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# Web 2.0 in the Archive World

**Editor's Note**

After taking a year off as editor of *Primary Source*, I am glad to be back!

*The Primary Source* has been an avenue of sharing ideas, innovations, and strategies for fellow professionals throughout the state of Mississippi and beyond.  Although we all work in different repositories of various sizes and missions, we are all entrusted with the invaluable goal of preserving memory and sharing that memory with others.

This issue's articles focus on Web 2.0 and its possible uses in the world of archives.  The authors show how various repositories are incorporating the Web 2.0 experience across the country by utilizing social networking sites and programs such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and many others in order to reach current patrons as well as draw in new ones. They discuss what type of programs they are employing and the different strategies they have defined for their implementation.  In addition, they highlight any of the benefits, drawbacks, surprises, or challenges they have encountered along the way.

The Web 2.0 road is still a new one that has only been traveled a short distance.  These articles will hopefully help you at your institution when deciding what form of Web 2.0 to incorporate.

Enjoy,

Mona K. Vance
Editor


Mona K. Vance is the Archivist for the Local History Department at the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library in Columbus, Mississippi. She received her BS in Communications from Mississippi University for Women before earning her masters in History from the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She recently published her first book Images of America: Columbus through Arcadia Publishing. In 2011 she received the Award for Excellence for Archival Program Development from the Mississippi Historical Records Advisory Board and in 2012 an Award of Merit from the Mississippi Historical Society. She currently serves as Editor of the Society of Mississippi Archivists journal Primary Source, Co-chair of the Women Archivists Roundtable through the Society of American Archivists, and as a board member of the Stephen D. Lee Foundation in Columbus.

# A Pinch of This and Salt to Taste: An Iterative Approach to Social Media

Shannon Bowen-Maier and Rachael Dreyer

*Abstract*
*The American Heritage Center (AHC) formed a Web 2.0 Task Force beginning in April 2009 to develop a social networking strategy and implementation plan. Two years later, the AHC has a blog, a Facebook page, and a Twitter account. After a year and a half of engagement with these utilities, we have accumulated a small online following, gathered data about the kinds of content preferred by our users, and identified areas for future experimentation and growth. This case study will describe our strategic planning process, discuss the transition from concept development to implementation, and highlight how assessment has informed the AHC's plans for growing its Web 2.0 presence.*

Archives and libraries have increasingly adopted social networking tools as a part of their outreach strategy, and the American Heritage Center (AHC) at the University of Wyoming (UW) has been one of many repositories experimenting with this recent form of communication. In April of 2009, the AHC convened a task force to explore the ways in which social media channels could be used to enhance the repository's mission. The task
force began by investigating models of strategic engagement with social media and then proceeded to look at individual utilities, along with other repositories' approaches to their use. It evaluated You Tube, RSS feeds, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, blogs, and wikis on the basis of popularity, usability, resource requirements, and potential return on investment. Task force members queried other repositories with established social media presences about how and why they chose to invest in the utilities they did. Based upon the results of these analyses, the task force recommended the creation of AHC Facebook and Twitter pages, as well as a blog. It also recommended that members of the arrangement and description unit begin to edit Wikipedia entries related to the collections that they processed.
However, for the purpose of this article, we'll focus primarily on the AHC's use of Facebook, Twitter, and a blog hosted by Wordpress.

The implementation of the three main prongs of our social media strategy began as a trial. The blog (http://americanheritagecenter.wordpress.com/) was intended to publicize AHC operations, collections, and events. The Twitter account (http://twitter.com/#!/AHCnews) referred people to the blog and any other new online content related to the AHC, such as new digital collections, online exhibits, online finding aids and subject guides. The AHC
Facebook account (https://www.facebook.com/UWAHC) publicized events, newly donated collections, new finding aids and exhibits. It also provided a platform for communicating basic information about the AHC, such as hours of operation, contact information, and links to the main website. The goals for the trial echoed many of the themes described in the Smithsonian Institution's 2009 Web and New Media Strategy, namely that the utilities
enhance the AHC's mission-central communications, that they maximize "one-to-many" transmission of knowledge, that they attract larger audiences than the AHC could reach in person, that the tools contextualize and market AHC resources for users, and that the implementation model would allow for further innovation and change.

The overlapping content posted to the blog, Facebook page, and Twitter feed allow us to identify the most effective platform for communicating different kinds of information. The simple analytics built into each utility give us feedback about the impact of individual posts. Further, the interlocking nature of this communications strategy multiplies the impact that any announcement might have on our users. We repurpose content from both newly completed and legacy finding aids as blog posts, raising awareness of collections related to popular research topics. We also repost articles written for AHC publications and press releases sent to media outlets. Using repurposed content makes regular posting sustainable. This technique insures that our users are provided with a steady stream of information, while building in time for us to create, edit, enhance and upload new pieces.

