

Online Learning Module for Social Media

What is social media?

Social media is a broad term used to describe a range of computer based websites or mobile applications which allow users to create and share content online, enabling the sharing of ideas and information within a virtual community. In short, social media is a highly effective communication tool for you to connect with your users and the rest of the world.

Social media for libraries

There are several social media platforms available and new ones are emerging all the time but the three biggest platforms at the present time and the most useful for libraries to use are Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. All three of these allow the posting of information, images and videos which go directly to the pages or timelines of your followers along with the posts from everyone else they follow. From there they can share your posts with their followers, who can share them with their followers, and so on. In this way something you post on social media can spread rapidly from you to your followers, to their followers, and so on. Therefore the more followers you have the quicker and further your posts will spread.

Why social media is important to libraries

Libraries have existed for thousands of years while widespread social media has only emerged in the last decade, so why does it matter to libraries?

Libraries have changed massively in the last decade and what people need and expect from them has also changed. They are no longer just a source of books; libraries have become a support network for people to connect with the digital world in different ways by providing computer access and WiFi, access to digital media and by providing help and advice for people to access information online. As the internet has grown the world has become smaller and more connected; social media has created a fast, free and effective way for people to reach out to the rest of the world. Libraries have become a trusted intermediary between the general public and a whole range of other people and organisations; authors, publishers, public services, local authorities. As a library, social media allows you to engage directly with your users and

your local community and it allows you to spread information in seconds, from inside your library to millions of people around the world.

How social media can benefit a library

Community building

Social media is a great way for libraries to communicate and engage with their existing users but also with the community around them including the people who never set foot through their door. It allows a library to engage with the wider world, to increase public awareness of services and facilities and it helps to make a library to be a modern, important and relevant part of the local community.

Breaking the stereotype

Libraries still suffer from the outdated reputation of being staid, stuffy and even intimidating establishments and people who have not been in a library for many years are often surprised to find how much they have changed – but how can you show that to people if they won't even step through the door? Social media is the perfect tool for changing how people think about libraries. By showing the outside world that they are open, friendly, interesting and accessible places with a wide range of modern services on offer and a good sense of humour, social media can help libraries appear more human and make people realise that libraries are a place for them.

Advocacy

Social media can make a small library just as important and as influential as a big one. Your library might be small but if you build up a large social media following you can be relevant and even influential. This can have many advantages – people will look to you for information, publishers are more likely to interact with you and authors or other high profile people are much more likely to come and visit. It doesn't matter that you're small – if you have a healthy social media following people will be much more interested in what you have to say. At Orkney Library their Twitter following in particular has attracted many authors to visit them including J.K. Rowling, Ann Cleeves and Alexander McCall Smith and their high profile led to them being interviewed by Simon Mayo on Radio 2 during Libraries Week. It also led to the library working

alongside the publisher Pan MacMillan to establish the Hurricane Book Club which involves a physical book discussion in the library while other people participate live through social media from wherever they are in the world. It has been a huge success and has since been expanded to include several other libraries.

It is a great way to boost numbers in all sorts of ways - people who follow you on social media are more likely to come and visit you. If they live locally they might join up and start borrowing books, if not they will at least come and see your library, post photographs on their own social media pages, engage with your posts online, purchase a souvenir if you sell library merchandise or even buy a book from your book sale. It is also a great way of driving more people to your website by placing links within your social media posts.

Responsive

It is by far the quickest and easiest way to engage with your customers, faster and more straightforward than a phone call or an email. If someone wants to know when you close/what time an event starts/whether you have the latest book in a series or any of the other hundreds of questions that library staff face on a daily basis then social media is the easiest way for your customers to communicate with you and for you to reply. They can ask a question in a few taps of a screen or clicks of a mouse AND there is the added benefit that the question and your reply can be posted publicly to help anyone else with the same questions. You can keep the duties of monitoring accounts and replying to working hours only or you might be able to respond outside of working hours depending on the flexibility of staff and resources. If several staff are involved they could take turns monitoring the account or you could simply state on your page the hours when a response can be expected and stick to this. Find a system that works for your library and staff.

Keeping up to date

It helps to keep you informed. By being on social media you will be exposed to what is happening in the world and what other people, organisations and libraries are getting up to and talking about. It helps you spot trending topics, news stories, new book launches, prize winners and other useful information that could easily be missed if you rely on spotting it through traditional news

channels. You'll go online and suddenly find out that it's International Cat Day, Talk Like A Pirate Day, Haiku Poetry Day or British Sandwich Week. By being part of the social media community you open your library up to the rest of the world – the world can find you and you have a way of reaching them.

Social media connects you with the right people. You are a library so the people who follow you will, in the beginning anyway, be your library users, other libraries, book bloggers, authors and publishers. If you follow them they will follow you back and so will some of their followers. Therefore you will start to build up a network connecting you with many similar minded people. They will learn from you and you will learn from them and your own virtual community will begin to grow with your library at the heart of it.

