SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE SCIENCE LIBRARY: HOW IT REALLY WORKS

ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY

Introduction

A lively social media presence is a great way of getting the researchers where you work to sit up and take notice of your library. It's also a great tool for building relationships that keep going in between book requests – whether you work with students and lecturers, or researchers at a busy company.

That's why you've probably been feeling pressure to step up your activity online.

But let's face it – 'update social media' is never going to be at the top of a busy to-do list. Particularly not when it can feel like a colossal time drain for very little return. So how do you make sure it's worth the time you're spending?

We got in touch with 5 science librarians, all with varied backgrounds and a differing range of responsibility in their current positions, and asked them what the real role and value of social media is for them in the library.

Read their stories, learn from their experiences, and remember their key tips for turning social media into a valuable tool for you, your library, and the people who should be using it.

MICHELLE BOND
Liverpool Hope University

ARIEL ANDREA
University of Wisconsin-Madison

GEORGINA CRONIN
University of Cambridge

VICTORIA L ORZECHOWSKI
Othmer Library

MAK JIE YING
National University Singapore

MICHELLE BOND

Faculty Librarian
Liverpool Hope University

Michelle is the Librarian for the Faculty of Science at Liverpool Hope University. She's the social media lead for the library, overseeing strategy, content and metrics. Michelle's currently working towards chartered librarian status and a PG Cert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

@Hope_Library
/HopeLibrary

@libmichelle

I started helping with the Hope Library accounts when I joined the library in 2013 and after around a year became social media lead. As social media lead I've got more members of the library team involved in social media, which has helped to increase the amount of content on our channels and had a big impact on our follower numbers and engagement.

We use social media to let users know about relevant library information; to promote resources and services; to find out more about our users; to increase our visibility on campus; as an additional way for our users to get in touch with us; and to show the human side of our service.

Key tips

1. **DON'T BE AFRAID TO SHOW SOME PERSONALITY.**

2. **CREATE A LIST OF LINKS OR ARTICLES TO POST INTERMITTENTLY – USEFUL WHEN TIME IS SHORT AND IT MEANS YOU DON'T HAVE TO THINK UP NEW MESSAGES EVERY TIME.**

3. **MIX UP YOUR OWN CONTENT WITH THINGS THAT ENTERTAIN OR INSPIRE YOU.**

> 66 We use social media to ... show the human side of our service. 99

We don't get a huge amount of interactions, which is something I'm trying to work on. Twitter moves so fast that responses need to be almost instantaneous – but as we don't have dedicated staff for this it's difficult to get a quick response.

I sometimes initiate conversations with library users through social media, mostly with other departments from across campus – the people running our sports facilities, for example. We also try to retweet our academic staff to help showcase their publications and activities.

One thing I introduced that has had a major impact is encouraging the team to retweet more on Twitter, rather than thinking they have to create their own posts all the time. I also created a list of suggested content, from information about opening times, to promoting new resources, to highlighting our different study spaces, showing where our referencing guides are, etc. This is all content that can be posted intermittently as it's always relevant. It helps take the pressure off thinking up something new all the time, too.

Posts that evoke memories or feelings tend to be really popular – we post images from graduation, for example. We did a Throwback Thursday post last year that was really popular. We posted pictures of our library before it was refurbished and had lots of likes and people reminiscing about their time studying here. I made sure to respond to each comment we got on the pictures to encourage further interaction – it was actually really fun! For me personally, having our library assistants suggest ideas for posts has been really memorable, as they haven't been involved in the social media team so far, so it shows they're interested and what we're doing has an impact.

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> 66 Facebook posts with pictures get more engagement than those without. 99

My new favourite thing is to create visual Facebook posts using Canva – there's some evidence to show that Facebook posts with pictures get more engagement than those without. This takes a little longer but is worth the time.

