SOCIAL MEDIA:
MAKE IT MEME-INGFUL

I f you have a group, event, reading club, business or two friends interested in this same thing as you, odds are you've made a Facebook page, Twitter handle, Instagram account and hashtag for them. GREG BELL asks what is different when you're representing your library or workplace?

Presenting an online and accessible social media (SM) presence allows organisations to engage with their members and the wider public quickly and effectively. This has led to a proliferation of new pages, groups, and sub-divisions within an institution's online presence, so let's delve deeper into the realm of the how to, why and why not of SM for libraries.

The SM channels and pages of libraries will be followed by a large number of people, with vastly different needs and interests. Currently, Facebook and Twitter are the main platforms that will appeal to most library patrons; while newer platforms may appeal to librarians themselves. The main Facebook page and Twitter handle for your library should be treated as a core business function, with smaller groups, pages or specific handles created only as needed for specific areas of interest.

Be careful not to fragment your following though. Before you create another page, handle or group for subsection, you should assess how many people may follow this topic, and whether it would be more practical to post on these topics or events from the main page or handle. Grouping or replicating your posts across multiple channels dilutes your message and audience, and can put them off following you altogether. A varied SM stream will remain engaging and worthy of following, but for specific targeted messages or posts, perhaps an all-patron or member email would be more suitable.

A healthy page or feed will share unique content and engage with its followers daily, and an effective SM presence will show a steady rate of growth over time.

Unlike your own personal SM, posts must be evaluated based on the brand values and aims of the organisation, and reflect that libraries are trusted sources of accurate information. This is particularly important for libraries and non-government organisations given the recent decline in public trust for social media, NGOs and government as revealed by the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer.

Using an analytics program to monitor your feeds will provide insights such as the best time of day to post to your audience and which topics, events or images have the most appeal. This analysis can also help to determine the value of paying to promote posts, or if organic reach is sufficient for your needs. Tools such as the Facebook Image Text Check, will help you determine the ratio of text to image in your posts, and if they will be automatically filtered out of your followers' feeds (20% or less text per image).

If you have more than one page or handle, occasionally share or retweet a message between them, but do not copy the original and paste it under another handle. This leads to audience confusion as you appear to be the authority for that message, and when they enquire about the original content you may not have the answers. Retweeting or sharing your own personal posts from your organisation's handle or page looks more like self-promotion than effective communication.

Links should be shortened using a service such as Bitly, in order to be less distracting and save valuable character space. When using hashtags, maintain a consistency over time; for instance #NSS2017, followed by #NSS2018. Check that the tag isn't already in use, or carries a meaning unrelated to your campaign.

Handles or pages that have become inactive following a campaign or where you do not have daily unique content to share, should be shutdown and posts made from your main accounts. It is far worse to have a poorly maintained and dated SM presence than none at all.

While it is tempting to share controversial images, memes or topics to garner some attention or post likes, unless discussion points and continued engagement on the post have been planned and thought out, this may just be damaging to your image and brand. But, we've all shared a cat image or two on a slow news day for some easy traction.

You must monitor your feed and any comments and interactions on your SM. Respond to questions, engage in discussion and most importantly moderate any bullying or threatening behaviour. Foster relationships with similar organisations and cross-promote events and opportunities of interest to your followers, while being wary not to promote ones that directly compete with your own interests. If you aim to 'go viral', you will fall short (please stop using the term, everyone else has). But if you have allotted sufficient time and resources to your SM plan and implementation, it will become a vital and enriching aspect of your work that is the fastest way to find out what your users need, want and are excited by.

Your brand, message and channels of communication all have intrinsic value to your organisation, and can be a wonderfully effective tool and asset. By enthusiastically communicating 'on message', you will foster a dialogue with your followers, and draw them to your core business.

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