

Chapter 9

Enhancing an Academic Library's Social Media Presence Using Peer-to-Peer Marketing: The Benefits of Student Content Creators

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ABSTRACT

The San José State University Library first became involved in social media in 2011 with the formation of a social media team. The team quickly realized that maintaining an academic library's social media presence—creating original content, monitoring posts and feeds, and maximizing exposure to the library's target audience—can take a sizeable chunk of time. Additionally, it is important to understand student preferences regarding the kind of content they are interested in seeing from their university library on social media so that the time spent creating content has not been wasted. This chapter will discuss how the social media team dealt with these questions and others, such as how to adapt to the regularly changing world of social media and how to reap the benefits of hiring student assistants to help create an engaging, relevant social media presence.

INTRODUCTION

Organization Background

San José State University (SJSU) is the oldest campus in the California State University system and the first public university on the West Coast (San José State University [SJSU], 2016). The mission of the university is to “transmit knowledge to its students” and “to expand the base of knowledge through research and scholarship” (SJSU, 2018a, para. 2). The San José State University Library serves a broad

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community with varying interests and needs. There is a diverse student body of over 32,000; the top undergraduate majors are design studies, psychology and kinesiology, and the top graduate majors are software and electrical engineering and library and information science (SJSU Institutional Effectiveness & Analytics, 2017b). The university employs over 2,100 faculty members, including professors, lecturers and librarians (SJSU Institutional Effectiveness & Analytics, 2017a). In addition to hiring faculty and staff, the university has a long-standing tradition of employing students, both to benefit students' career and academic goals and to help support the work needed for the campus to function (SJSU, 2018b, p. 4).

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library

Located at the northwest corner of the campus in the center of downtown San José, the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library (King Library) houses both the SJSU Library and the main branch of the San José Public Library. As a joint academic and public library, it serves both the university and the City of San José communities. The services and resources provided by the SJSU Library include library instruction, one-on-one research consultations, technology lending, software training, 3D printing, digital archives, an institutional repository, and much more. Over the years, a great deal of attention has been given to providing student services but not as much to marketing those services. Finding the best solutions for marketing the library's services to the entire student population has been an ongoing challenge.

BACKGROUND: SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONTEXT

Social Media in Academic Libraries

Within the past decade, social media use in academic libraries has gone from nearly non-existent to being an essential part of most libraries' outreach and promotion strategies (Harrison, Burrell, Velasquez, & Schreiner, 2017, p. 248). In his book *Tell Everyone: Why We Share and Why It Matters*, Alfred Hermida (2014) writes, "People are not hooked on YouTube, Twitter or Facebook but on each other. Tools and services come and go; what is constant is our human urge to share" (2014, p. 1). Social media is an integral part of most students' lives today — 88% of adults ages 18-29 use at least one social media site (Pew Research Center, 2018) — so it makes sense that academic libraries would eventually embrace social media as a new way to connect with their students.

Fagioli, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2015) debunked the once-common idea that social media was a distraction for college students by finding a relationship between their community college students' GPAs, retention rates, and their activity on social media. Students who were more active on social media had higher GPAs and retention rates. There is not necessarily a direct correlation, but it can be inferred that students who are more active with their college community tend to do better academically, whether that activity is partially or solely online.

For some time, academic libraries have been exploring the benefits of utilizing social media to market their services and to communicate with their target audiences. Taylor & Francis Group summarized the current practices, perceptions, and possible future of social media in libraries in a 2014 white paper (p. 5). Libraries use social media for promotion and outreach, communicating with patrons, getting feedback, providing customer service, increasing engagement among users, and even as a collection development tool. Some challenges libraries face with social media include the time required to maintain a social

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