



AUSTRALIAN LAW LIBRARIAN

Vol 19 No. 2 2011

Social Media Basics : Tips for Setting up Library Social Media Accounts

Bernard Lyons, Melbourne University Law Library

This is a brief article on the basics of social media sites, with some information that would be useful to anyone considering setting up their own library account. The article covers rules of engagement, practical uses, and tips on practical use of this medium, taking into account current practice and my experience of running the Facebook and Twitter accounts and the website for the Melbourne University Law Library.

Social media is in an ever increasing position of becoming a mainstream medium for communication. Australians in particular, are keen users; we are the world's fifth largest user of social networking.¹ While for years, social media, including tools like LiveJournal and Myspace were avidly supported by relative niche groups, the phenomenon really came to prominence when Facebook arrived. Facebook made social media commonplace tools, now not only used by the young, but increasingly used by people from all age groups.

While in the past some corporations and firms have blocked access by their employees in the workplace to Facebook, the fact that it is available on smartphones has to some degree made this blocking redundant.

Purposes of Social Media

Social media can be used by a library as a:

- Communication tool
- Research tool
- Static information site
- Platform for software applications
- Basis for building a community

Commonly used as a **communication tool**, information about events, news, general developments in a field of interest, new books, databases and services can be conveyed to the user. It can even be used as an online reference service, by providing answers to reference questions via Twitter or Facebook chat for example. Communicating services and features of the library assists in promoting and improving your brand to the users.

As a **research tool**, social media accounts can be used as a gathering point for accessing news from other social media accounts eg by following lists in Twitter, or following notable accounts or groups in Facebook. You can join/monitor other accounts that may post or generate research worthy information.

Social Media can also act as a **static information** site, in some ways like a simple website. A number of firms use their Facebook page in this manner as a *website lite*.² Other social media users, or the public, if the account is publicly accessible, can go to the account to see certain library information that you may have on the main page.

Social media can also act as a **platform for software applications (apps)** that your users can utilise, for instance, you could add a library catalogue widget, WorldCat search box, Cheaptxtbooks (finds cheap books) or Courses 2.0 (Course scheduling for students) just to name a few.

Operating Social Media Accounts: Some Concepts

The number one rule for operating library social media accounts is that the operator should be

¹ Sophie Toomey, 'Working on their Connections' (1 May 2010) Saturday *Weekend Australian*.

² Jordan Furlong, 'FaceBook for Law Firms' (2010) 73 *Texas Bar Journal*.

someone who understands the media. The operator should have their own account, and be familiar with the way social media operates. If they are not, have them use social media for a while before they manage the accounts . . . or assign these duties to someone else.

Having one person run a number of similar activities can achieve efficiency. We have one person who runs our website, social media, and the electronic bulletin board displays – this means that in some cases we can post the information to one tool, and then have it automatically redirected to other tools. Facebook posts can automatically be posted to Twitter using the Facebook Twitter application (made by Twitter) and Twitter posts can be automatically sent to Facebook using Tweetdeck.

Make sure you post regularly. With Twitter and Facebook, it should be at least daily. If you can't think of anything to post, then you may not need a social media presence. In some ways, it is better not to have one at all, as opposed to one that appears neglected or little used.

Promote your social media. Use your library website, traditional notice boards for printed signs, and electronic displays to promote your website. It's no use having it if no one knows it's there.³

Company Rules?

After you have clearance to start an account, there may well be rules to follow. In your particular firm or institution, there may be protocols to follow for social media, generally marketing or

web page writing. Often marketing personnel will have control over the use of social media.

When you are writing in social media, you represent your employer – which is why many marketing departments control and limit the use of social media. Social media writing tends to be less formal than general web writing, but remember you are still accountable for what you write as an employee.

Specific notes on different Social Media

Facebook

In terms of what sort of social media account to get, the choice of Facebook is fairly obvious, just on size alone. It has recently exceeded its 400 millionth member mark⁴ and has also recently surpassed Google as the most visited web page, according to two measures.⁵

In some ways, the personal nature of Facebook can be problematical for libraries that start Facebook accounts. Most users have personal accounts and some of our focus group have indicated they may not want to interact with work or their academic institutions based accounts. That said, there are a number of popular academic based library accounts, with thousands of *fans/likes*, and the individual's privacy controls on Facebook can always be used to keep accounts separate and private from other users.

