Library Social Media Best Practices

Updated 2019

PaLA Pennsylvania Library Association

Developed by the 2018 PALS Social Media Team
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This guide is designed to help libraries and those who work in them think strategically about their social media presence. Whether you currently have social media accounts and are looking to improve them, or are starting new accounts, the best practices compiled here will help you.

Read through these documents and consider your library, the community you serve, and the information you are hoping to share. Once you have reviewed the best practices and chosen the platforms that will work best for your library, review the Social Media Policy Template for your library type on PALibraries.org. These templates are available in Word format so that you may download and easily edit the template to meet the needs of your library.

This guide is not a substitute for legal advice and does not pre-empt any existing policies set by your library administration or other oversight group. Discuss any proposed changes to your library's social media policy and/or presence with all appropriate stakeholders prior to implementing changes.
TOP 10
BEST PRACTICES FOR
LIBRARY SOCIAL MEDIA

Create a policy for your library

Create a thorough policy for your library’s social media activities. Policy should include guidelines for platform use, content creation, purpose, etc. See PaLA’s social media policy template for more information.

Respect Patron Privacy

Avoid posting confidential information, such as details about patrons, on social media platforms.

Be Mindful of Copyright Laws

When posting pictures, take advantage of the numerous public domain images online. See Tools for Creating and Managing Social Media Content for content creation tools. For more information on copyright: http://www.ala.org/advocacy/copyright

Connect Back to Your Library

Connect your social media presence back to your website and library resources such as catalog, eResources, and digital collections.

Be Purposeful in Your Posts

Update posts on a regular basis, but avoid sending posts out all at once. Spread out posts over several hours or days. Consider using a social media manager or in-platform scheduling tools.
Create a Consistent Social Media Presence

Use consistent usernames and handles across platforms. This creates a cohesive online presence, and helps avoid confusion between personal and professional online presence. Also consider having a designated library device for posting.

Keep Posts Unbiased and Factual

Posts should entertain, inform, and capture your audience’s attention while relating back to the library’s or organization’s mission (i.e. no political endorsements).

Create Accessible Social Media Content

Create posts with accessibility for all audiences in mind (i.e. closed caption videos, alternative text for pictures):
https://accessibility.umn.edu/tutorials/accessible-social-media

Follow Social Media Etiquette

Communicating on social media can be tricky, and can create misunderstandings or have unintended consequences. Understanding and clarifying appropriate social media etiquette can minimize those outcomes: https://www.cybersmile.org/advice-help/category/examples-of-good-netiquette

Platform Maintenance

Stay informed of changes on social media platforms. Most platforms have a news page, so incorporate checking them into your workflow.
Questions to Answer
When Developing Your Library Social Media Policy

Who are you?
What is your organization?
Are there any subdivisions or affiliated groups?
Who has permission/authority to post?

Who is your audience?
Different age groups and interest groups use different social media platforms.
Who are you trying to reach most often?
What do they do?
How often do they visit your library?
How do they access the internet/social media?

What are you doing?
Why do you need a social media presence?
What will you do with it?
What are your short-term and long-term goals around your social media development and engagement?

How much time do you have?
Social media management, when done well, takes time.
How much time do you have each day or week to devote to creating content and interacting with users?
Do you need to divide these responsibilities among several people?

What platform will you use?
See *Types of Social Media* and locate at least one platform that would be a good fit for your time, content, and audience.
How many posts will you create per day or week?
Will you use a management platform to schedule?
More Questions to Answer When Developing Your Library Social Media Policy

What will you share?
Do you have a content calendar?
Can you create one?
Are there important events, resources, deadlines, etc that you want to promote? Put them on your calendar.

How will you catch attention?
Basic text posts will not catch attention.
How do you plan to create eye-catching content?
What software or tools will you use to do it?

How will you keep it safe?
How will you handle offensive content or users?

Who do you admire?
What are some libraries or other organizations who are doing interesting things on social media?
What can you learn from them and how will you apply it in your posts?

