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Channeling Passions: Developing a Successful Social Media Strategy

Elizabeth Ramsey
Boise State University

Amy Vecchione
Boise State University

Article

Engaging Library Users through a Social Media Strategy

Elizabeth Ramsey
Amy Vecchione
Boise State University

Abstract

Libraries often struggle with developing a consistent message that communicates their relevance and value to their patrons. When it comes to a social media strategy it's understood that consistency is an essential aspect in library branding, but how to do it? What measures need to be in place to decide to use new social media tools like Instagram and Pinterest? In 2012, Albertsons Library worked with Web and social media teams in the library and across the Boise State University campus to develop a strategy that works for today's busy library staff and librarians. By channeling the passion of library staff members from units throughout the library, creating a shared calendar of themes, and asking for volunteers, the authors, who are the social media strategy coordinators, created a unified voice across all social media, the Library's Web presence, and on the screen savers in the computer labs.

Academic libraries frequently face a number of challenges with maintaining their social media presence. As Andy Burkhardt (2010) notes, "It takes time to learn what sorts of things get reactions from people or how to keep conversations going" (p.12). Developing a social media strategy can be difficult and time consuming, but it is essential for continued, measurable success on social media networks. In establishing social networks, libraries can begin to tune in to their users' voices and begin building relationships with them through the interactivity of comments, "likes", and other forms of sharing. Social media offers libraries the ability to respond quickly to user queries, enhancing a library's reputation as a responsive and collaborative institution.

Albertsons Library's social media team developed rather loose guidelines (see Appendix), which, when combined with a dedication to using social media to help accomplish the library's mission, have been successful. By collaborating with other Boise State social media users, having a flexible strategy, encouraging social media contributions from everyone at the library (students workers, staff and faculty), and, perhaps most importantly, keeping informed about our users, we have been able to support the library's mission while simultaneously engaging users via social media. Our success was noted by LibraryScienceList.com which nominated Albertsons Library as number five on their "100 Most Social Media Friendly College & University Libraries for 2013"[1]. LibraryScienceList.com assessed our social media engagement by reviewing our analytics for Facebook (i.e., the number of likes and posts), YouTube (i.e., number of subscribers), and other social media tools, as well as evaluating our content.

Background

In 2013-2014 Boise State University had a total student enrollment of over 20,000 students supported by 2,689 staff and 623 faculty members. Albertsons Library has a staff of 73.38 FTE including 20 tenure track faculty librarians. The overarching mission at Albertsons Library is to actively engage in learning, teaching and research at Boise State University[2]. The library's use of social media helps support major themes within this mission by engaging students to foster their success; providing high quality, relevant information resources and services; and assisting in the development of an organization that is flexible, fluid, and adaptable to change.

Librarian Memo Cordova established social media networks at Albertsons Library in 2005 with a Twitter account and the library blog. Cordova initiated these accounts on the basis of his research into their potential for engagement with the library's community, not because of a management mandate. Eventually more formal data on the topic was provided by the Educause Center for Analysis and Research (ECAR), which conducts a survey called the ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Technology every two years. Albertsons Library faculty review this data to ascertain where students are using technology and social media. Using the data from 2009 and 2011 we were able to determine that students felt that the University should have a presence in these social media environments. Therefore, the Albertsons Library

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[1] http://librarysciencelist.com/100-most-social-media-friendly-college-university-libraries
[2] See http://library.boisestate.edu/about/mission.php

increased its social media presence to now include Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, Pinterest and the library's blog.

Method

Collaborating Outside the Library

When faculty at Albertsons Library began using social media tools, we were ahead of the rest of the campus in terms of adoption; the centralized Office of Communication and Marketing unit did not have any formal guidelines at that time. We collaborated with staff in that unit by sharing what we were doing, as did some other campus entities. The Boise State University campus looked to the library to learn about new tools, best practices, and guidelines. As the Office of Communication and Marketing developed guidelines in 2012, we adopted their best practices and used them in all of our social media Web presences[3]. Also, the Office of Communication and Marketing maintains a calendar of events taking place on campus, and we coordinate with them whenever applicable.

The Marketing Minds group at Boise State is comprised of social media managers from all over campus. The social media team at Albertsons Library presented at a Marketing Minds meeting on new tools being utilized and how we were sharing them. In addition, the social media team at Albertsons Library participates in an email group that sends out calls and requests for shared promotions; we share information relevant to our students on our social networks, such as Financial Aid due dates, important information from the student government group Associated Students of Boise State University (ASBSU), and pertinent events.

Scheduling

To help us formulate our social media strategy we created a Google Drive shared calendar; all library staff are able to view the calendar and the key curators of social media tools are given editing rights. Included on the calendar are campus events from the Office of Communication and Marketing and the aforementioned email group, library events, and both local and national commemorative events. The social strategy team finds these events through social media sites and sites such as Holiday Insights (http://www.holidayinsights.com/moreholidays/).

