automatically sent to Twitter using Twitterfeed and automatically included in Friendfeed (Flickr and other RSS feed are included in Friendfeed), which in turn is displayed on the Facebook page

### **Tagging and descriptions**

Make sure you tag your content and add descriptions so that people and the search engines can easily find your content.

### **Decide on copyright licenses**

Decide on the copyright license for your stuff. 'All rights reserved' means that people will have to contact you if they wish to download it or circulate within your organisation. Of course, people may still use download and re-use your content without your permission. Creative Commons licenses (<http://www.creativecommons.org/>) are widely used in social media. This is a series of licenses with terms and conditions ranging from Public Domain to Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives. The former - Public Domain - allows the user to do whatever they want with your content including commercial applications: the latter is the most restrictive allowing redistribution as long as users mention you and link back to you, do not change the content in any way or use it commercially. The Creative Commons web site describes the whole range of licenses and can help you decide on the most appropriate one.

### **Decide how you want to share your stuff**

Do you want to allow others to download and embed your material? Presentation sharing services, for example, have options for allowing or blocking the download of the original PowerPoint, and whether or not others can embed your presentation in their own pages and social media.

### **Too much and too confusing?**

Are you suddenly finding the terminology, tools and processes too much and confusing? Then concentrate on just one thing to start with: photo, presentations, videos, or a blog for example. What is going to appeal most to your existing and potential users? What do you

already have or do that can be used in a social media context? Once you are comfortable with it you will find that ideas of how it can be extended into other social media will come.

## Monitor usage

You will, at some point, want to check what impact your social media activity is having either out of curiosity or to determine if your strategy is working. Keeping track of the number hits, views, embeds and downloads of your stuff is a black art. Absolute and totally accurate numbers are impossible to obtain but you can get some indication and general trends of usage. Are you receiving more enquiries? Are the number of visitors to pages or services mentioned in tweets, blog postings etc increasing? Visitor statistics for your main web pages page or blog should give you an idea of the number of page views, where your visitors have come from and how they found you.

Some blog hosting services, for example Wordpress.com, provide basic statistics that will at least give you an idea of what is popular and generating the most interest. If the blogging service does not offer visitor statistics or you want a “second opinion” Google Analytics code can be inserted into blogs as can Sitemeter.com. Many other social media applications also give basic information on views and use. Slideshare provides number of views, number of “embeds”, number of downloads and who has “favorited” or shared a specific presentation. On YouTube, use the Views option to see an annotated graph of views over time. The annotations will tell you how many views the video has had after its “first referral from Twitter”, its first “referral from Facebook” and from embeds in other web sites and blogs.

Want to know who is referring to your stuff on Twitter? Then use Backtweets (<http://www.backtweets.com/>). Simply type in your URL and see who has tweeted and what they have said.

## Skills required

What key skills would be listed in a job description for setting up and managing social media?

- Strategy development and project management skills. This project never ends.
- Ability to delegate. You can't do everything
- Imagination. Let yours run riot!
- Be bold and prepared to experiment
- Ruthlessness. Be prepared to drop stuff that does not work
- And “no previous experience necessary”. When it comes to social media we are all continually learning and previous experience is no guarantee that we'll get it right for the next new ‘thing’ that arrives on the scene.

## And finally...

I recently gained a new client who told me that when I was shortlisted for their project they naturally carried out a search on me. Not surprisingly the results included my web site, Facebook profile, Twitter profile and recent tweets, blog profile and postings, Slideshare presentations, and also some images from my Flickr photostream. One photo in particular attracted their attention: Slavek and Tomik, Prague Zoo 2008 <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rbainfo/2536686370/in/set-72157618994314978/>. It has nothing to do with information management or libraries, and nothing to do with the client's project but it aroused the client's curiosity. Would I have won the project without that photo on a social media site? Who knows but it got me to the top of the list. That is the wonder of social media: you never know where it may lead or what opportunities may arise from it.