A separate challenge that the AHC encounters with its social networking strategy is the difficulty of crafting a communication brand—a range of specific messages that promotes and highlights the AHC's collections, services, and mission that also invites meaningful participation from our audiences. For example, many of our blog and Facebook updates announce newly processed collections, new finding aids, or new donations to the collections. Other updates might publicize a public lecture or exhibit. The style of these posts is "broadcast" in nature; they do not intrinsically invite engagement or discussion from our online audiences. While an important part of our social networking strategy is disseminating useful information and "staying on-message," one of the obstacles in moving forward with our social media operations will be crafting meaningful content that promotes feedback from and engagement with our users.

Feedback and assessment are areas that the AHC encounters complications that shape our social networking approach, currently and in the future, as we gather more information about how our users are reaching us. Due to the dispersed and shared management of many of the web tools used to manage AHC collections and service delivery, tracking the online traffic patterns on some sites is simply not possible. The challenges involved with determining whether our social networking strategies impact information-seeking behaviors of our end users are myriad. Nonetheless, the assessment that we are able to conduct reveals that we are attracting users to our digital collections through our Facebook presence. Facebook sent 1,054 users to our digital collections portal from November 2010-November 2011; 267 users accessed the digital portal through the AHC blog. Over 1,300 users found their way to our digital collections from our blog and Facebook updates; these are, presumably, users that we may not have had an opportunity to reach through other means. But compare this with the 11,340 users who found our digital collections through Google. This sheds some light on how both researchers and casual users first approach their research queries and we can then use this behavior to inform our strategy. For example, in several instances, including a post that announced the digitization of the Charles Belden photographs, our AHC blog posts received more traffic than the official access points (University of Wyoming Libraries catalog and the Rocky Mountain Online Archives (RMOA)) because these links were higher-ranked Google search results.

Participation in social networking channels has given the AHC the opportunity to explore new modes of communication with current and potential users of our collections and services. In the initial year and a half in which the AHC has maintained an active online presence, we've seen the potential that social media hold for both information broadcast and engagement. We at the AHC look forward to exploring the possibilities for future engagement with our fans, followers, and researchers. However, our iterative approach requires assessment throughout the process, as well as a scalable, sustainable model so that our strategy can grow and evolve as the social media landscape shifts and morphs into new modes of interaction. The iterative approach we've chosen means that we are always working to perfect our

recipe for a successful social networking strategy that blends the complementary ingredients of engagement, branding, and assessment

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# Using Social Media and Web 2.0 Tools in an African-American Repository

Aaisha Haykal

## Abstract

The College of Charleston's Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture in Charleston, South Carolina is an archival repository, museum, and center for public programming dedicated to collecting, preserving, and making public the history of African-Americans in Charleston and the South Carolina Lowcountry. Currently, the social media strategy consists of maintaining a blog called "Not Just in February" and a Facebook page, but we are investigating other mediums. These platforms were chosen by the administration to promote the programs and archival collections at the institution. The effort to create an indelible Web presence is imperative if the institution wishes to stay engaged and current.

The Avery Research Center's staff uses Facebook to upload photos of its programs, highlight current news and events happening around Charleston, and share information on African-American history and archives on a national scope. Alternatively, the blog is a behind-the-scenes look at what archivists do, highlighting items within collections as well as bringing historical context to the records. The blog is used as a space for African-American and Charleston history scholars to engage the public with their history. As a result of using social media, the Avery Research Center has been able to connect with individuals and organizations locally and nationally to inform them of local African-American history that was hidden while concurrently getting people interested in preserving their own collections. However, some of the main challenges in using social media have been staffing and time to commit to updating the page and the blog.

## Introduction

Within the past five years or so, the use of social networks and media has become the predominate mode of communication in both the public and private spheres. Initially, social media was a way for people to connect with their friends and family; but now, all types of organizations, associations, and businesses use it to connect with their markets on a more personal level. Archives and other cultural institutions can use social media to harness the power of connecting and providing constant contact with their audiences. Archives and other cultural institutions are using social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and blogs to push content out to people, but they can also receive feedback and information from their users. Communication now becomes a two-way street. Users can provide their input on the collections and even offer more context to an event or record than what the archivist may be able provide. They are also able to ask more questions about the archival and/or curatorial process. As a result, archival work becomes more transparent than it historically has been.

The staff and the administration at the College of Charleston's Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture are embracing the notion that social media and Web 2.0 tools are necessary in order to connect and engage with current users and to cultivate new user groups.

