# Putting library content into Facebook

## Georgina Parsons, Systems Librarian, Brunel University

### Brunel Library's background in social media

At Brunel University Library, we maintain a keen watch on technology trends and have been using social media since 2009. Our Twitter account[1], set up June 2009, has 1277 followers as of February 2013, and we average 2.4 tweets a day. Our Facebook page[2] was set up in October 2009 and now has 2424 likes. With social media's focus being on communication and interaction, both sites are monitored constantly so that they are not simply streams for pushing news and updates, but places for conversations and debate.

In its past forms, Facebook has allowed for easy development of apps, and we wrote a catalogue search app for Facebook in 2010. Users could add this "box" to their page and use it to search the catalogue for books and journals from within Facebook; they could click items to link out to the catalogue to place reservations.

We did not include a My Account feature due to initial time constraints and the fact that the account side was more complicated; as the systems librarian, I developed the app, but am not a developer and have limited coding skills. We did not prioritise time to develop the account side later, as we did not see high usage of the app. As Facebook revised its page structures, and development platforms changed, the app was retired after around a year; it was decided to retire it rather than do the necessary re-coding to keep it working, again due to limited time and development resources.

When SirsiDynix announced their Social Library product[3] in late 2011, we were therefore very interested: it was a more functionality-rich Facebook app and we would not have the maintenance and development overheads. Social Library was to consist of two sides: one being the search and account features, and the other being the bookshelf feature, where users could save lists of items and create and share bookshelves.

### Getting approval for Social Library

The case to purchase Social Library was relatively easy to make and we were successful in getting the spending approved. At a time when student fees were rising and students were expecting more, it was important to show that the Library was still investing in and expanding services, yet we had already made great service improvements and had fewer opportunities for quick wins.

We were unable to release a mobile Library website so were especially keen to expand services in mobile-friendly environments to fill the gap. The possibility of paying bills through the account feature of Social Library was also particularly appealing as our online payment function in the Library catalogue is somewhat restrictive for users (pending our upgrade in summer 2013).

The sharing aspect of Social Library would also make it an excellent tool for viral promotion and enhancing the Library image with minimal staff input; marketing was an area we weren't investing heavily in, so again this showed added value to the app. Furthermore, with this interactive aspect, as well as our growing base of users liking our page on Facebook, we hoped it could draw more users than a simple search-only app so we were

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[1] http://twitter.com/brunel_library
[2] https://www.facebook.com/bruneluniversitylibrary
[3] http://www.sirsidynix.com/sociallibrary

optimistic that there might be a better uptake from students this time.

Finally, it is always pleasing to benefit from an early adopter discount!

**Beta testing and go-live**

In January 2012, beta testing of Social Library began. SirsiDynix have an excellent history of working with customers before products are released, which does require staff time investment from the  customer, but allows for very thorough testing and confidence and knowledge in the product from the outset.

Most bugs were ironed out very quickly – the benefit of beta testing being the direct contact with the developers to allow for fast resolution of issues – so the first release was satisfactory with no major problems. At this stage, Social Library consisted of just the catalogue search and account side, as the bookshelf aspect was set aside in order for it to be redeveloped for fuller integration with other SirsiDynix products.

May 2012 saw the official release of Social Library 1.0.4 and it was added prominently to our Facebook page with the default label "Catalogue and Account" (although a shorter name might be better on the display):
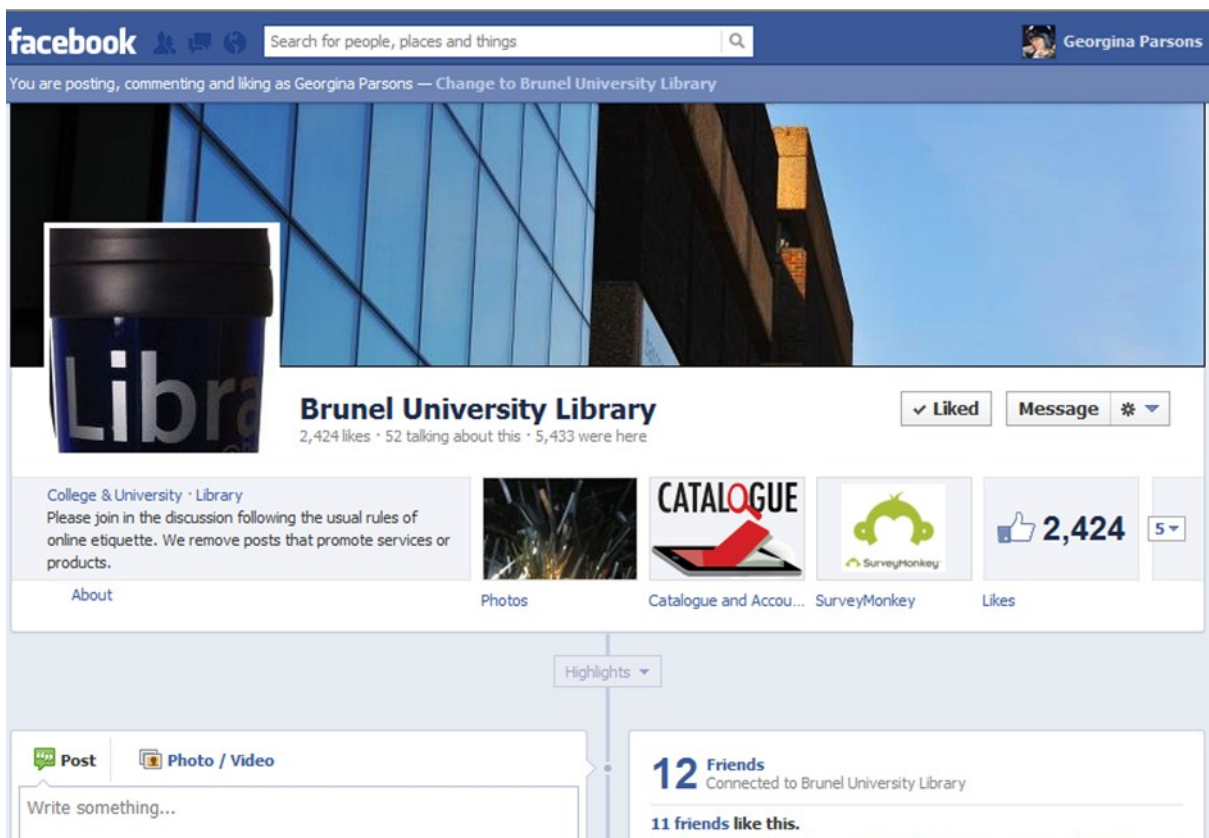