What’s your back-up plan?
How will you keep account passwords secure?
How will you allow for continuity if someone leaves?
Who will update the account if you aren’t able to?
What are some go-to places for quick content?
Facebook
(facebook.com)
A platform that allows users to create in-depth personal profiles and easily share all kinds of media, including photos, videos, and links to outside websites.
Number of users: 2.27 billion monthly active users
Average age of users: 25-34 year-olds are the largest cohort on Facebook. Around 81% of those ages 18 to 29 use Facebook in the U.S.
Recommended number of posts per day/week: 1-2 posts per day; 5-10 posts per week
Content type: Text, video, images, user-created or shared from other sites
Time level required for content creation: Minimal to High. From basic text updates and “shares” to creating images and other content. Flexible for your time and needs.
Potential Library Uses/Feasibility for your library: User engagement, Outreach, Events

Instagram
(instagram.com)
Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social networking service owned by Facebook, Inc.
Number of users: 800 million users
Average age of users: 71% of Americans aged 18 to 24 now use Instagram. More than 80% of these users check the platform daily, and 55% visit multiple times a day.
Recommended number of posts per day/week: 1 post per day; 5-7 posts per week. Post consistently to stay on top of Instagram’s algorithm. Disruptions in posting frequency can hinder how often your content is seen.
Content type: User-created images and short videos
Time level required for content creation: Minimal to Medium. Basic images take less time but more complicated/more engaging images require a time investment
Potential Library Uses/Feasibility for your library: User engagement, Outreach, Events
Social Media Platform Guide

Twitter
(twitter.com)
Twitter is an online news and social networking service on which users post and interact with short messages, "tweets," which are 280 characters or less. Tweets can contain photos or videos.
Number of users: 68 million in the US
Average age of users: 45% of 18-24-year-olds use Twitter in the U.S., compared with 8% of those 65 and up.
Recommended number of posts per day/week: 1-5 tweets per day; 5-25 tweets per week
Content type: Short text
Time level required for content creation: Minimal to High. Basic tweets take little time, but requires daily logins and interactions; can be time intensive.
Potential Library Uses/Feasibility for your library: User engagement, Outreach, Events

YouTube
(youtube.com)
YouTube offers a wide variety of user-generated and corporate media videos, including live streams, video blogging (vlogging), short original videos, and educational videos.
Number of users: 1.8 billion users every month
Average age of users: 94% of 18-24-year-olds in the U.S. use YouTube. YouTube reaches more 18-34-year-olds and 18-49-year-olds than any cable network in the U.S.
Recommended number of posts per day/week: At least once per week; be consistent.
Content type: Video
Time level required for content creation: Medium to High. Editing is time-intensive.
Potential Library Uses/Feasibility for your library: Instruction, Events
LinkedIn
(linked.in)
LinkedIn is a business and employment-oriented service, for networking.
Number of users: 260 million a month
Average age of Users: 45.2% of LinkedIn users are between ages 25-44.
Recommended number of posts per day/week: 1 post per day; 5-7 posts per week
Content type: Text, images, shared websites
Time level required for content creation: Minimal to Medium
Potential Library Uses/Feasibility for your library: Professional Development, General Literacy, Job/Employment Resources

Pinterest
(pinterest.com)
Number of users: 83.6 million monthly
Average age of users: 50% of millennials use Pinterest monthly. The majority of active pinners are below age 40.
Recommended number of posts per day/week: 3 pins per day; 15 pins per week
Content type: Shared websites/images
Time level required for content creation: Minimal
Potential Library Uses/Feasibility for your library: User engagement, Outreach, Events

Flickr
(flickr.com)
Number of users: 87 million registered members
Average age of users: N/A
Recommended number of posts per day/week: N/A
Content type: Images
Time level required for content creation: Medium to High. Editing, uploading, and organizing can take time.
Potential Library Uses/Feasibility for your library: Image Sharing, content management
SnapChat
(snapchat.com)
SnapChat is a image and short-video sharing app. Shared content is only available for a short period of time, up to 24 hours. Users can apply filters, which can be purchased to promote an event or location.
Number of users: 188 million daily active users
Average age of users: 60% of SnapChat users are under age 25.
Recommended number of posts per day/week: At least 1 snap per day; 5-7 snaps per week.
Content type: User-created images and videos
Time level required for content creation: Medium to High. Creating content, especially video content, can take time.
Potential Library Uses/Feasibility for your library: Program and resource promotion.