If resource wasn't an issue, I think we might join Instagram or try another social network, like Snapchat. I'd also like some advertising money so we could boost some Facebook posts, and also money for a digital communications librarian (preferably me!) to spend more time on our networks so they're cohesive and so we can investigate new channels.

Beyond my library
I love what Orkney and Shetland library Twitter accounts do – Orkney in particular (@OrkneyLibrary) is the one you think of when you think of library Twitter accounts. In my own sector, Liverpool University Library do a great job. The thing that makes these accounts stand out is the tone used – they're irreverent, funny and often a bit cheeky. They mix up information about the library with other content and have lots of user engagement as a result.

🐦 @Hope_Library
📘 /HopeLibrary

🐦 @libmichelle

ARIEL ANDREA

Chemistry Librarian
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Ariel's background is in inorganic chemistry. As Chemistry Librarian, she provides instruction and reference support to the Chemistry Department.

 @AskChemistry
 /askchem

The UW-Madison Libraries have many social media accounts, and they encourage the branch libraries, like mine, to have social media accounts as well.

I use Twitter because it is a quick and easy way to send out timely messages about workshops or other events. Twitter is used by many academics as a source for networking and news, and that's the audience I'm interested in. I find that posts about events, and posts that include an image, tend to get shared more.

I also use Pinterest – chemistry can be a very visual science, and so I try to show that off in one of the boards, Lab Beautiful. I also have a popular board that highlights chemical errors in media and TV, Cringe Worthy Chemistry.

Key tips

1. **SET UP NOTIFICATIONS SO THAT YOU CAN RESPOND QUICKLY WHEN A LIBRARY USER ASKS YOU A QUESTION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA.**

2. **IF YOUR SUBJECT HAS VISUAL APPEAL, TAKE ADVANTAGE BY POSTING TO IMAGE-BASED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS LIKE PINTEREST OR INSTAGRAM.**

> **"** Chemistry can be a very visual science, and so I try to show that off. **"**

My followers include students, faculty, staff, and other departments. I rarely get direct questions on social media – when it does happen, I have the accounts set up to send me notifications on my phone and iPad so I can respond quickly.

I really do not use either of these platforms for getting information to users about new resources – mostly because we do not get a lot of new things these days.

Beyond my library
College Library (@college_library) the main undergrad library on our campus, and Steenbock Library (@Ask_Steenbock) our main life science library, both have great twitter feeds and get good feedback.

GEORGINA CRONIN

Research Support Librarian
Betty and Gordon Moore Library
University of Cambridge

Georgina has worked in librarianship for almost a decade and has held an interesting mix of positions such as being a User Experience Librarian for a business school, working with polar scientists looking at melting in Antarctica and her current role where she supports STEM research across the University of Cambridge.

@MooreLib
/MooreLib

@senorcthulhu

cardiesandtweed.wordpress.com

We use social media to promote library services and resources, as well as communicating interesting stories, developments and resources from the wider STEM community. We constantly experiment with the content that we post but it is primarily about the services on offer mixed with university news, fun facts and whatever else we feel will be useful to our various user groups. We've found that tagging individuals when we share their content helps bring them into the conversation and initiate discussions with our community.

I personally always have my social media channels open so I can keep an eye on them and engage with topics as and when they come up. For our library channels, it currently greatly depends on the day or week. In a previous role of mine, it was quite common for our users to ask us questions on social media, which meant we had to be very vigilant so we didn't miss social media notifications and could answer questions promptly. However, doing this in 140 characters on Twitter definitely took some flexible thinking!

Key tips

1. **THINK LIKE A MARKETER: CATCH YOUR AUDIENCE'S EYE WITH A GOOD IMAGE AND THINK OF THE 'CALL TO ACTION'.**

2. **KEEP YOUR POSTS VARIED: EXPERIMENT WITH NEWS, FUN FACTS OR USEFUL INFORMATION TO FIND OUT WHAT GETS THE BEST RESPONSE FROM YOUR LIBRARY USERS.**

> ❝ It really does build a rapport … especially with distance learners. ❞

We've had many other students engage with us in person because of content that we have posted on social media and it really does build a rapport with our various user groups, especially those who may be distance learners and/or not visiting our physical building that often.

