

Ten ways social media can help show that libraries matter

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Every day, I'm reminded of how technology keeps me connected to my family, friends, and yes, even library patrons.

Just the other day, I received a Facebook message, via my phone, from someone thanking me and others for helping keep their neighborhood library open when it was on the list for closure due to city budget cuts.

I've never met this person, but they know I'm the president of the Birmingham Public Library Board of Trustees. And, they know how passionate I am about how we serve the community. How do they know? I talk about our library system on Facebook.

Mind you, it's not excessive talk, but just enough to inform my Facebook friends about all of the wonderful things our libraries are offering patrons. Because of my posts, several friends have told me they've started to look at libraries in a new way. No longer do they see them as stuffy places with old books. Rather, they see our city's libraries as vibrant, energetic spots where they can learn computer skills, search for jobs, find out how to make a dish for that next holiday, and more.

From this, I've learned that if you get a community behind you when things are good, they will be your cheerleaders when things get bad, such as when facing potential library closings. I've had a very positive experience in seeing our libraries branded via social media, and I want to share some of the things I've learned along the way.

1. **Embrace social media.** If your library system is not on Facebook, Twitter or both, you have missed the boat. It's an easy way to spread the word about upcoming events. It's also a way to get real-time feedback from patrons. Start off simple.
2. **Don't try to do everything at once.** Once you or staffers get the hang of it, you'll be a pro in no time. There are other social media outlets besides Facebook and Twitter, such as YouTube and Flickr. Take time to check them out, too.
3. **Have a social media strategy.** Don't just get on Facebook and Twitter and post for the sake of posting. Make sure your posts are about something. When you write the posts, be jazzy and short. People don't like to read long, drawn-out posts.
4. **Get noticed.** A nonprofit organization launched a fundraiser last year for breast cancer research. They used Facebook as one of the ways to promote it. Their social media plan was so successful, that it even caught a reporter's eye. "I found out about your fundraiser. It's everywhere on Facebook," the reporter told them. That showed me that if folks are talking about an event via social media, it gives the event that "something extra" to get noticed by the media.
5. **Interact with patrons.** If patrons thank you for doing something on your page, tell them you appreciate it. Also, go to their page and make a comment on something they've said. People like to know that they matter and are not just another name to you. Show you are authentic. Engage with patrons.

6. **Encourage your friends and family to “like” or “follow” the library on Facebook and/or Twitter.** Expand your audience by asking those you know to check out your library’s Facebook page or tweets on Twitter. They’ll likely do it because you’ve asked them.
7. **Be personal.** Show that the library is a fun and hip place by injecting personality into your posts. Give followers a reason to come back to your page. Post pictures, too. Don’t be boring or predictable in your posts.
8. **Check out other library pages and tweets.** You do better when you know more. See how other libraries are using social media to help brand themselves. Are patrons responding in big ways to their posts or tweets? There may be a reason why. Check out their walls and “listen” to the voice they are using. Also, check out the way they write their posts and the content. Those three things make a huge difference.
9. **Promote your library programs on your personal Facebook or Twitter accounts.** Don’t think of it as bringing work home with you. Think of it as sharing the work you love with the world.
10. **Stay connected.** When there is a major weather issue that may cause libraries to close, post such notices on Twitter and Facebook. Also, post information such as shelter locations, food distribution sites, etc., that may help patrons affected by a major weather issue.
11. **Toot your own horn.** If your library has received an award, if an employee has been honored for an achievement, or even if you’ve purchased new chairs for a sitting area, share it via social media. There’s nothing wrong with tooting your own horn. People like to read good news, even if it’s about some new comfy chairs and paint added to the research area.

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