

The social library

By David C. Waddell.

*This piece highlights some of perspectives from the session titled *The Social Library at the 2013 BC Library Conference*. The panelists balanced pragmatic suggestions with a dose of humour to remind everyone that social media can be daunting but that it is conquered through small, manageable steps.*

Jessica Woolman, UBC Web Communications Coordinator Communications & Marketing

Jessica Woolman, a graduate of SLAIS who has worked in both public and special libraries, provided some tips about getting started with social media. Responsible for UBC Library's digital media channels, Woolman serves on the UBC Social Media Committee. She pointed out that social media requires you to get under the hood of the technology if you want to understand how you are seen by the public. For example, Facebook's EdgeRank is the system that decides the order of content when it appears on your Facebook wall. Woolman suggested that understanding EdgeRank will help you get to the top of your users' walls. Contributing factors include how often individual users directly interact with you (by liking a page), how popular a post is among users (total number of people liking a page), as well as the type of post (such as those that include pictures getting a better position).

Woolman not only covered the nitty gritty of what makes social media tick, but she also provided tips about handling unhappy users. She recommended that content managers always address user complaints out in the open with the intention of showing the organization as responsive to user comments. This way your audience sees that you care, can take criticism, and also take action. Woolman also proposed how this can often turn around a user's negative opinion simply by answering the question or offering to help. The user may apologize and even admit to simply having a bad day.

Allan Cho, Community Engagement Librarian, UBC's Irving K. Barber Learning Centre

Before the start of the session, Allan Cho left sheets on everyone's seat. These sheets contained a QR code on one side and an image from UBC's campus on the other. Already, we could tell Cho's presentation would be particularly interactive. Remember QR

codes? These Quick Response codes are visual codes (like bar codes) that contain information that can be read by an app. They are composed of tiny black and white squares and are typically on advertisements. You can simply pull out your phone and take a picture of the code to be directed to the correct website (no typing required).

Augmented reality takes the concept of taking a picture as a way to directing users to content to a whole new level. Cho pointed out that persistent connectivity is fairly common with the influx of smart phones, wifi, and mobile data plans and this connectivity creates new possibilities. Instead of using a picture of a QR code to direct someone to a website, a user takes a picture or video of an actual location and text boxes are added directly onto the image itself. Similarly, a phone that uses a global positioning system (GPS) can find where you are and provide you with mediated reality of graphics and text that relate to your journey through the physical world. This can transform ordinary experiences with historic information and factoids automatically at your fingertips.

Cho's presentation reminded me that innovation in libraries is about helping people realize how much information is all around them. With augmented reality, UBC spaces can leap to life in the hands of visitors and students.

Signe Housser, Career Commons at Vancouver Public Library

Signe Housser pointed out that keeping an eye out for the next big trend is a good idea and to never be afraid to leap in. For example, she recommended that libraries should make accounts for both popular and obscure social media platforms in order to claim a good login name. From there you can decide which ones actually make practical sense for your library. Having access to an account name that is very close to your official name will help your users recognize you online.

For sharing career and employment information online for the VPL Career Commons, Housser is a big fan of Twitter because it is easy to network between organizations and user groups with Twitter just by mentioning each other in tweets. Housser suggested it is incredibly important to reach out to related

organizations and businesses to see what others are doing and also to set up potential partnerships in the future.

Houser biggest take away message: If you don't know what you are supposed to do with a social media tool, then the sky is the limit! Branch out and get your hands dirty. For example, Houser believes that Pinterest is the next big thing thanks to its emphasis on communicating via pictures and short messages. It was not clear exactly what messages Pinterest users might be looking for - some users simply used the service to put up pictures of their pets. However, Houser incorporated motivational images and humorous pictures to her employment related messages across. She said she was surprised at how much interest these images generated, so clearly trying something new on social media can really pay off.

Alexis Greenwood, Coordinator, Skilled Immigrant InfoCentre, Vancouver Public Library

Alexis Greenwood loves finding ways to make every message impactful and is big on being personable and direct on social media.

Greenwood recommended combining all of your tweets, posts, and social media content into one web space. This makes sure that the time you put into writing and creating content is being well spent. Being able to access all your content in one place is not only valuable to see how your social media presence works as a whole but is also valuable for your audiences. The service <https://www.rebelmouse.com> collects streams of information made across various social platforms and pools them all in one website. It makes a great home page because it shows all the social media work you

have been doing and gives a real sense of how your overall message in the communities you serve.

Greenwood reminded us that we are working hand in hand with other libraries and organizations. If you do a stellar job at answering an information need for a user, you will want to share your skills and resources with others in the same boat; this build trust and is a great way to hear about best practices.

I liked Greenwood's closing message because it crystallized what social media is really about. She reminded library staff to always be compassionate and focused on our users needs whether in person or on social media. This can mean going the extra mile in a conversation, taking the time to follow-up, and actually getting to know the people you serve. Greenwood reminds people that social media is just a stepping stone that is a part of an entire process of building trust; we should not be afraid to pick up a phone and get in touch if a virtual interaction warrants a personal interaction. Taking the communication one step further can get new initiatives off the ground and in Greenwood's case lead to the creation of virtual job fairs.

I hope that these snippets inspire you and your library to try something different. Remember, if you found something interesting here and want to continue the conversation, every single speaker is wired and ready to hear your thoughts. Social media is friendly, so do not be shy!

David C. Waddell is a recent graduate of SLAIS and is interested in the vibrant future of public libraries, which will inevitably require a bold curiosity for new ways to communicate and engage with patrons.