All for One, One for All? Developing a Social Media Marketing
Infrastructure for George Mason University Libraries

Best Practices & Plan Proposal

Bridget Ryan

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Introduction

In this document, the best plan of action for George Mason University Libraries' social media presence will be explained and a recommendation given regarding social media best practices. This plan of action and best practices, presented during April 2015, is based on research performed during February and March 2015. Research for this best practices and plan proposal was done by reading articles available through scholarly journals and the open web, by looking at the social media sites of Mason's peer institutions' libraries, and by asking questions of several individuals who work with social media at these peer libraries.

Plan of Action

Bridget was asked by the Marketing Team to determine what Mason Libraries should be doing to present itself via social media in a unified manner. Its members were not sure that the current social media setup is serving the library system as best it could. After gathering research from articles, a survey, and personal observations informed by her library science studies, this is what Bridget recommends:

Mason Libraries should have one account on each social media platform rather than a separate account for each library. Information from all libraries should be posted to this one account. This was a difficult conclusion to reach since the research indicated an approximately 50/50 split between universities that have one account for all libraries and those that have a different account for each library. Therefore, it is not overly clear as to which is the better way. However, when Bridget was looking at the social media sites of Mason's peer institutions, it was her opinion that the universities who chose to have separate sites for each library did not create a unified presence with these separate accounts, whereas the universities that chose to have one account for all libraries did have a unified presence and did not cause their individual libraries to lose their identities. Individuals who are interested in one library over others can look out for posts about that library and be exposed to information about other libraries that they would not have received had they only been following that one library. That should be in the best interest of Mason Libraries, as Bridget assumes they want as many people as possible to know about the things they choose to post via social media.

Mason Libraries should have accounts with Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and should seriously consider having a YouTube account and a blog. In both the research performed in articles and by way of the survey and site investigations, Facebook and Twitter were ubiquitous. Therefore, it would be a mistake not to include these two sites in any social media plan. Not everyone uses one of these two sites in particular, so it is important to maintain a presence on both and to put the same information on both sites. If content that someone wishes to put on Facebook is not appropriate for Twitter's limit of 140 characters, a link should be made to the content placed on Facebook so that users of Twitter are aware of the presence of the content even if they choose not to access it. Similarly, a request for feedback on Twitter should be mentioned on Facebook. For images, Instagram appears to be the most popular and widely used social media site. It is a good idea to make use of YouTube and a blog, but careful attention must be taken to make additions to these sites on a regular basis so that interest in them remains and the effort to have them is worthwhile.

Social media efforts should be the work of a team of individuals, who should use an aggregator to help them perform their duties. The majority of the individuals who responded to the survey indicated that their libraries use a team of individuals to manage social media. Mason Libraries already has a collection of individuals who contribute to the social media effort, so it should not be difficult to maintain a team effort. A team effort is the best way to ensure continuity of the social media presence because it is possible that someone may move on from his or her position, and in the event of this happening the others can maintain the social media efforts while this person's replacement is found and trained. These individuals should use an aggregator to help them manage postings. Using an aggregator is faster and easier than going to each site individually, and ensures that the posts are the same. It is also the best way to handle security issues. Hootsuite is the most widely-used site and therefore is Bridget's recommendation.

A specific schedule should be established for when and what to post to social media. If what is to be posted is planned in advance, it should not be a big effort to keep up with making posts on a regular basis. Both a schedule for when to post to which sites and what kind of content to post when should be established. For Facebook and Twitter, posts should be made at least once a day, however as many as three posts in a given day could be acceptable. Posts to Instagram should be made whenever there is appropriate content to post, e.g. an event, new collection to promote, etc.; it is very likely that there will not be new content for Instagram every day. The team responsible for social media should decide how it wants to use YouTube in a way that will ensure fairly frequent posts. Adding content at least once a month should make the site appear as if it is being used currently. If a blog is used, it should be updated at least once every week, although that does not mean that posts could not be made more frequently if there is something about which to write.

Posts should cover a variety of topics and should be appropriate for the platform. Facebook and Twitter should be used for notifications about changes to hours of operation, promoting library events, announcing new items, promoting ongoing library services, tips for research, links to articles and/or news items of interest, community information of significance, and to solicit feedback from users. Instagram should be used to post images of events, new items, or collections that the library is featuring. YouTube could be used to present how-to videos for library users and to present video content that the social media team determines is of interest to Mason Libraries' social media followers. A blog could be used to present information to library users that is too long to be presented as a Facebook post; a blog is not the best place for short announcements.

Best Practices

Some things should be discussed related to the various platforms and how to use them that are not directly related to the social media plan recommendation. Therefore, this separate section has been created to present the information.