**Avery Research Center's History**

To understand the importance of communicating with the public, it is important to know the history of the Avery Research Center.

The Avery Research Center is dedicated to preserving and making public the lived experiences and culture of African-Americans in Charleston, the Lowcountry, and South Carolina. The Avery Research Center was originally the Avery Normal Institute, which was established in 1865 by the American Missionary Association (AMA) to educate African-Americans in Charleston, South Carolina. The students were trained in teaching and other professions to create a classically educated segment of the African-American community. The school closed in 1954 due to social and financial pressures. However, when a developer was considering turning the building into apartments, Avery Institute alumni (forming the Avery Institute of Afro-American History and Culture), the College of Charleston, and other interested individuals rallied to purchase the building to create a center to document and preserve African-American contributions to Charleston and South Carolina. The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture opened in 1990 and the first collections came from Avery Institute alums who donated their papers and other school memorabilia.

**Social Media**

Due to the grassroots nature of the Avery Research Center's creation, using social media and Web 2.0 tools to make collections more accessible to the public is a natural extension of its mission.

Graduate students and/or grant-funded staff members maintain social media activities at the Avery Research Center primarily. Full-time staff members have the ability to update the social media platforms; but due to other responsibilities, this does not occur on a regular basis. Presently, the Avery Research Center maintains two social media platforms, the "Not Just in February" blog and a Facebook page.

***Blogging***

(*http://blogs.cofc.edu/averyarchives*)

"Not Just in February" is a Wordpress-based blog and was originally created by Amanda Ross and Harlan Greene, the archivist and project investigator respectively, for the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) grant that the Avery Research Center was awarded in 2007 to process their "hidden" collections. Grant staff updated the blog to inform the public about the collections on which they worked. In addition, the blog featured guest contributors such as Dr. Jeffrey Green, Joi Mayo, and Dr. Dale Rosengarten, who provided additional contexts to the Avery Research Center's collections and Charleston's and African-American history. The CLIR grant ended in June 2011.

The purpose of the blog is two-fold. It allows the archival staff to make collections more accessible to students, scholars, and community members who may not have known about them and it allows readers to comment and discuss the posts. The comments received on a blog post vary from "good job" and "very interesting" to "Really, the ledger can be an invaluable historical archive…because it

is very unique." The various levels of engagement with the posts do not take away from the fact people are learning about our collections.

Since the blog was created for the CLIR archives grant, the grant staff maintained the blog; but now that the grant has ended, other staff members are being asked to contribute to the blog, such as by writing a post about what they are doing and the conferences they are attending. Inviting other elements of the Avery Research Center to appear on the blog shows readers all the aspects of the institution they otherwise might not have expected or known.

***Facebook***

[https://www.facebook.com/pages/Avery-Research-Center-for-African-American-History-and-Culture/122353217454](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Avery-Research-Center-for-African-American-History-and-Culture/122353217454)

Facebook has become the primary resource people use for information about institutions they want to visit and to keep abreast. As of December 4, 2011, the Avery Research Center's Facebook page has 1,140 "likes" up from 1,077 (+63) from September 2011. The work I have done as the Outreach and Processing Fellow probably helped this increase, and it demonstrates the need to have a dedicated person to undertake a social media initiative. Updating a page only once a month or only when one has an event does not cultivate a following—one has to be proactive when connecting with Facebook "likers". Being proactive entails sharing articles, links, status updates, photos, etc. with other pages on the site that share a similar mission and interest as ours such as Lowcountry Africana and the Auburn Avenue Research Center. Once we share something of theirs, they return the favor and share one of our posts; thus, we are able to connect with people who like their page, but were unaware of the Avery Research Center. One can see this as the 21$^{st}$-century word-of-mouth method.

The platform is currently used:

- to update "likers" about upcoming events and commenting on past events that occurred at the Avery Research Center;

- as a place to upload pictures of events;

- to send out news article links and videos about Charleston, historic preservation, genealogy, African-American history, and issues facing cultural institutions to keep them informed about what is going on in the broader dialogue; and

- to highlight items in our digital library[http://lowcountrydigital.library.cofc.edu/cdm4/browse.php?CISOROOT=%2FART](http://lowcountrydigital.library.cofc.edu/cdm4/browse.php?CISOROOT=%2FART) (Note: this aspect of our social media initiative is new, but we hope it to be successful as people may be unaware of the digital library consortium to which the Avery Research Center belongs).