The installation was extremely simple and well-documented by SirsiDynix, with the admin time needed no more than a few hours. Similarly, any updates are controlled by SirsiDynix with email notification to sites to alert them to any major changes.

**Initial promotion**

We promoted the new feature on our existing social media channels, as potential users would already be there, with mentions on Twitter and Facebook and of course ensuring it is visible on the page. It is additionally mentioned on our website, under our "Getting Started"[4] section where we provide information on renewing; and in our knowledge base/reference software, LibAnswers, in an FAQ on renewals[5].

When informing students about account management options (for example, when they're asking for fines to be waived because of a reminder email they did not see), we also point out the various options available to them, including the Facebook features amongst other services.

We promote Social Library primarily for account management as Summon is our main search front-end encompassing e-books and e-journals as well as catalogue content, so we do encourage users to use that instead of the opac.

**An overview of the app interface**

The app homescreen is clean with a top bar of menu functions, with Settings only available to administrative users:
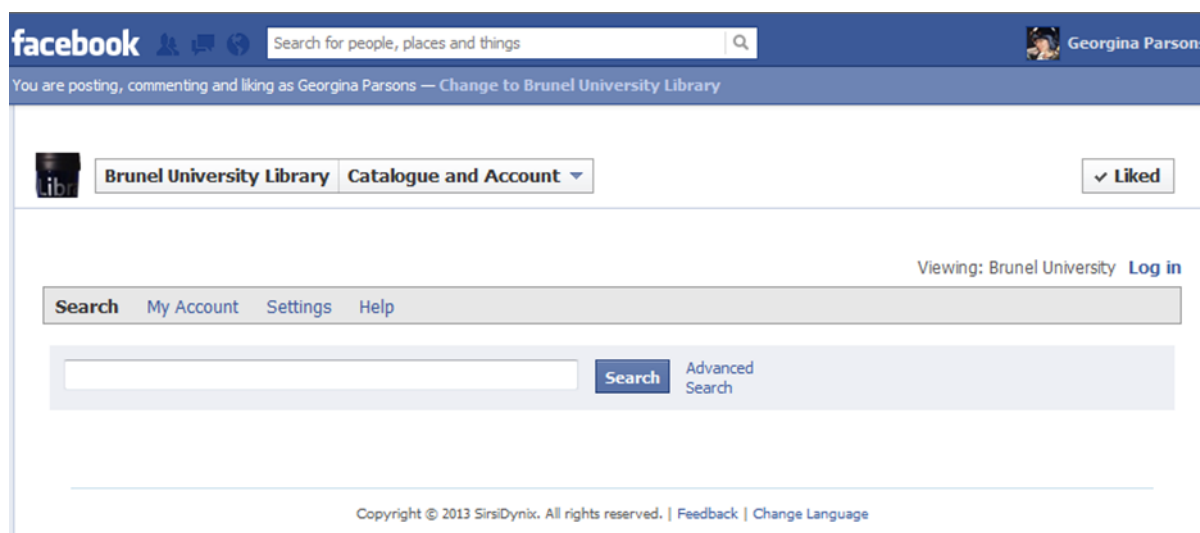


It is simple to use for a quick search, but there are no options for limiting by item type or location, and the Advanced Search takes a very different approach from that of the opac:

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4. http://www.brunel.ac.uk/services/library/about/library-101/renewing
5. http://libanswers.brunel.ac.uk/a.php?qid=78822

Limiting and filtering is not possible either from the search results screen, however the majority of searches on our opac and on Summon are quick keyword searches, so this may not be an issue to many users.