Writing Posts

When writing posts for Facebook and Twitter, many things should be considered. One should am for brevity. Important information should not be buried. Casual, not formal, language should be used, but careful attention should be taken to use correct grammar. One should strive for accuracy in information and in grammar, and should be sure to check all posts before making them public. Any errors that escape should be corrected as quickly as possible. Be sure to include commentary with images and links so that users understand what it is they are seeing and why. It is a good idea to use hashtags, but as much as possible try to include them in the natural language of the post rather than lumping them at the end. Try to be compelling when you write and give a solid introduction to the post. Keep things simple and make every word count.

Planning for Posts

A number of things should be kept in mind when planning the posts that will be made to social media. It should be used for two-way communication, not just one-way announcements. Concrete goals should be established. This is because the highest satisfaction from using social media comes when you have clear goals, know who is responsible, and have a plan. The social media presence should be connected to the library's mission. Think about what is going to be the best way for you to get your message out to your users – Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, a blog, etc.; don't spread yourself too thin by posting everything everywhere. You should be social and human; to be social means to respond when people comment, and to be human means to use humor and a personal touch to the extent it is appropriate. Always keep the goal of the post in mind. Make sure you provide context and use graphics whenever appropriate.

You should be sure that you are engaging with your audience with the posts you plan. Do this by making sure that posts will be interesting to them. Include a variety of content to keep things interesting. However, be sure to keep messages consistent with your identity. Also, be sure to respond to questions and comments in a timely manner by monitoring the sites daily.

Using Social Media Effectively

Many things can help in the effort to use social media effectively. The first, which was mentioned in the social media plan, is to use an aggregator such as Hootsuite to manage posts. Developing a schedule of post categories is a good way to make sure that a good variety of content is getting posted on a regular basis. Be sure to check the library's calendar when you're setting the post schedule so you don't forget about anything. Also, try for one "fun" post for every "marketing" post. Re-share and engage with

content from other accounts at your institution and elsewhere that is relevant to your community. Using visuals (e.g. infographics, videos) is key because time is often short so quick, easy-to-digest content is important. Set common-sense goals for what you hope to achieve with posts. Try to post at times and on days when the content is most likely to be seen; see the table below (from the web) for more information. Seek inclusiveness, and value contributions from your followers. Remind yourself about copyright restrictions and getting permission where necessary to post content.

	Maximum Frequency	Time of Day	Day of the Week
Facebook	5-10 times per day	9am-3pm	Thursday
Twitter	3 times per day	1-4pm	Wednesday/Sunday
LinkedIn	2 times a day	7am-9am/5-6pm	Tuesday/Thursday
Google+	3 times a day	9-10am	Wednesday
Instagram	Unlimited	Any time of day	Monday/Thursday
Pinterest	5-10 pins a week	9-11am	Saturday

Page Setup/Maintenance Best Practices

A few things should be kept in mind with regard to page setup and maintenance. It is very important to have a good bio and a link to the library website in the profile of the social media account. Links to the other social media sites used by the library should be included as well (e.g. a link to Facebook on Twitter, etc.). As was mentioned in the social media plan, multiple staff should be included to allow for staff turnover.

Marketing the Social Media Presence

It is very important to market the fact that the library has a social media presence in order to make the most effective use of it. This can be done in a variety of ways. First, include links to the social media sites wherever is appropriate and possible. Second, mention the sites by word of mouth when giving reference assistance and presenting instruction sessions. Third, be sure to mention the sites on flyers and handouts whenever appropriate using QR codes and/or the ubiquitous symbols for the sites.

Facebook-Specific Information

Facebook is best-suited to promotional and/or notification endeavors. It should be updated daily. The ways it can be used include, but certainly are not limited to: notifications about changes to hours of operation, promoting library events, announcing new items, promoting ongoing library services, tips for research, links to articles and/or news items of interest, and community information of significance. Facebook can and should be used to solicit feedback from users by way of contests and requesting comments. However, whatever it is used for, it should be kept in mind that social media is meant for social, not academic/research, uses. Whenever possible, include a multimedia element in updates (photo, video, etc.); use text-only updates primarily for notifications of changes to hours.

Twitter-Specific Information

In addition to presenting information about the library, Twitter can and should also be used as a way to interact with the community. This interaction could be in the form of a question about the library or a topic of interest to which you solicit responses (e.g. what is your favorite thing about the library), or in the form of a request for comments about the library. Twitter is a great way to connect current events to the library; e.g. a post could be made featuring the library's collection of biographies of Martin Luther King, Jr. around the time in January we honor him. It is better to post important messages earlier in the week, and repost messages from late in the week early in the next week.

YouTube-Specific Information

Many ways exist for libraries to make good use of YouTube. These include how-to-use-the-library videos, other forms of library instruction, promotion/marketing videos, and providing an easily-accessible repository space.