When choosing holidays, the coordinators think about what kind of library resources can be tied into the holiday as well as which holidays would be most meaningful for our users. As David Fiander (2012) stated, "Social network sites are not broadcast media; they are places to engage in conversations with your community" (p.194), so we always think about what themes are going to stimulate interactivity with our key audience, the students. On the shared calendar the coordinators indicate each social media outlet and possible library staff candidates to contribute content on each topic. Additionally, we

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[3] See http://news.boisestate.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files/2010/05/Boise-State-Social-Media-Handbook.pdf

include timely promotions of resources, workshops, and services useful to our students, such as Access Services, Special Collections and our institutional repository, Scholar Works. The calendar not only helps in planning, but also acts as a great way to keep track of past campaigns and assess their success.

Each month the coordinators choose five main messages we want to convey on our website. We develop large banner images to use on the library website that link directly to a blog post or webpage on that topic. Cross system unification assists in sending the message out through all of our platforms. However, while we may duplicate some language or images, we do customize the message for each tool for consistency, audience, and appropriateness.

Coordinating Contributors

Meetings also help in planning and assessing social media strategies. The coordinators hold quarterly meetings that are open to all library staff as well as the main curators of our social media tools. In general, we have specific individuals who are responsible for the upkeep of each social media network. For example, one colleague is in charge of keeping tweets going on Twitter, although a number of others also contribute and act as backup when the person in charge is unavailable.

During our quarterly meetings the coordinators preview upcoming calendar events, brainstorm what library resources should be promoted in coordination with those events, arrange volunteers for posting on those events, and assess past campaigns. Dickson and Holley (2010) advise libraries to "continuously monitor how their social networking attempts are working among their users and make any necessary adjustments to their platforms that could make the … service more effective" (p. 477). The quarterly meetings provide an informal method of this essential component of social media effectiveness.

The authors run the meetings. Digital Access Librarian Amy Vecchione oversees the webpage and social media, and the Outreach Librarian Elizabeth Ramsey coordinates social media with a library slide program and other outreach efforts as well as contributing to social media. The authors hold working meetings at least once a semester to consider strategies and firm up the calendar. They also occasionally hold informal lunch gatherings that are open to all to try to generate ideas in a more relaxed setting. The informality of these sessions serves as a breeding ground for sharing fun and new ideas.

Having multiple contributors for social media helps create buy-in and support across the library as well as assisting with continuity of service as library staff comes and goes (Carscaddon & Chapman, 2013). By including members of all units in the library we also make more meaningful use of social media tools by creating posts, boards, and slides that resonate with our users. This has been especially true for Facebook contributions from our student workers. Student contributors to social media at Albertsons Library must review the library's guidelines and submit sample posts before they are allowed to become regular contributors. In the first year that students began posting to the library's

Facebook account (2013-2014), the Library's "likes" grew by 20%, strong proof of the students' ability to foster engagement with the Boise State community.

Coordinating Content

Linkage between social media postings, the slide shows in the library lobby and on computers, and other outreach efforts is key in reaching as many patrons as possible, establishing a brand identity and garnering a response. However, when repeating a message on several different social media networks we are careful to tailor the repeated message to each network's users. Elizabeth Harper (2013) cautions, "[Although] audiences are very different and you can probably get away with producing duplicate content on these platforms, it's smart to tailor each and every post, article, or tweet to your exact audience" (para. 9).