Possible future uses:

- Ask-an-archivist day(s)

- Archive chat day(s)

The technical challenges of maintaining a Facebook page are relatively minor as the platform is

easy to use and relatively self-explanatory. Recently, the site has added ways for administrators to see how people locate their organization and how they engage with us. This insight is important and allows us to examine the impact of what we are doing; what does and does not work; and how to improve.

The benefits of using Facebook as a way to engage with our "likers" are that we can expose them to information and resources about which they otherwise would not have known. Additionally, we are able to keep in contact with researchers and visitors once they physically leave the building (or even the state) and keep them constantly informed about what we are doing at the Avery Research Center. One of the biggest successes that we have had with Facebook has been the photos we upload to the site of our events and conferences. People comment, like, share, and tag people in the photos for us. This is good as it creates a community of supporters of the Avery Research Center in a virtual space.

### *Future Platforms: Twitter and Tumblr*

The Avery Research Center does have a Twitter account that was started by a graduate student, but it has not been fully utilized. Thus, when the revised news blog gets rolling, we will integrate the blog to filter into the Twitter feed. Furthermore, the Avery Research Center staff, graduate assistants and scholars (college and high school volunteers) will be able to tweet important statements from speakers to include those who wanted to attend an event, but could not. Right now, Tumblr (a microblogging platform) is not on our priority list; but in the future, it will probably be used as another information source to see what kinds of conversations are happening amongst different communities and how the Avery Research Center can participate. The implementation of these two resources will require a more refined strategy for our Web presence than what we currently have.

## Web 2.0 Tools

Social networks are not the only Web 2.0 tools that exist, consequently, archives and cultural institutions need to seek other ways for their patrons to engage with them and their collections. I have been considering other types of tools for the Avery Research Center to use, such as $21^{st}$-century subject guides, virtual exhibits, and user-contributed digital collections. I will discuss the last two.

### *Virtual exhibits*

The Avery Research Center has done exhibits both alone and in collaboration with other institutions. The Avery Research Center has made it a priority to reuse exhibit information for community events and programs, but the benefit of a virtual exhibit is that it can be accessed by a wider audience. Additionally, developing virtual exhibits allows this information to be presented in more interactive ways. Thus, I have been looking at developing virtual exhibits for at least two past exhibits and using multimedia sources (YouTube, iTunesU, etc.) and interactive tools (timelines, visualizations, etc.) to provide information about the collections and to get people thinking about them in a different way.

### *User-Contributed Digital Collections*

Currently, the Avery Research Center's collections do not reflect the lived experiences of African-American youth (ages 14–21) in Charleston, South Carolina. So I am leading the effort to create a digital collection of stories in varied formats of these experiences on seven themes including social justice and relationships. African-American youth in the Charleston area will be encouraged to submit their stories to a Web site based off of the Omeka Web-publishing platform. The benefit of this collection is two-fold as the underdocumented community will have the ability to share their stories and the Avery Research Center is able to connect with and engage with a population that has not historically been reached. Since this program has not been fully developed the outcome cannot be determined, but we at the Avery Research Center are excited about the possibilities of using this technology to involve youth in history and archives.

## Challenges

As aforementioned, historically the maintenance of social networks and Web 2.0 tools have mainly been the responsibility of grant funded staff and graduate assistants. This model is unsustainable and a defined strategy needs to be created to involve everyone. To get started, I have been encouraging more staff to contribute to the blog and information for the Facebook page.

Some reasons that staff have given about their lack of participation with the social media aspect of archives previously are that they are not familiar with the technology; they are busy; and that it is not a part of their job description. Yet, as I explain to them that in general the updating of Facebook, to comment on a feed or to write a short post to place on the blog does not take an inordinate amount of time. The demographic of the Avery Research Center staff is that most have not grown up with social media as the primary way to communicate; therefore, showing these staff members different Internet-based tools and how they can be used to improve access to the collections and extend their impacts has been one of my endeavors as the outreach fellow.

## Conclusion

As a whole, the Avery Research Center is embracing social networks and Web 2.0 technology/tools as a way to engage with both new and old users of our collections and that with a strong leadership, the Avery Research Center is ready to enter the 21st-century.

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# A Tale of Two Blogs: Lessons Learned Establishing *The Top Shelf* and *La Cocina Histórica* at the University of Texas at San Antonio

Sean Heyliger, Juli McLoone, Nikki Lynn Thomas

## Introduction

When establishing a blog, Special Collections departments face a variety of decisions that will affect the future shape of the blog and its readership. The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) Libraries Special Collections is in the unusual position of publishing two blogs with distinct audiences and content: a general department blog, *The Top Shelf*, and a collection-specific blog, *La Cocina Histórica*. This article examines various strategies employed by both of these blogs in the areas of content, targeted audience, management and authorship responsibility, media exposure, and platform-choice and how those strategies affect blog readership.