Over the years I have found that anything with a good picture and some sort of 'call to action' works wonders. Our users enjoy fun and informative content and they really engage with anything about Cambridge or the royal family. Don't ask me why, but those two themes always get a lot of positive engagement, especially from our alumni groups who keep following our accounts even after they've graduated.

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We have also conducted various user experience studies to get a better idea about how our users work in our various spaces which have provided some interesting insights.

In my last job at the Cambridge Judge Business School, a student needed access to a database but they were in London and just had their phone. Something wasn't working for them so they tweeted at us for help. I managed to work through the problem with them and direct them to a suitable alternative (the resource they needed was down for maintenance) all in a few tweets of 140 characters. It was tricky to keep everything concise yet helpful but we managed it and the student was delighted.

In future, I would love to have more branded campaigns with videos and competitions. However, we are working on this sort of content at the moment so maybe with some creativity and clever thinking, resources don't always have to be as big of an issue when developing engaging content.

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Beyond my library

I always enjoy the Wellcome Library's account (@WellcomeLibrary) as they really maximise their collections for communicating what they do. The Orkney Library account is another one that is always a pleasure to read and extremely funny with their tweets.

The work that NASA is doing across its various channels is positively inspirational. They use incredible images and video content as well as pulling in a lot of unique materials created by their astronauts while they are on the ISS. You really cannot replicate that kind of content, merely be inspired by it.

VICTORIA L ORZECHOWSKI

Librarian
Othmer Library of Chemical History,
Chemical Heritage Foundation

Victoria Orzechowski earned her MSLIS from Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA, in 2013. She is currently a Librarian at the Othmer Library of Chemical History. Her responsibilities span both public and technical services, including administration of the library's social media accounts.

in ® /vorzechowski
/vvbooks
/victoria.valusek

The most common remark we hear from patrons is that they would like greater accessibility to our collections (we have closed stacks). Enter social media as a tool to achieve such accessibility!

> 66 We use social media to ... share and connect our special collections content with users beyond those researchers who visit the actual library. 99

Key tips

1. **INITIATE CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR LIBRARY USERS TO FIND OUT WHAT CONTENT THEY WANT/NEED.**

2. **RESPOND PROMPTLY TO QUERIES TO SHOW THAT YOU'RE DEPENDABLE AND ACTIVE ONLINE.**

The Othmer Library is currently on Tumblr and Pinterest, highly visual platforms with strong library/bibliophile communities. Our posts highlight significant events in the history of chemistry and science generally, unique library holdings, and serendipitous finds that occur during the work day at the library.

We also cross-post on our parent organization's Facebook & Twitter accounts when appropriate (@ChemHeritage), using an institutional editorial calendar that specifies days for library content.

Content for social media is developed through a collaborative process, with 4 librarians and 3 archivists meeting monthly to plan posts for the upcoming month. I then spend about 2 hours a day (spread over 10-15 minute intervals throughout the day) on social media activities.

> 66 In order to get the most out of social media, you need to be willing to initiate conversations with users. 99

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If you want to build up a robust social media presence, you need to show users that you are active and involved online. Initiating conversations is thus a crucial part of this work. In addition, encouraging such conversations is one way of learning what content your users want and need.

We have seen a sizable increase in the number of user questions, comments, and interactions since we first established a social media presence. On average, we see about 20-30 interactions per post on our Tumblr blog from our current follower base of 13,575 users. Our Pinterest page is fairly new, but we are seeing an uptick in the number of interactions from users. Users seem to engage most with posts that feature rare book images, vintage advertisements from our archives, and behind-the-scenes activities in the library such as the cataloguing of new acquisitions and the processing of archival collections.