Blogging
Share stories and information with your patrons; it can be a good way to highlight your library and the people that work in or visit it. Rather than a standalone blog located only on the blogging platform, you may incorporate your blog into your website, or regularly/automatically share links to your blog via your social media accounts when you post a new entry.
Number of users: Depends on platform
Average age of users: Depends on platform
Recommended number of posts per day/week: At least once per week.
Content type: text, images, videos
Time level required for content creation: Minimal to High
Potential Library Uses/Feasibility for your library: User engagement, Outreach, Events, News

Sample Blogging Platforms:
Blogger: blogger.com
Tumblr: tumblr.com
WordPress: wordpress.org
Wix: wix.com
Tools for Creating and Managing Social Media Content

Content Management Tools

**Content Calendar:** A content calendar is a monthly or yearly editorial planning tool. Organizations use content calendars to highlight important events or holidays, or target specific times to promote an important message, such as a fundraising campaign or other awareness event. A content calendar allows you to plan your posts far in advance, saving you time each week because you do not need to go searching for new content. It also helps to ensure that you do not miss promoting major events. Calendars should be planned or reviewed by a team within your organization to minimize potential oversights of important events. The Pennsylvania Library Association releases content calendars for libraries to use that include press releases and infographics for you to customize and disseminate. Content calendars are typically free and do not require specialized software or technical skills. Libraries can use their standard events calendar as a starting point.

Access the PaLA content calendar:
https://www.palibraries.org/members/group_content_view.asp?group=117296&id=240873

**Management Platforms**

**HootSuite:** Hootsuite is a dashboard-based social media management platform. It allows you to connect your various social media accounts and schedule posts and manage mentions and messages in one place. All major social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Wordpress, and Pinterest can be connected. Hootsuite uses a freemium model. Users can sign up for a free “community” account, which allows you to connect up to 3 social media accounts and schedule posts. The free account does not provide analytics. There are also more advanced accounts that cost between $29-$599 a month, depending on business size and features. The free account only allows for one user login; paid accounts allow for more. The platform is generally user-friendly for people familiar with social media. It simplifies having multiple accounts because you can publish to all connected accounts from the Hootsuite dashboard, rather than needing to access and update each individual account. If you have a dedicated social media staff member, a free HootSuite account may be great for you library. A larger team, or a team not comfortable sharing one account, may need a paid version. Access HootSuite:
https://hootsuite.com/
Tools for Creating and Managing Social Media Content

**Buffer**: Buffer is a social media management platform similar to HootSuite, which allows you to connect social media platforms into one dashboard and schedule posts from one location. Buffer supports Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. Free accounts allow one user to connect up to 3 social media platforms from Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. Paid accounts, ranging from $15 to $399 allow for more users per company, management of Pinterest accounts, and advanced social media analytics. Buffer is user-friendly for those familiar with social media tools. If you have a small team and use traditional social media platforms, a free Buffer account may work for your organization. If you have a larger team and/or heavily use Pinterest, you may want to explore a paid account. Access Buffer: https://buffer.com/

**Later**: Later is a visually-driven social media management platform -- you schedule posts by dragging images into your timeline. Later supports Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest and uses a freemium model. Free accounts are limited to one user, but you can use all four platforms. However, you are limited in the number of posts per month you can schedule. Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest allow 30 scheduled posts each; 50 for Twitter. You get limited analytics options. You can earn additional posts by referring friends to the service. Paid accounts up the number of scheduled posts and accounts and offer different ranges of analytics and support for $9-$49 per month. Later is geared towards more social-media savvy users than Hootsuite and maybe more complicated than you need. The limited number of posts may also be a challenge depending on how frequently you share content to your pages. Access Later: https://later.com/

