

Case study

Manchester Libraries and social media

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Background

The days of promoting library services by simply printing a leaflet, leaving it on a table and hoping someone will pick it up are long gone. Our customers expect us to find them online, tailor our messages to their preferences and be able to engage in dialogue. In 2008 Manchester Library and Information Service decided to add a new activity its marketing line up – social media. Part of a wider audience development programme the project also included pop up street library in various city centre locations and email marketing.

Objectives

- Raise awareness of the range of library services, projects and events and to encourage wider take-up;
- promote the library's online offer – the website, online renewals,
- reservations, account management and the range of reference resources at the 24 Hour Library;
- encourage new members to join the library and lapsed members to return;
- speak to customers in a less formal way and open avenues for them to respond;
- find communities of interest and share stories we know will be of relevance to them.

Process

The story starts in 2008 when we launched a Facebook Page and a blog. The Lit List Blog aimed to promote a busy calendar of library poetry and literature events that often got lost on our corporate website. Facebook offered exciting opportunities to 'recycle' library content in an engaging and shareable way plus the opportunity to target specific audiences and even talk to our 'fans'. Daily updates point to our own and other people's content in an entertaining mixture of news, events, videos, photos and links. Our aim is to inform, entertain and draw attention to services people may not know about.

Content is sourced from everywhere – colleagues, the Manchester City Council website, our own archive photos, local news and a long list of blogs that I subscribe to in Feedly. Some Facebook updates are pre-scheduled and I check for comments about twice a day. Anyone can comment on our page and there are posting guidelines in our 'more info' section that I use to deal with inappropriate posts or spammers.

Our Facebook presence has led to some exciting partnerships. We piloted the Random House 'A Christmas Carol' book widget on our Facebook Page and ran an online reading group with live author chats courtesy of Vintage Books.

We also love Flickr! It's a bit of a cliché now but "going where the people are" has worked for us. In June 2010 Manchester Central Library closed for a three-year refurbishment. As a keen Flickr user I knew there was an active Manchester Flickr community so it seemed the perfect place to recruit local photographers to record the library as it was before the closure. Publicised through Twitter, Flickr and local bloggers, 760 beautiful photographs of Central Library were submitted to the Get Wisdom Flickr pool.

For speed of feedback, Twitter is pretty much unparalleled. Launching a new online reference resource (The Guardian and Observer archives), we needed to know whether or not it worked outside of the Council's firewall. After tweeting a request for people to test it, a dozen Twitter users responded pretty much immediately to verify that it was working. Moreover, without any prompting from us, half of those testers went on to retweet the news.

Something to note is that our Twitter followers differ in their demographic profile, tastes and interests to our Facebook users, demonstrating that diversifying our social media strategy means that we reach diverse audiences.

Despite the 140 character limit Twitter can be incredibly effective. A retweet from Manchester musician Clint Boon sent 15,000 people to our Flickr gallery in one day. Twitter has opened up our archives to a whole new browsing audience, who would otherwise not visit or even be aware of the archives.

Outcomes

Today more than 10,000 people follow Manchester Library & Information Service on Twitter (including Elbow's front man Guy Garvey!). The Lit List blog has become an established part of the Manchester blogging scene and we post daily Facebook updates that our fans and followers will like and share with their friends. We have also experimented with publishing content on Vimeo and Issuu and have run several two successful crowd-sourced Flickr projects.

Key points for effective best practice

But this is not a template for your organisation. One size doesn't fit all. Take a look at your library and identify where social media could have a positive impact, transform communication, energise employees, or simply delight your customers.

If you decide to go ahead take some time to prepare a plan to convince the doubters. Be ready to share impressive social media statistics - how many people use Facebook in the world, in the UK or in your town?

Research successful case studies and identify projects in your organisation areas that could benefit from social media tools. Know where to find social media policies and business plans in case you're asked to draft one. Be prepared to explain why a corporate website is no longer the best communication tool and have an amazing list of content ideas at your fingertips. What are you waiting for?

Conclusions and recommendations

It is a quick, flexible and cost-effective method of reaching and engaging customers who may not regularly visit libraries and an excellent way of opening dialogue with new audiences. Manchester Libraries has used several ways such as blogging, sharing photos/videos, tweets and Facebook to promote resources and activities and reach new audiences. It's cost effective, we can feature user generated content and it has helped us network with customers, publishers, authors, librarians, bloggers and developers from Manchester and beyond.

Useful links

- [Manchester Library and Information Service](#)
- [Visit Manchester's digital map of the city](#)
- [The Manchester Lit List](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Get Wisdom Flickr group](#)
- [Manchester Archives and Local Studies](#)
- [Manchester Archives Plus blog](#)
- [Manchester Archives Plus on Twitter](#)
- [Manchester Archives Plus on Flickr](#)