At times, it is appropriate to duplicate content across platforms. A successful project where the library duplicated content effectively involved the introduction of phone charging stations in the library. The social media team used the same imagery and wording for the print signs next to each station and for the digital slides promoting the stations, as well as in the blog post announcing the new service. In another example, a Pinterest board was created from Special Collections photos on Boise State's Gene Harris Jazz Festival. An image from the board was used to create a slide for National Jazz appreciation month in May promoting the Pinterest Board. The image was then used again in a Facebook post promoting the library's streaming music resources. Our library home page features a rotating banner (see Figure 1) that is also a player in our repeated message strategy. The Sixties database was featured during African American history month with similar images and messages repeated in the slide shows and a blog post. This same tactic is used when the library hosts special events. For example, the same art and wording in signs, slides, and various social media postings was used to promote our University Authors' Reception.
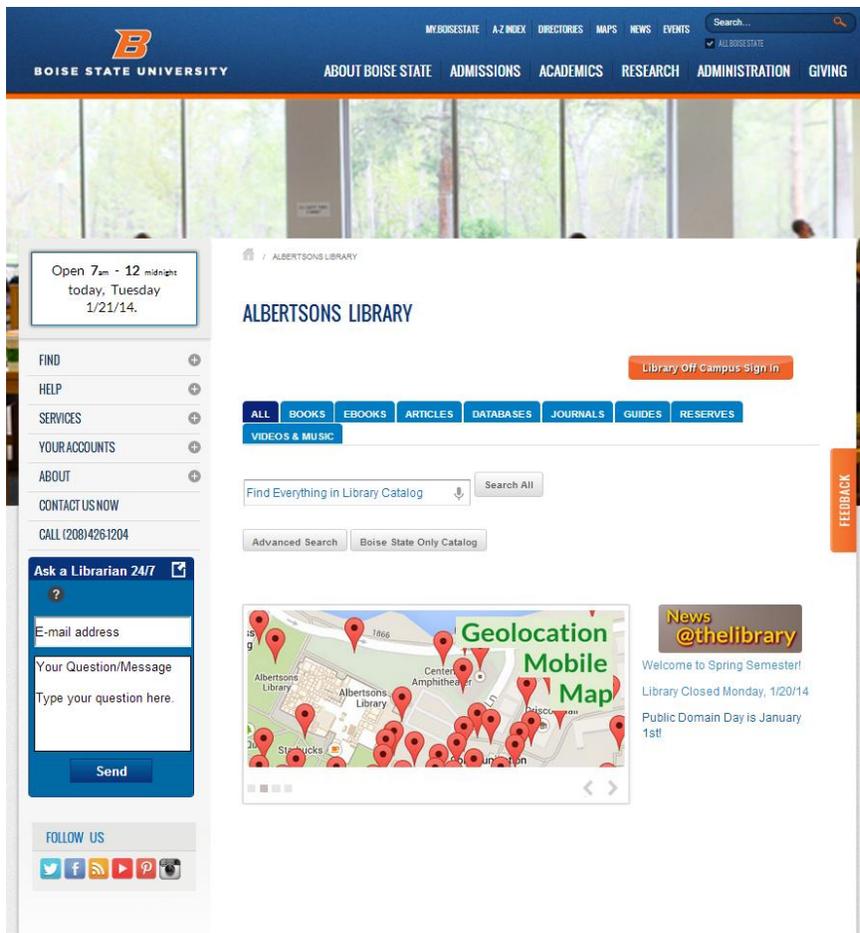
Figure 1. Albertsons Library website featuring the scrolling banner.

Assessment

As a library considers new social media tools there are a few factors to consider. If you determine your measurable goals at the outset of implementing the new tool you will be better off in the long run. If you'll need to justify the use of a social media program to management or others you might consider a SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis (Fernandez, 2009). Ask yourself what success would look like and create goals based on that vision. Different social media networks will appeal to different communities, so give yourself time to determine what particular networks will resonate. At Albertsons Library we set reasonable expectations based on a combination of experimentation, an understanding of our users based on our interactions with them, and consistent review of best practices in the literature. We revisit our goals frequently to determine their relevance.

When the library social media team pilots a new social media tool we set goals to measure success. When Albertsons Library first started experimenting with Instagram, we set success targets for the number of followers and likes we wanted to achieve by a certain point. We were able to exceed those initial success targets. The library defined success for Instagram as obtaining 60 followers within the first four months of using the service and receiving multiple likes per image. This goal was an educated guess informed by an informal assessment of student use of Instagram. Within three months the library had 81 followers on Instagram, and as of February 2014 (a year after initiating the service) the library had 191 followers. The number of likes per image range from 4 to 30. With this evidence, Instagram is deemed a successful component of the library's social media network.

David Lee King (2012) writes that goals might be more about the tone of the posts or how often to post: "Goals for Facebook might include always using business casual language. Maybe you'll have a practical goal of posting five status updates a week" (p. 147). At Albertsons Library we bring together our social media team and evaluate together as a group how we accomplished those goals. We ask what barriers there are to posting, if any. Early on one of the identified barriers was a fear of posting or not knowing what to post. This led to the creation of the calendar and the strategy across all platforms to cross-promote the same ideas and services.

There are a number of tools such as Klout (https://klout.com/home), SumAll (https://sumall.com/) and StatCounter (http://statcounter.com/) that can be used to evaluate social media across multiple platforms. Using these analytic tools can alleviate the kinds of concerns expressed by Dickson and Holley (2010) about the lack of quantitative data to support [library] effectiveness in student outreach. Klout provides a score from 1-100 that indicates influence through social media. Albertsons Library uses Klout to measure the reach of its Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts, which, when combined, create a Klout score of 56.53, putting us in the top 20% of library users of social media.

