

Engaging Students with Social Networking

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Introduction

- social networking increasingly powerful (from the political side such as the Arab Spring though to increased opportunities to interact with students in an academic setting – whether in lectures or as ‘followers’ of the Library
- social networking vs social media? Often used fairly interchangeably; we see the former as focussing on the people relationships, the latter concentrating on the technology.
- Bit of history: University of Portsmouth social networking began with our blog Thing of the Day (or TOTD) (<http://reden.wordpress.com>) in October 2007. This aimed to present non-serious side of Library and attract student interest and encourage contributions of ‘weird and wacky’ on web. Managed by four members of staff taking turns to post a week’s worth of entries – approx an hour a week of time.
- Then out of Freshers’ Fayre activities developed our Facebook presence (<http://www.facebook.com/#!/uoplibrary>) in 2009 with a soft ‘launch’ to gauge interest and then ‘permission’ sought from management once they were seen to be working. Facebook page was developed by junior member of staff with significant interest; we argued the case for about an hour of her time per fortnight; now about 2500 fans and used to place news and events as well as more lighthearted items which often get the biggest responses from students. Students also use it for enquiries on occasions. No requirement for students to become ‘friends’ but we cross-promote it at Freshers’ Fayre and offer to put photos up of whatever activity we’re doing (Daleks, peep-thru-board etc). The TOTD blog is piped through to Facebook page via RSS to given new content each day.
- Started Twitter (@uoplibrary) at the same time and now has some 2100 followers and again used to promote Library and events; answer enquiries but also to interact with students. Finding upbeat, positive ways to interact can require a lot of creativity. Team of three or four post spending a few minutes a couple of times a day.
- Seems to be a different audience of students for Twitter and Facebook so worth maintaining both. Managers need to ready for not-so-formal!
- Have subsequently added Google+, Pinterest, YouTube videos
<https://plus.google.com/105160925780437322815#105160925780437322815/posts>
<http://pinterest.com/uoplib/>
<http://www.youtube.com/user/uoplibrary>
- We review some of this history in: *Exterminating Boredom: synergy and creativity in an academic library* which shows some of our thinking on creativity and engaging with students (http://eprints.port.ac.uk/1508/1/Microsoft_Word_-_White_%2B_Collinson_-_Exterminating_boredom_final.pdf) (or search the Parade repository for ‘exterminating boredom’)

Tour (see links above)

- Facebook
Page should be viewed as a distribution point not a destination – often followers will visit only once – most content consumed or interacted with through the newsfeed – photos generate at least 2x more engagement

Tried to create some content to encourage return – also need to engage them on first visit

Cover Photo – symbolises what your organisation is about – branding

Timeline – viewed as negative but need to embrace it – we looked at early adopters

CocaCola

Create an emotional connection, be engaging and tell an authentic story, create nostalgia and a sense of history. Needs to be visually engaging

Reach and Statistics – shows the power of FB

- Twitter

Obviously much shorter form than Facebook and less distraction, but can say a lot with little, can also use URLs (and URL shorteners) to convey more information or link to Facebook page etc

Style of its own in informality and responsiveness – no use simply trying to replicate a web page ‘news item’ in 140 characters

Can be very immediate with some competitions (such as “first to come and ask for the giant infographic of Steve Jobs [that we displayed for a month on the lift shaft], can have it”) producing results within the hour

- Pinterest (doing well, but American audience more than UoP students?). Have aimed to ensure that there is Library content there as well as the fun things we repin from elsewhere although the latter is usually Portsmouth related.

- YouTube (short, to the point, quick and iPad not major projects so they can be updated easily). Did *not* want to use our film production unit and spend months on something that would go out of date, so have used iMovie on the iPad to create short things, very simply after some storyboarding and planning. Not more than 1 or 2 minutes long.

- Google+ - this hasn't been so successful for us although other libraries (Cambridge University?) have reported good traction. However, on December 17th 2012 all University of Portsmouth staff are being migrated to Google Mail and Google Apps so we'll wait until the new year to see if this helps us to have more an impact through this.

(But a good reminder to review social networking activities and not be afraid to drop any that aren't working for you.)

Engagement

Engaging with students can be difficult, students see library as boring and stuffy, or think they know everything about searching. Different social networking tools aim at different audiences, so we've attempted to “fit” the different functions:

- videos – kept short
- Pinterest – very pictorial and not *just* library pictures
- TOTD – anti-stuffy! (e.g. the “hats of meat” post in the very first week, well before Lady Gaga made such apparel trendy but which nearly had us shut down by management who didn't quite see the point)
- Facebook – interactive, lively

We've tried to keep it informal, immediate and interactive. Keeping things fresh. Being enthusiastic – probably best not to force it on members of staff who aren't interested in being involved.

Examples – marleysky (see image), calories (see image), snow closures; retweeting, @replies etc finding upbeat, positive ways to interact can require a lot of creativity; enthusiasm of team members.



Snow closures example: in 2010 Portsmouth (and the University) was pretty much shut down by the first snow the area had seen in some years. Junior member of staff who managed our Facebook page was stuck at train station and phoned in to find out Uni was shut. Put the news on Facebook. We later discovered that not only was the first ‘official’ notification students had, but that when an official email went out, they were querying it with academics as it didn’t come from a

‘trusted source’ that they recognize. It was at that point that Library management realized how much we’d empowered our Facebook guru!

Although not strictly a Library role we have even developed a beginners’ Twitter workshop in our wider workshop stream for University staff which has attracted a lot of interest. Very basic: How to login, tweet, retweet, reply etc along with a one page leaflet due to massive interest in simply how to get started. Workshop finishes with reflections on how we’ve used our account to build followers.

It’s a CONVERSATION (Ned Potter slides “7 Reasons People Give for Not Using Twitter”

<http://www.slideshare.net/thewikiman/7-reasons-people-give-for-not-using-twitter-and-why-they-can-all-be-rebuffed-with-the-phrase-its-a-conversation>) – this goes for all social networking, not just Twitter. **The whole point of social media is the social. Not just broadcasting or PR.** We endeavour to answer enquiries, we won’t ignore complaints, we listen to feedback – actively responding, taking action (Examples – You Said/We Did, 24/7, polls).

Summary

Social Media – obvious opportunities to promote

BUT

- If that’s all we’d done we would have missed a big opportunity
- Social Media shouldn’t just be about broadcasting – it’s about creating a dialogue and listening to the needs of our students
- Increased fees – higher student expectation – need to for us to be more accountable and to give feedback and through engaging in a conversation with our students we want them to feel we are interested in their views
- Continually looking for new Social Media to adopt – nothing stays popular forever