Facebook is very simple to set up. It can house basic information, that can be observed by anyone, not just those that have their own

³ Kasia Grabowski, 'Social Media, Best Practice for Libraries: A TTW Guest Post' (2010)

<<http://tametheweb.com/2010/03/18/social-media-best-practices-for-libraries/>>.

⁴ Above n 2.

⁵ Ylan Q Mui and Peter Whoriskey, 'Facebook Passes Google as Most Popular Site on the Internet, Two Measures Show' (31 Dec 2010) *Washington Post*.

Facebook account. You just need to adjust the privacy settings. Your Facebook account page can hold basic information such as address, phone, email contact and opening hours, as mentioned, using the Facebook account as *website lite*.

Twitter

Twitter is even easier to set up than Facebook. While Twitter does not offer all the same sophisticated functions and applications that Facebook does (and lacks 3rd party games like *Farmville* and *Mafia Wars*) it does appeal to certain users, and has a different dynamic from Facebook.

Twitter does not even have some of the basic functions that Facebook has – you can't use it as a static information page. However, in its niche as a microblogging tool (you have to type 140 characters or less in each post) it has found its uses. It performs well in some roles that Facebook does not. Twitter is more phone orientated, and traditional messages can be posted using SMS on a non-smart phone. You can post messages to Twitter from any mobile phone anywhere.

Experts and professionals often post on Twitter, and their words will be hung on by their followers. Users that are popular with law librarians include Mary Ellen Bates (Twitter name 'Meb's'), Jessamyn West ('jessamyn') or *The Librarian in Black* ('TheLiB'). A library Twitter account may adopt the role of an 'expert' and attract followers by posting regular legal research tips or notes about resources.

While we have currently more Twitter followers than Facebook 'likes' our Twitter followers appear

to be more industry professionals, as opposed to our Facebook followers who are mostly students and Academics.

You can set up alerting mechanisms on Twitter, such as *Tweetalarm*, or *Twilert*. These can send you an email when specified keywords are mentioned in Tweets, so this can be good for monitoring any mention of particular issues, or discussion of your library on Twitter.

Delicious

Delicious and Diigo are examples of free social bookmarking sites. They allow the storage of links to notable resources, and the sharing of these links. Think of sharing your favourite websites that you have as favourites in your browser. Anyone with a Diigo or Delicious account can access their URLs from anywhere they can access the web. We use these to suggest links to important legal resources, and we also have them linked in to our Libguides so you can look at links pertinent to the subject matter of the particular Libguide.

Tumblr

Tumblr is a newish social media platform, that is highly modifiable. In 2010 it had about 3 million users.⁶ While Tumblr is gaining in popularity, it remains to be seen if it will become a widely used social media tool.

We are currently looking at using its gallery functions to display pictures of exhibitions and other visual material related to the library. Amongst many features, it offers large text entries, connects to Skype, has tag cloud options and easily plays multimedia.

⁶ Marisa Meltzer, 'The Curated Web: Tumblr, a Relatively New Blogging Platform, Just Might Be the Future of the Social Internet.(MEDIA)' (2010) 21(3) *The American Prospect* 43(3).

Conclusion

Just with some basic understanding and following some simple rules, library social media accounts can be set up quite easily and operated to maximum benefit. Used wisely, social media are sophisticated tools that can extend your brand, build relationships with your users and promote your collection and information services.

References

Jordan Furlong, 'FaceBook for Law Firms' (2010) 73 *Texas Bar Journal*.

Kasia Grabowski, 'Social Media, Best Practice for Libraries : A TTW Guest Post' (2010) <<http://tametheweb.com/2010/03/18/social-media-best-practices-for-libraries/>>.

Marisa Meltzer, 'The Curated Web: Tumblr, a Relatively New Blogging Platform, Just Might

Be the Future of the Social Internet.(MEDIA)' (2010) 21(3) *The American Prospect* 43(3).

Sophy Toomey, 'Working on their Connections' (May 1, 2010 Saturday) *Weekend Australian*.

Ylan Q Mui and Peter Whoriskey, 'Facebook Passes Google as Most Popular Site on the Internet, Two Measures Show ' (31 December 2010) *Washington Post*.

Further Reading

Dennie Heye, 'Social Media: The Value for Librarians' (2010) 14 *Information Outlook* 10.

Jane Secker, 'Case Study 5: Libraries and Facebook' (Report, University of London Centre for Distance Education, 2008).

Laura Solomon, *Doing Social Media So It Matters: A Librarian's Guide* (ALA Editions, 2011).