> 66 Timely responses do much to communicate to users that we are dependable and engaged online. 99

Responding promptly to users is a priority for us since timely responses do much to communicate to users that we are dependable and engaged online. As such, when questions are received, they are sent immediately to the appropriate staff member for response. As the administrator, I check with the staff member to make sure that a response was sent. I keep track of these exchanges in my monthly social media report.

Beyond my library

There are a number of libraries that maintain outstanding social media presences. On Tumblr specifically, some of the libraries that stand out for their incredibly interesting content and high levels of engagement with users are the University of Iowa Libraries, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries – Special Collections, and the Bodleian Libraries. On Pinterest, the Ohio University Libraries maintain a vibrant page with a range of intriguing images from its collections.

YOU MIGHT ALSO BE INTERESTED IN:
The Othmer Library's Tumblr for Libraries & Archives LibGuide

Victoria's forthcoming publication:
Kativa, H.S. & Orzechowski, V. (2016). Going viral: Using Tumblr for special collections advocacy and outreach. *Journal of Digital Media Management*.

MAK JIE YING

Assistant Librarian
National University of Singapore

Jie Ying is a Chemistry Resource Librarian at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Libraries. Since joining NUS Libraries in 2014, she has been exposed to various roles such as cataloguing, reference services and learning support. She holds a BSc (Hons) in chemistry from NUS. Her areas of interest include digital scholarship and citation metrics.

@NUSLibraries
/NUSLibraries

The NUS Science Library caters to the Faculty of Science which comprises six departments and more than seven thousand staff and students. We currently blog and run social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr, Foursquare and YouTube.

The Library Communications Team uses these networks to disseminate information on services and upcoming events, share photos from past events, and repost articles on the university's research breakthroughs.

I get to know my users by conducting information literacy programmes and outreach activities several times every semester for undergraduates and graduate students.

I currently receive enquiries mainly through online chats, emails and face-to-face interactions. As the Chemistry Resource Librarian, I intend to explore new ways in engaging the users to promote chemistry resources and learning support programmes.

The posts that currently do best and get the most responses for us are the ones that showcase the exhibits and events in NUS Libraries, as well as certain reposts of light-hearted articles and videos.

Beyond my library

My personal favourites include Instagram posts by New York Public Library. A title is creatively showcased every week through a bookface image. The weekly posts of vintage photos and famous quotes are interesting as well. Another favourite of mine would be Burlingame Public Library's Instagram. Besides its bookface images, I love how its resources and services are promoted through captivating videos and photos.

National Geographic's Instagram appealingly captures the beauty of life and nature. Coupled with an insightful caption, each breathtaking image brings viewers close to the wonders of the world.

Key tips

1. **GET YOUR AUDIENCE TO FEEL LIKE THEY'VE VISITED BY SHARING EVENTS AND EXHIBITS.**

2. **DON'T RESTRICT YOURSELF TO THE MORE COMMON CHANNELS – IF FACEBOOK'S NOT WORKING FOR YOU, TRY FOURSQUARE OR YOUTUBE.**

Summary of key tips

- Set up notifications so that you can respond quickly when a library user asks you a question through social media

- If your subject has visual appeal, take advantage by posting to image-based social media platforms like Pinterest or Instagram

- Think like a marketer: catch your audience's eye with a good image and think of the 'call to action'

- Keep your posts varied: experiment with news, fun facts or useful information to find out what gets the best response from your library users

- Get your audience to feel like they've visited by sharing events and exhibits

- Don't restrict yourself to the more common channels – if Facebook's not working for you, try Foursquare or YouTube

- Don't be afraid to show some personality

- Create a list of links or articles to post intermittently – useful when time is short and it means you don't have to think up new messages every time

- Mix up your own content with things that entertain or inspire you

- Initiate conversations with your library users to find out what content they want/need

- Respond promptly to queries to show that you're dependable and active online