Some key tips on how to develop an audience

When you first start out you should find interesting and relevant accounts to follow. For libraries this might be authors, publishers, bookshops and, of course, other libraries but also try to follow local organisations and businesses who will share a common interest or a local community with you. Local businesses will have the same potential customer base as you do so by following each other you will both benefit by sharing your followers. Once you've followed these people look to see who they follow and who follows them or who they engage with. People will start to follow you back and your profile will begin to rise.

Pay attention to what the people you follow are talking about and join in the conversation or create your own posts on the same subject. Your followers will see it and respond. Pay attention to what subjects are trending and find ways to post relevant things so that you can jump onto those hashtags. A hashtag is a tag added to a social media post which helps to describe the theme or content of the post. They are usually a word or term typed after a # or hash symbol and they allow users to find all posts on a particular topic by searching the hashtag. For example a library related post might include the hashtag #libraries or #books or both, a post featuring a cat might have the hashtag #cats or #pets and so on. The most used hashtags at any given time are considered to be 'trending' and are listed so that everyone can see what people are talking about at that moment. It might be a news event or

something that's just been shown on TV. People tend to look at what is trending so if you have posted something on a subject that is already trending your post will do a lot better than normal. When your following gets bigger you can even MAKE something trend.

Try to post regularly but be careful not to post too much. You should try to post every day (or at least every working day) so that you remain active and your followers know you're still there - nobody will bother to follow an account that hasn't tweeted for weeks or months or that only posts occasionally. Having said that, one or two good posts a day is plenty unless there is something special happening or a worthwhile reason to post more than that. Posting too often can become irritating if there is no reason for it and if people find your posts clogging up their timeline they might be tempted to unfollow you. There are online tools available that can be used to schedule posts to go online exactly when you want so you don't need to cram all your posts into a working day then go quiet for a few days over the weekend. You can schedule posts to go online when you're not there or you can set up posts to be automatically replicated across multiple social media platforms; for example, if you put a post on Twitter you can set it up to automatically post to Facebook or vice versa.

Post with a purpose. It might be inform your followers about a library event or a temporary closure or it might be something funny to tie in with whatever is trending that day or to show off a particular display or part of your service – but try to make sure that every post is doing something. That will help to keep the quality of your posts high. Don't just post something for the sake of it – it will nearly always fall flat. Consider that every post might be the first thing a new potential follower sees.

Use visuals – this is very important. Your posts will stand out much better when accompanied with a photo or a group of photos, a video or a GIF. Always try to take a picture of the thing you are talking about or if your post is just for information then use something generic like a view of the library or something else interesting. Avoid taking pictures that feature members of the public and especially children. If it is necessary to include people in a photograph, for example to show an event or activity within the library then make sure to get their permission before taking the photo. Keep looking around and keep your

camera handy to capture things of interest for later use. This is much easier if you manage your social media page from a smartphone or tablet. Visuals can elevate a post from a paragraph of text to something quite striking that stands out in a timeline and makes people stop as they scroll through their page. All social media platforms will allow you to attach photos and perform some simple editing such as cropping or applying filters. It is quick and easy to make a normal photo look great and an ordinary post look impressive.

Try to be good. Not every tweet can be mind-blowingly interesting or utterly hilarious but try to at least make them entertaining on some level. Anyone who spends time on social media will have a timeline full of the serious stuff so aim to put something interesting, pleasant or amusing in their day.

Remember – funny doesn't have to be side-splitting. Don't be put off trying to be amusing by thinking you're not funny enough. A deliberately terrible pun, something quirky or esoteric or even something a bit silly can raise a smile and stand out. Tongue in cheek is often the way to go.

Use what you've got – look around and find what makes you different from everywhere else. It could be what you have or where you are, your building, your town, your local area. If you post about local things in the right way you'll still make them interesting to a wider audience and you'll make people want to come and see the place for themselves.

Develop your own voice and style. Try to find a tone or a way of writing that becomes your own. Then your posts will always sound like you and your audience will start to respond because they will begin to feel like they know you and recognise your style. If you have more than one person contributing to an account then try to maintain a similar style throughout. You might have several different people or departments with content that requires posting but try to ensure that they don't all end up posting at the same time on the same account. The easiest way is to have someone coordinating all of the content. Different posts will have different aims; some might be purely informative or purely for entertainment purposes but try to make it all feel as though it is coming from the same place. Aim to sound friendly and conversational, posting as though you were speaking to someone in front of you rather than announcing things. Also try to find things to post about that interest you. Don't

worry if everyone else is posting about something you don't know anything about. Leave it to them – if you try to copy them it will sound false. Share their posts and join in with the discussion but also try to create your own original content. It will be the thing that people really notice. Remember – you are the only library like you so show it off.

