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Dipping into the Stream

Building collegial ties on Twitter and FriendFeed

by Meredith Farkas

When you think of Twitter, you might think of Oprah. You might think of Ashton Kutcher. But do you think of Roy Tennant, Jessamyn West, and ALA's Association of College and Research Libraries? While social networks are useful for keeping up with celebrities, friends, and family, they're also valuable professional networking tools that can connect you to the brightest individuals in librarianship. I have developed rewarding professional relationships through my use of Twitter and FriendFeed and believe these sites have value for librarians looking to further their careers.

Following the leaders

Twitter is a social networking and microblogging service where users update the people following them with broadcasts (tweets) of 140 characters or less. Users choose who they want to follow and will receive tweets only from those individuals. You can comment on what someone else tweets by using the @username reply function and can promote a tweet you liked to your followers by retweeting (rebroadcasting) it. Twitter is an "always-on" technology, so people who use Twitter simply dip into the stream of information when they have time rather than expecting to keep up with everything.

The population of librarians on Twitter has skyrocketed as people increasingly use it more as a tool for

professional communications than a medium to share what they had for lunch (though

there is still some of that). Twitter's not only useful for building relationships with library professionals, but also for getting help and keeping up with the profession. I constantly find people tweeting links to useful articles or discussing studies whose results could impact my work. Also, once you are part of a professional network on Twitter, you can "query the hive" for feedback or help.

FriendFeed is similar to Twitter in that users share resources and broadcast updates, but it's considered more of a lifestreaming tool that can aggregate your entire social media presence. It can pull in your tweets, blog posts, websites you bookmark, photos you share, and much more. Users can comment on anything posted to FriendFeed and conversations are much easier to follow since, much like a blog, the comments show up just below the original post. Updates on FriendFeed are not limited to 140 characters, but should still be brief.

Grow your own hive

So how do you get people to follow you on Twitter and FriendFeed? When you follow someone in either network, they will receive a notification that you did so and will have the opportunity to follow you back if



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they want. Writing interesting content is therefore important, but, as with blogging, you need to interact with people you're interested in networking with.

In Twitter, you can do this by commenting on the things they post using the @username reply. It's easy to follow mentions of your username in Twitter, so they'll see your comment. In FriendFeed, interacting is as easy as commenting on someone's post, since your comment will show up right below their post. If people find your response interesting, they'll likely check out your profile, see what you've shared, and perhaps decide to follow you.

Trying to choose between FriendFeed and Twitter? Use both; have your FriendFeed posts show up on Twitter and vice versa. A drawback is that you can end up having parallel conversations in each space. Lots of tools exist to manage these streams so you can keep up with what's important to you and filter out what isn't. There is so much great content in these social networks: just adjust the information flow to a level that works for you. ■

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