**Iconosquare**: Iconosquare provides extremely detailed social media analytics for Facebook and Instagram. If you heavily use social media to promote your library, it may be a useful tool, but it is not free, with accounts ranging from $29-$79 monthly. The platform does provide some free tools and information through its SMMArtbox, which can be useful in developing your own social media positioning and refining your content. Unless you have a large social media presence where in-depth analytics are required, Iconosquare is not necessary, but you may want to take advantage of their free tools and reports, which do not require specialized social media knowledge or skills. Access Iconosquare: https://pro.iconosquare.com/
Tools for Creating and Managing Social Media Content

**TweetDeck:** If your library uses Twitter, you may want to use TweetDeck to manage your account. It is a management platform directly within Twitter that allows you to schedule tweets and manage interactions and messages in a more user-friendly atmosphere than the standard Twitter interface. TweetDeck is free and is easy to use for anyone who is familiar with Twitter; only one login/account is used for the service. Access TweetDeck: https://tweetdeck.twitter.com/

**Website Analytics**

**Google Analytics:** If you manage your own website, Google Analytics can help you gather information about your web traffic. To capture data, you add tracking codes provided by Google Analytics to each page of your website. Data is loaded into the Google Analytics platform for you to analyze. Google Analytics is a freemium service, with basic tracking included for free on up to 100 pages. Additional features are available with paid service, but the cost is negotiated through Google Sales, and will vary. Google Analytics will be most useful for libraries that manage their own websites and do not have other web analytics software or services. Some coding knowledge is required to add the code to your webpages. Access Google Analytics: https://analytics.google.com/analytics/web/

**Link Managers**

If you use Instagram frequently, you may want to consider a link manager. URLs do not work in Instagram posts, and your profile is limited to one link at a time. Link managers allow you to place one link in your Instagram profile. You add the additional links to their platform, and when a user opens the link, they can select the links associated with each of your posts.

**Tap.Bio:** Standalone platform with a free option for 3 “cards,” which provide links and information about your organization. Add more cards with paid accounts ranging from $5-$12 per month. Access Tap.Bio: https://tap.bio/

**Linktree:** Standalone service offers unlimited links in your Linktree with a free account, but Linktree branding appears on the site, and you have limited design options. For $6 per month, you can remove Linktree branding, add customizable options, an email sign-up form for visitors, and analytics. Access LinkTree: https://linktr.ee/
Tools for Creating and Managing Social Media Content

**Linkin.Bio:** Available for paid users of Later, described above under Management Platforms. $16/month for linked 2 Instagram accounts; primary purpose is to help viewers shop from your profile. Provides link analytics. Access Linkin.Bio: https://later.com/linkinbio/

**Content Creation Tools**

**Canva:** Canva is a web-based graphic design software that allows you to create modern-looking documents for print and web. You can upload your own images or choose from their libraries. The site uses a freemium model. Certain layouts, fonts, and tools are limited to either paid accounts or pay-per-use. Canva for work ranges from $9.95-$12.95 per month. 501(c)3 organizations can apply for free Canva for Work accounts, but they are not available to schools or government organizations. Canva is relatively easy to use, with many pre-formatted layouts to choose from, making it a nice tool for those unfamiliar with graphic design -- you can drop in your own content in already formatted images and save. Access Canva: https://www.canva.com/

**Free Stock Photos**

The sources below provide access to images you can use freely in your social media or on other web platforms. You may be required to provide attribution, so check the license before downloading or using in a publication.

**Pixabay:** https://pixabay.com/en/

**Flickr Creative Commons:** https://www.flickr.com/creativecommons/

**Getty Images Free:** https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/free

**AvoPix:** https://avopix.com/