## Establishing Content Guidelines

UTSA Special Collections established *The Top Shelf* in October 2008 as an informal outreach tool, intended to demonstrate the department's activities to library staff, potential donors, and the local community by highlighting new acquisitions, special events, and content from collections. A decision was made early on to allow an open content format, with posts ranging from interesting items found in collections to featured researchers and staff introductions. This openness allowed staff to include items that, while important to the department, would not necessarily be featured on the university or library press feeds. Although announcements have a place in the scope of *The Top Shelf*, it should be noted that research-based posts generate roughly 2.5 times as many page views as announcements. Also, because the focus of the blog is so broad, staff sometimes have difficulty deciding on a topic, given the entire holdings of mid-size special collections to choose from. The challenge is to maintain a roughly equal balance between announcements and subject-based content.

Figure 1. Screenshot of *The Top Shelf*

Based upon the perceived success of The Top Shelf, a subject-based blog, *La Cocina Histórica*, was created in April 2010 to promote the department's Mexican Cookbook Collection. It was conceived as a dual-purpose cooking-archival blog that would post bilingual recipes from the collection every Friday. By posting recipes in both Spanish and English and testing recipes at home, the goal was to position the blog between as many potential user groups as possible— English speakers, Spanish speakers, historians, and food bloggers. The enthusiasm with which readers greeted the idea of preparing historical recipes inspired staff to dramatically increase their frequency. Currently, 56 per cent of posts are kitchen-tested, and comments posted to the blog suggest that readers appreciate this emphasis on kitchen-tested recipes. An open approach to content ensures that all of a department's activities fall within the blog's purview as is the case in *The Top Shelf*. However, a tightly-defined scope as is employed by *La Cocina Histórica* simplifies the process of planning posts.

Figure 2. Screenshot of *La Cocina Histórica*

## Targeting Audiences

As noted, *The Top Shelf* was originally envisioned as an outreach tool to reach many potential audiences. However, writing for such an undefined audience has further complicated the process of topic selection. Blog posts can at times seem disconnected and lacking in continuity, which makes it difficult to cultivate a committed audience. Readers are less likely to regularly follow a blog when they cannot predict whether the content is applicable to their interests.

By focusing on publishing content in a specific collecting area—recipes in English and Spanish—*La Cocina Histórica* sought to attract a more targeted readership of foodies, culinary historians, and amateur cooks. The more than 1500 site visits *La Cocina Histórica* receeives each month illustrates its popularity. Several reference questions from readers indicate that at least a portion of the audience consists of cookbook enthusiasts.[1] And the fact that a scattering of the blog's 35 followers subscribe from locations in Mexico suggests that the blog is reaching both English and Spanish-speaking readers. Attracting a popular, rather than professional, audience for an archival blog is challenging. If readers can tell that a blog will regularly feature content in their area of interest, they are more likely to return. Furthermore, focusing on sharing content directly from collections, rather than telling narratives about collections, may attract more readers with a topical, rather than general interest in special collections.[2]

## Blog Management

Determining who will have ongoing responsibility for managing content and scheduling posts is an often overlooked, but important step in the process of setting up a blog. For *The Top Shelf*, all professional staff are able to post and edit blog entries with no single person overseeing the management of the blog. This has frequently led to long gaps between posts, as well as multiple posts appearing close together. The only regularly scheduled post is a formulaic list of monthly acquisitions, unlikely to have wide appeal. Statistics from *The Top Shelf's* first blog hosting service demonstrate that while a popular and informative post may cause a spike in readership, a schedule of regular posts, no matter the content, is needed to maintain that readership.
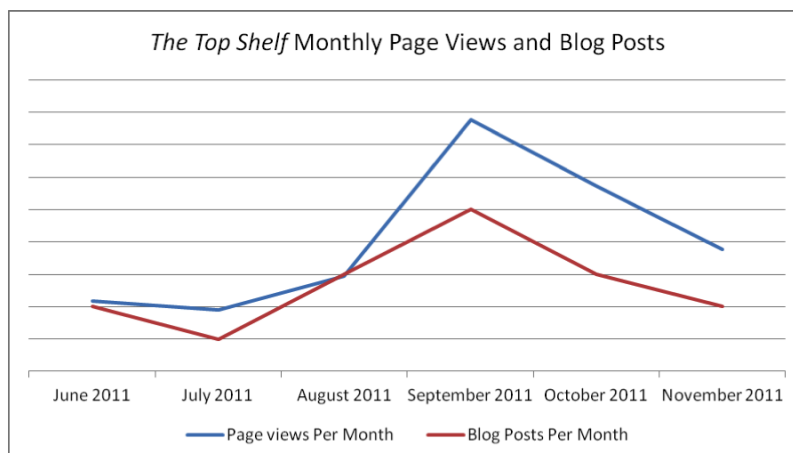


Figure 3. Page Views and Posts, *The Top Shelf*

The rare books librarian is responsible for scheduling posts on *La Cocina Histórica* and for this reason the blog has maintained a regular, weekly posting schedule. There is broad agreement among staff that assigning management responsibility to one person is vital to maintaining consistent scheduling of blog posts. Page view statistics from both blogs demonstrate that consistent and frequent blog posts are an important factor in generating and maintaining readership.