The search results screen is very clean with the expected feature of Facebook's "like" button by each item; it is not a simple "like" but rather a "share" feature, as it provides a pop-up for you to add a comment before posting the item to Facebook in your activity stream. There is also a "send" feature which allows the user to send the item to contacts using Facebook messages.

Cover art and other enrichment is displayed using the customer's Syndetics subscription where available.

The display is fully controlled by SirsiDynix with no options for customisation by the customer; this is generally not a problem although can cause confusion because of the difference from the opac. For instance the format icons are hidden on our opac because the way they are automatically set means they are not always accurate for our stock, and the "available" number does not offer the useful additional detail of the opac hitlist (giving the library and location).

The full item detail display screen is again very attractive with practical expanding boxes for enriched content such as the summary.



When clicking "My Account" the user is prompted to log in and then has a menu of three functions. The appearance is smooth and uses concertina boxes again for sections within a page, and includes by default both checkout history and payment history.

However, there is again currently no customisation so sites that do not charge fines cannot hide this tab, and we have been unable to rename "Holds" to "Reservations" which can lead to confusion. Having requested further local control, this is an area being reviewed by SirsiDynix, with some enhancements planned for an update later this year.

Example account screen:



## Outstanding development issues

Whilst bug fixes and tweaks were very rapid and we achieved quick feedback during beta testing, there have been few changes since Social Library's launch, apart from the introduction of Google Analytics integration in version 1.1 in late 2012. This release did not include bug fixes and several issues are outstanding; as with any software, there are minor issues which can be overlooked, but there are also some we see as critical.

In the earlier screenshot of the item details page, the availability box has column labels we would like to re-name (a minor issue and they may suit some libraries, but we would not refer to a "Shelf Number", and "material type" is somewhat misleading for some of our records); it also displays the LMS's internal policy names rather than the public-facing descriptions for both "Libraries" and "Material Type". This is a critical problem when internal names (which cannot be edited) such as 18VID-24HR are displayed as such, instead of their human-readable description of "18-rated DVD (3 day loan)". This is a long-term problem initially caused by practical restraints in the web services used, but where we are still awaiting a fix.

In the My Account screenshot, the date of "2/6/13" refers to a due date of the 6th of February 2013, because there is no "UK" version of the app (although currency can be configured and the Fines screen does show amounts in £). This is a more recent problem caused by an unannounced change from the previous display where the month was displayed in letters, therefore the month-day-year order was not ambiguous.

A recent update from SirsiDynix does, however, confirm that the above key issues are now scheduled to be addressed in the Social Library 1.1.1 release at the end of April 2013.

## Social Library evaluation and usage

The interface design is excellent with a very smooth, attractive, and intuitive layout and simple functioning throughout. The stability of the app has also been impressive, with only brief and intermittent access issues that are not replicable across browsers, so may reflect the unreliability of the Facebook platform rather than the app.

However, the two major issues mentioned above do mean that we are reluctant to promote the app further until these are resolved, and the lack of customisation is a drawback for us.

We have also learnt that the payment of fines through Social Library will only be supported with PayPal, whereas we use a different system (Capita's AXIS) supported by SirsiDynix on the opac but not in this app.

There are additional areas where improvements we had hoped for cannot be implemented, for reasons outside SirsiDynix's control. For example, we had wrongly assumed that this could be used from a mobile device; Facebook's page setup means that apps on pages are not accessible in Facebook mobile. Additionally, during beta testing many customers asked about the use of Facebook notifications as alerts when items are due, to take full advantage of the integration possibilities, but this is not possible due to Facebook coding/access limits.

Google Analytics for January 2013 shows 37 visits by 24 people to our Social Library instance; six of seven exit pages were areas of My Account. Transaction reporting in Symphony 3.3.1 required some configuration updates but from 3.4.1 renewal counts should be straightforward. Our average stats on the Library catalogue are 30 000 searches and 15 000 logins per month; Brunel's population is approximately 15 000 students and around 2 500 staff.

Whilst usage of Social Library therefore appears very low, there is no one clear and simple reason, but a variety of key areas that can be considered.

After our initial announcements, we have relied on general communications and FAQs rather than a marketing push. When the date and item displays are corrected we will be in a better place to promote Social Library again and try to increase usage.

However, not all staff and students may be on Facebook or simply may not want to combine work with their personal online presence (certainly, our Library page has only 2 424 likes, so it is unwise to consider our full user base as potential users of Social Library).

Currently the app does not offer many functionality enhancements over the Library catalogue, and, as Social Library is not accessible on Facebook mobile so users will necessarily be on a PC or tablet, the catalogue is logically a more efficient choice for searches and account functionality. As and when the bookshelves feature is introduced to Social Library (we await further news later this year), perhaps users will see more appeal in the app; this would also be a good feature to use in promotion.

Social Library is almost a year old so we are looking forward to seeing how it develops, and what user take-up might be achievable in the future.

*Georgina Parsons is happy to be contacted for further information on Brunel Library's Social Library experience.*