While Albertsons Library uses Klout, we prefer to look at the metrics native to each social media tool or platform as well. We scan the number of views from our blog and other social media tools, looking at what gets more likes or views and trying to cultivate content that is pertinent to our audiences. Twitter's notifications tool gives Albertsons Library immediate proof of interest in what is being posted through notifications on which library tweets are being shared or "favorited." The notifications also alert the library whenever it is mentioned in a tweet, thereby providing an alert for when a response is needed to a comment or question. Twitter also has analytics that provide an overview of effectiveness according to interactivity (Favorites, Retweets and Replies) with a measure of how much better than average a tweet performed for interactivity. Overall, Twitter has proven to be one of the most successful social media networks in the Albertsons Library arsenal with 1,957 followers, 432 favorites, and numerous daily retweets as of May 30, 2014.

Facebook provides some of the most robust statistics through its Insights analytical tool. On May 14, 2014, Insights indicated that Albertsons Library's Facebook page had 1,024

likes, a post reach of 13.6K (the number of people who saw any activity from the page including posts, posts by other people, page like ads, mentions, and check-ins), and engagement of 861 (the number of likes, comments and shares) with 1.7K post clicks. Although some research has indicated that Facebook may not be successful in promoting engagement with some library user populations, it appears from the statistics that Albertsons Library's Facebook page has struck a chord with its users, and will continue to feature strongly in our social media efforts.

Blogger's analytics indicate that Albertsons Library's blog had more than 90,000 total views of its 661 posts as of May 21, 2014. Blogger's analytics can also break down the statistics by month, so, for example, the blog had 2,765 views from April 21-May 21. YouTube also provides its own analytics; during April 21-May 20 this year the library's videos had 1,279 total views. While these accounts have not been as successful as Facebook and Twitter in engaging viewers to comment, its felt that the high number of views indicate a strong, if passive, audience.

Neither Instagram nor Pinterest provides its own analytics. Instead, account holders must simply assess whether the number of account followers and shared posts indicate sufficient interactivity to merit continued use. Although the numbers for Albertsons Library's Instagram and Pinterest networks are not particularly robust, we continue to post to these tools while assessing their use and interactivity.

Conclusion

Social media networks that have been investigated and subsequently eliminated from the Albertsons Library social media repertoire have included GooglePlus (https://plus.google.com/) (when it was determined that there has yet to be sufficient student interest and use of the network) and Flickr (https://www.flickr.com/) (when it became necessary to pay for an account). SoundCloud (https://soundcloud.com/), which can be used to feature audio recordings from Albertsons Library's Special Collections, is currently in exploration mode. Libraries interested in growing their own social media networks should be committed to this form of experimentation to create sites of engagement, creativity and collaboration. Foster growth in your own social media network by trying out new tools as they come available, remembering that Facebook was a new social media tool once.

Collaboration is another key to growing a social media network; once the official Boise State Twitter account was established, the Albertsons Library account was further invigorated by a cross pollination of retweets and favorites. Connecting with the social media accounts of other campus departments can also provide a broader picture of what works and what doesn't for our users. In addition, assisting with the outreach efforts of others on campus by posting about their resources and events can help establish the library as a campus community information center.

When creating your social media strategy, focus on getting passionate partners from within the library and among your users who have a strong desire to contribute. Listen to their ideas and allow them to happen. By having loose guidelines and collaborating

within the library and across the campus, any academic library can have a successful social media strategy. By using the analytical tools provided by most social networks, libraries can garner the evidence they need to bolster or change that strategy to make sure their social media networks are meeting the needs of their users.

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Appendix

Social Media Guidelines
Albertsons Library
Boise State University

Albertsons Library maintains a presence in several social media communities. We experiment with new tools, play, learn, discover, and connect. For our user's interest and experience we customize our message based on our calendar of themes with different wording tailored to each social media tool that we use. Members of any unit within the library are welcome to participate in crafting the social media marketing calendar, adding to social media, and generating new ideas!

Our **goals** with social media are:

- to be engaged with the diverse campus community and vicinity
- to be seen as a source for reliable information
- to develop relationships through open and honest communication
- to write for our audience

We ask you to take these **recommendations** to heart when posting:

- **Be interesting**: have fun; if you're engaged the community will be engaged too; post ideas; chat with people; incite our community to take action!
- **Be authentic**: be yourself when you post as the library and identify yourself via initials or name; we have a diverse customer base so it is good we have diverse voices on our social media; please use good grammar and spelling and also refrain from language that might offend some customers.
- **Be engaged**: generate interactivity by posting things that matter to our audience; reply to all types of comments; do not delete comments; share information based on the themes for each month (see the calendar).
- **Be kind**: don't be sarcastic; take everyone for their word; remember that we are all doing our best.

Elizabeth Ramsey is Assistant Professor/Librarian/Outreach Coordinator at Boise State University.

Amy Vecchione is Associate Professor and Digital Resources Librarian at Boise State University.