## Authorship

Author burnout has become a serious problem after three years of publishing *The Top Shelf*. This issue was temporarily solved by recruiting support staff to provide content from projects they were working on. Recently, however, the department has lost all support staff. Student workers and graduate interns are sometimes able to fill gaps left by support staff, but because they work limited hours and their posts require a high level of staff intervention, it is not feasible to rely on student labor for regular content. Staff reduction has not only increased author burnout, but also lowered the blog's priority among professional staff's growing list of responsibilities. The loss of support staff has significantly reduced the frequency of blog posts, which in turn has negatively affected readership.

*La Cocina Histórica* has largely been able to maintain a frequent posting schedule by recruiting authors throughout the library, which has also raised the profile of the department and encouraged staff from other departments to develop an interest in Special Collections. However, even though 12 per cent of posts are written by non-departmental staff, *La Cocina Histórica* still faces author burnout. This is partially attributable to the frequent posting schedule and to the commitment of personal time and money required to prepare historical recipes.

All blogs will likely face author burnout at some point, which is likely to be exacerbated by the increased responsibilities and reduced staff many special collections departments currently face. UTSA does not have a tested solution to offer, but possible strategies include recruiting guest bloggers, reducing posting frequency, and avoiding time-intensive posts. It must be recognized, however, that the latter two strategies are likely to negatively impact the blog's readership. A forthright discussion and decision on the place of the blog in the department's priorities will help staff to rank it appropriately within their individual responsibilities.

## Leveraging Local and National Media

*The Top Shelf's* varied content does not lend itself to being easily summarized to appeal to a particular audience. For this reason, *The Top Shelf* has not been featured in local or national news outlets. However, a significant, though unsustained, increase in readership has been seen when local news outlets run articles on the donation of archival collections to the department. In September 2011, Special Collections received the collection of a notable businessman and philanthropist that was featured on several local and national news sites. Though none of the news stories linked to *The Top Shelf*, readership spiked to 776 page views for the month of September, which was a three-fold increase from the previous month. But because the increase was related to a singular event, the page views for *The Top Shelf* in the months following the spike returned to previous levels.

Due to its focus on a particular subject, *La Cocina Histórica* has better lent itself to leveraging local and national media to increase readership. Since *La Cocina Histórica's* inception, public relations personnel for the university and the library have featured the blog as a way to highlight the university's growing research collections. *La Cocina Histórica* has been featured on a popular local culinary blog, in UTSA's alumni magazine, and on a bilingual library blog. The most significant media exposure, however, came from a holiday-related press release that UTSA issued on December 21, 2010, which was picked up by more than 500 news feeds, including Fox News Latino. Referrals from the latter led to *La Cocina Histórica's*busiest day with 500 visits on January 5, 2011. The media coverage led to a dramatic increase in readership in the following months—a 20 per cent increase in page views from November 2010 to February 2011 and an additional 27 percent increase the following month. Not all blogs or collections easily lend themselves to leveraging media coverage, but when possible, it is well worth pursuing.[3]
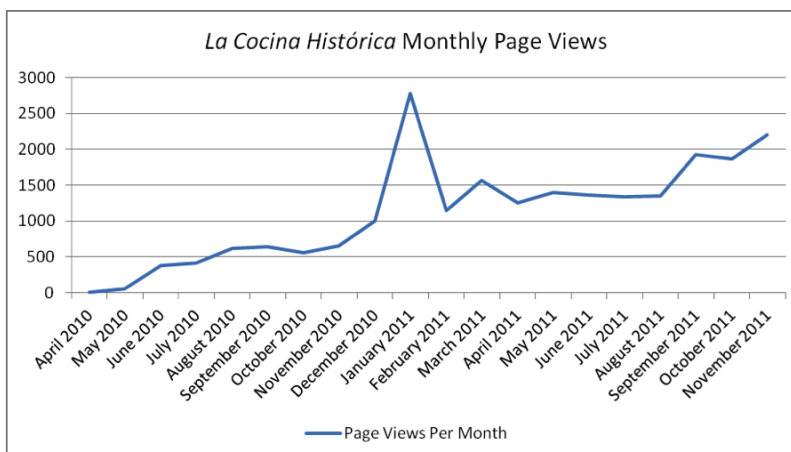


