

Chapter 7

Maximizing Social Media Tools: Planning and Evaluating Social Media Strategies for Special Libraries

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of social networking sites and platforms has paved the way for alternative marketing and information dissemination tools. Several institutions, including special libraries, take advantage of this new technology due to its low cost, ease of use, and wider reach. But since it is a relatively new technology, and its practice is usually not formalized, there is a lack of policies in implementing social media campaigns, especially in special libraries. While social media tools are very popular and easy to use, they still demand considerable time and effort. Thus, it is important to evaluate the impact of special libraries' use of social media among their clientele and target audience. This chapter will feature selected social media tools appropriate for special libraries and recommend guidelines in planning social media campaigns and evaluating their impact.

INTRODUCTION

Every day, millions of people interact in social media. It has undeniably become an integral means of communication in today's highly connected age of the Internet, both for personal and business purposes.

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Maximizing Social Media Tools

Over the past decade, several social networking sites and platforms have proliferated. The emergence of such has paved the way not just for convenient personal communication, but for alternative marketing and information dissemination tools, as well. Several businesses or institutions, including special libraries, take advantage of this new technology due to its low cost, ease of use, and wider reach.

However, it is a relatively new technology and as such, its practice is usually not formalized. Several people are proficient with social media use on a personal basis, but this does not necessarily translate to good practice when tasked to utilize social media skills for the workplace. For professional use, there is a lack of policies in implementing social media campaigns, especially in libraries in general, and special libraries, in particular.

While social media tools are very popular and easy to use, they still demand considerable time and effort. It may seem easy to implement but there are several things to be taken into consideration, and special skills needed for better execution. Thus, it is important to evaluate the impact of special libraries' use of social media among their clientele and target audience. This chapter will feature selected social media tools appropriate for special libraries and recommend guidelines in planning social media campaigns and evaluating their impact.

Social Media

Social media is generally defined as “forms of electronic communication (as web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)” (Merriam-Webster, 2014). Its history can be traced way back in 1997 with the launch of the “first recognizable social networking site” SixDegrees.com (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Its usage went mainstream with the popularity of MySpace in 2004. Many social media sites and platforms have come and gone and the landscape continues to evolve.

There are hundreds of social media platforms that can be grouped into several categories. Lou Safko, in his book *The Social Media Bible* (2010), classified various social media tools into 15 categories. These are Social Networking, Publish, Photo Sharing, Audio, Video, Microblogging, Livecasting, Virtual Worlds, Gaming, Productivity Applications, Aggregators, RSS, Search, Mobile, and Interpersonal. There are social media tools that fit multiple categories. However, this chapter will mainly focus on the Social Networking category wherein most tools are also able to provide functions in other categories such as publishing, photo/audio/video sharing, microblogging, among others. Furthermore, the focus will be on the most widely used platforms (at least in the Philippines), particularly Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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