Try to find a few regular things that you can post every week, maybe on the same day or at the same time – it will create a pattern that your followers will begin to expect or look forward to. For example at Orkney Library they have regular tweets like #NicheBookMonday, #BookyMcBookface tweets about their Mobile Library and #Bookface on a Thursday night. Having regularly recurring posts also gives you a basis for creating content that you can plan ahead for. This is useful if you are short of time or if you are leaving someone else to post things when you are not there. If they are related to a particular hashtag then be sure to use it every time – if no hashtag exists then make one up and it will be your own thing; for Orkney Library #NicheBookMonday was their own invention and has proven popular with their followers. Create your own hashtags and turn them into regular features. It might start off slowly but eventually it will become a recurring theme and when people click on the hashtag they will see all your previous posts too. This helps old posts to keep recirculating as your following grows.

Insert activity here that gets learners to reflect on all of the above and apply it in their workplace e.g. :

Who do you want to connect with?

Which Social Media channel will you use?

What's your purpose?

Who will be speaking on it?

What's the tone/voice?

Good Practice

When people comment on your posts or join in a discussion then try to reply. If they praise you then respond and thank them. If people follow you then consider following them back, particularly other relevant organisations,

authors or verified accounts. You shouldn't automatically follow back everybody that follows you but at least consider them, especially in the beginning - look at their bio, see what kind of things they post and follow them back if you think it will be worthwhile to connect with them.

If you're posting about something that is trending then remember to include the relevant hashtag. That will ensure your post is included with all the other posts on the trending subject.

If you are mentioning an author or organisation in your post then check to see if they are on social media and tag them in the post. This will make sure they see the post and they might like or share it on their own page – there is every chance they will have a lot more followers than you do.

Share other people's posts but don't copy. You can retweet post by someone else and add your own comments but it is also important to create your own content as much as possible.

When tagging people try to make sure you are tagging the right account. There are a lot of people with the same name and authors often have fan pages or even fake accounts that have been set up in their name so make sure you tag the correct one. A few quick checks of the account will usually tell you if it is the real person. For example, you can check if the account has a verified badge which means the social media site has checked and confirmed that it is the authentic account for the person or brand it represents. You can also usually get a reasonable idea by looking at the sort of things they post or by checking how many followers the account has – genuine pages are more likely to have a larger following than fan pages or parody accounts. If all else fails you can simply look up their website and find their social media handles listed there.

Always check over a post before you hit send. Check the spelling, check the grammar, and make sure the information is correct or that autocorrect has not changed something without you noticing. Some platforms allow editing after posting and some don't. The only option if you can't edit is to delete and repost by which time the momentum might have gone and people will already have noticed the mistake. Try to post it right first time.

Pitfalls and things to avoid

Conversations on social media can become fast-paced, often with you feeling like you have to reply to several people at once. Don't get in a panic. Take the time you need to reply and make sure what you say is what you want to say. If someone makes a comment or a complaint that you want to respond to but don't feel like it is appropriate to continue the discussion on social media then you can use the private or direct message function or else encourage them to get in touch via email.

Being funny can often carry the risk of causing offence - over time you'll develop a sense of what is okay to post but try to stay away from using terminology that could cause offense or using humour about sensitive subjects. Remember that what seems okay with you might not be okay with some of your followers so think about how other people might receive things. You want them with you – not against you.

Appearing to be a bit cheeky or mischievous is okay, being offensive is not. Innuendo has limits so try not to go too far. You don't have to avoid politics but don't be political – it's not what you're here for. You're not trying to push an agenda so it's important to remain neutral and avoid contentious issues - if you take a side you'll always be going against one half of any debate.

Just because something is trending doesn't always mean you should try and join in with a funny quip or a clever remark. Things trend for bad reasons as well as good and some subjects are best avoided. Keep things light.

Unfortunately you may occasionally come up against trolling which is when somebody replies to one of your posts with something unpleasant, controversial, aggressive, inflammatory or even just needlessly critical. It is almost always done to provoke a reaction and the best advice is to completely ignore it. If a troll replies to one of your posts it is unlikely that any of your followers will even spot it but by replying to it you only risk giving it more attention because your reply will be visible to your followers. Ignore it and it usually goes not further. If you want to make sure you don't see anything other posts from a particular account you can always unfollow, block or mute them.

If a post begins to go wrong – someone takes offense at something or you think something has been taken the wrong way or gone too far – take it down. Posts can be deleted and it's always better to take something down than risk

causing controversy or further offence. Remember a social media post can spread very far and very quickly It is worth noting that if you do delete a post it will remove it from your page and from the pages of anyone who follows you or who has shared it. However if someone screen captures your post before you remove it then it is possible they could repost it themselves and you would have no control over it. This means that even deleting a post does not always guarantee that it has gone for good.

Key points to remember

Follow people and make good connections

Post with a purpose

Add images or videos to add interest

Use what's around you because it's what makes you different

Always respond to questions, comments and praise

Be active. Post regularly. Like and share other people's posts

Tag relevant people

Use hashtags when possible. Make up your own if necessary

Create your own style and use recurring themes

Check over every post before you hit send.

Avoid controversy

Keep it light

And most of all...

Have fun with it. It's an amazing way of communicating your passion for books and libraries directly to others who share the same passion while also connecting with authors, publishers and other local businesses and organisations. If you keep them engaged they'll stick with you, maybe even come to visit, and your library will continue to grow and remain relevant in the 21st century.