Figure 4. Page Views by Month, *La Cocina Histórica*

**Choosing a Platform and Maintaining Continuity**

*The Top Shelf* and *La Cocina Histórica* are both hosted by third-party vendors and not the university. After two and a half years, *The Top Shelf* changed hosts in June 2011, requiring a new URL. The change in blog platform was not only disruptive to staff, but also negatively affected the blog's readership. *The Top Shelf* had built a substantial following at its previous URL, but statistics suggest that many regular readers did not follow the blog to the new address. Regardless of whether readers consciously decided not to follow the blog to the new URL, or simply missed the announcement, Special Collections' staff should thoroughly evaluate various platforms before deciding upon a blog host so as to avoid future disruptions.

*La Cocina Histórica* has been hosted by Wordpress since its beginning. The fact that Fox News Latino's article about the blog continues to refer readers almost a year later highlights the potential for lost page views that a change in URL could cause. If possible, it is preferable for a blog to be hosted by its parent institution to ensure that the URL remains constant over time. Whether self-hosting or using a hosting service, it is important for staff to discuss how the blog will be integrated into the larger library or institutional website, as 47 per cent of referrals for The Top Shelf and 36 per cent for La Cocina Histórica are from the UTSA Libraries' main page.

**Conclusion**

This article has examined how choices in the areas of blog content, targeted audience, management and authorship responsibility, pursuing media coverage, and platform choice influence a blog's readership. Before creating an archival blog, staff should consider each of following questions and how each will affect a blog's readership:

1. How in-depth and frequent will the posts be? What type of content will be included or excluded?
2. Is the department seeking broader awareness for all collections, or is it trying to attract a niche audience for a particular collecting area?
3. Who will be responsible for scheduling, authoring, and editing posts?
4. How will the department utilize potential media outlets? What institutional support is available publicizing the blog?
5. If self-hosting is not institutionally viable, what factors will be considered when choosing a platform?

In some of the areas discussed in this article, one choice is clearly preferable, while in other areas the relative benefits and disadvantages of various strategies must be weighed.[4] Ideally, a department blog will be managed by one staff member, will have regularly scheduled posts, and will feature content that appeals to a particular audience. But each department must devise a workable plan to build a blog's readership based upon their collecting foci, staff expertise, institutional support, and available resources.

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[1] Reference questions include inquiries about where to obtain originals or digitized versions, English translations, and reproductions of cookbooks.

[2] For more information on performing surveys of blog readers to determine blog content, see Joanna Blair and Allison V. Level, "Creating and evaluating a subject-based blog: planning, implementation, and assessment," Reference Services Review 36:2 (2008): 162-164, accessed December 1, 2011, doi: 10.1108/00907320810873020.

[3] For a more general discussion of marketing principle for library blogs, see Jill Stover, "Making marketing work for your library blog," Internet Reference Services Quarterly 11:4 (2008): 156-157, accessed December 1, 2011, doi: 10.1300/J136v11n04_10.

[4] For an overview of general steps to planning a library blog, see Joanna Blair and Cathy Cranston, "Preparing for the birth of our library blog," Computers in Libraries 26:2 (2006) 12-13, 54.

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# Social Media Outreach: How the Ernest J. Gaines Center Explores New Platforms

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The Ernest J. Gaines Center at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (UL Lafayette) is an international center for scholarship on Ernest Gaines and his work. The center honors the work of UL Lafayette's Writer-in-Residence Emeritus and provides a space for scholars and students to work with the Gaines papers and manuscripts. Born in 1933 on a plantation near New Roads, Louisiana, Gaines based his award-winning novels on the African American experience in the rural South. His works include *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and *A Lesson Before Dying*, both later produced as award-winning films. Having a great research collection is a start, but it is important to attract patrons that will utilize these important resources. As a new and growing research center, the Ernest J. Gaines Center presents and introduces itself using social media platforms such as Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/ErnestGainesCenter) and Twitter (@Gaines_Center). The results of this type of outreach have been positive and very easy to continue.

It is very easy to become lost in the maze of special collections and the library. The Ernest J. Gaines Center saw that creating an online presence should be the first step in promoting the mission of the center. A limited budget and small staff meant using free technology to enhance and broaden the effective outreach of the center. Having an online presence has not only saved money but it has brought the voice of the patron to the archivist and director. Utilizing social media brings voices from the surrounding area and an international perspective to the center. The mission of the Ernest J. Gaines Center is to foster research and scholarship on the life and works of Dr. Gaines, to archive, house, preserve, protect and utilize the "Collection of Ernest J. Gaines," and to make the collection available to scholars in perpetuity. New media platforms have enabled the center to fulfill and enhance their initial mission. These platforms create an inviting effect for the center in a way that archives sometime do not come across.

The biggest audiences that the center seeks to provide research services to are students. Debates are now emerging about the social and learning benefits of social media technologies on the traditional undergraduate student experience and how it shapes their learning experience. Emerging research seeks to understand how the use of Web 2.0 technology, particularly social media, is enhancing academic and social engagement. Examination of these issues will ultimately lead to greater understanding of how colleges and universities can utilize these technologies responsibly, ethically, and for the enhancement of student learning. A very effective way to promote the archives is to understand the student demographics and the surrounding community. The next step is to pinpoint the flow and objective of your online outreach.

Student employee participation is an effective strategy to attract other students. The Ernest J. Gaines Center spoke with our student employees and asked them to join and promote the center on our social media platforms. The students were then asked to share the information with their social media network. Another way to engage the student population is to let them preview and critique the social media posts before making them live. Students know how to target other students and come up with ideas that the staff would have never thought of. They also are able to add content that they feel will interest a diverse user population. The student voice has been very important to promoting the Gaines Center due to their advance knowledge and experience with

these platforms. They also have the ability to change layouts and make the pages more appealing to their peers. By promoting the center to fellow students, as well as finding interesting artifacts in the collection to highlight, our student employees help promote and encourage the mission of the center.

The Gaines Center's social media platforms are used as advertising space to promote programming. Every event is posted and sent out to a worldwide audience. The events are enhanced with quotes, and photographs that relate to the event posted on the various social media platforms. For example, the center hosts a monthly movie series. Leading up to the movie presentation, unique and related materials are posted to show the relationship between the movie and Ernest Gaines. This has created dialogue and discussion that helps to bring people to the events. Games, trivia and polls can be created on Facebook and these tools have also helped spur dialogue. The polls are also a great way to see what type of events the patrons would be interested in for future planning.

The surprising result of this outreach has been the local community response. The Gaines Center easily draws students to the events on campus, but the social media presence has drawn community members with no ties to the university. These community members would have not known about the events if not for the social media presence. For a recent movie screening in the Gaines Center, we posted a few facts about the original release of the film. The community users of our social media pages posted about the original perception of the film and the reaction when it was release. This type of discussion is a great way to teach the students about the history of the film and help the community feel compelled to attend. In the future the Gaines Center will work on streaming events through social media networks. Every week Facebook sends an email with insights from the page to the owner of the account. Administrators of the Facebook page can log into the account and see a week by week chart of how your page is being viewed and whether people are talking about it. It also shows if friends of the people viewing your page are also getting information. These valuable statistics and data help provide evidence of which social media networking efforts are working.

University wide social media pages have also added to the success of the outreach in the Gaines Center. The University of Louisiana at Lafayette has a large social media presence and they help other university pages promote themselves. Various colleges, student groups, alumni chapters and departments around the university have social media pages to promote themselves. The center uses these university pages and asks that they repost items and encourage their users to visit our pages. It has created a shared network of social media pages that all relate to UL Lafayette. By utilizing this broad audience base, the Gaines Center has been able to bring in a wide pool of visitors. This help has been vital for the promotion of the Gaines Center. Collaboration is imperative for an effective online social media presence. Contacting other repositories in the area or ones that have similar research focuses can help researchers know where to search for information and can provide the foundation for joint events and projects.

One of the most important rules for having an effective presence online is to be dedicated. The Gaines Center updates its online presence 2-3 times per week. Once you start using social media platforms you have to have a continual online presence to promote your repository. It can be very easy to forget to maintain your social media pages and your presence becomes outdated. Visitors are highly mobile and your information must be current in order to promote and showcase your collection and repositories mission. Patrons will visit seeking up to date information and may never understand the great research and cultural opportunities if the page has not been updated.

Thinking outside of the box can attract a diverse user population. Social media platforms are very

easy to use and everyone in the repository can participate and bring their perspectives to the site. These sites can also aid in website integration and content development. Social media may be used as the official online presence for smaller repositories. It can be more efficient than maintaining and updating a full website. The advent of social media technology offers possibilities for dramatic shifts in the delivery and accessibility of archival collections. As archivists, we have an obligation to study how our user population utilizes such technology. As we understand the use, we can develop practices that will assist us in continuing to achieve effective outreach.

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