

Chapter 15

No Budget, No Barriers: How Academic Branch Libraries Can Make Twitter Work

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a roadmap for Twitter use by academic libraries at a branch, remote, or satellite campus. These smaller libraries, operating at a distance from the center of their institution, often face challenges relating to their budget, resources, and status. The use of Twitter can empower a branch to serve their unique populations more effectively, promote engagement within the local community, and establish a presence for the branch within the institution. The authors provide strategies and suggestions for managing Twitter based upon their own experiences while managing the Southampton Campus Library of Stony Brook University Twitter account.

INTRODUCTION

Since Twitter debuted in 2006, it has become a significant part of the popular and cultural landscape. It has been used by a wide range of organizations, businesses, and individuals as a means to further their missions, support their brands, and engage with their communities. Over that time, Twitter has also become a staple of the academic library's social media portfolio. The ease of starting and the simplicity of using this microblogging platform belie its potential impact. Allowing users to post text of up to 280 characters as well as share content in the form of links, images, and videos, Twitter is a potent mechanism for distributing information and building community.

Twitter use in academic libraries has also evolved since 2006. Initially seen by many as a one-way broadcasting channel for disseminating library information, Twitter has since been adapted to more innovative and engaging uses. Academic libraries have recognized the platform's power to create community,

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foster interaction, and extend the reach of their message. Given this, any rationale for using Twitter in an academic library is equally valid for a branch campus library. In fact, Twitter can have an even greater impact for branch libraries. Often located far from the center of their institution with limited staff and budget, branch libraries nevertheless can leverage Twitter to build a network of engaged followers, create compelling content, and interact with their main institution and surrounding community.

This chapter examines ways in which branch campus libraries can overcome barriers to Twitter use, no matter what they might be. The authors will provide supporting rationales for the maintenance of local Twitter accounts at branch libraries as well as strategies and tips for growing, maintaining, and assessing the results. Examples provided are from the experiences of the chapter's authors while operating the Twitter account for the Stony Brook University Southampton campus library in New York, along with research from the field.

Although this chapter uses the term *branch campus library* throughout, there are many similar terms that could be applied. Branch campus is not meant to be exclusive or to denote a specific administrative or conceptual model. It is used here as an umbrella term to describe any academic library within a multi-library system that: a) operates at a geographic location removed from the main library, b) serves a unique patron base, c) maintains a distinct collection development focus, and d) interacts with its own local community. This would include libraries at satellite, remote, and distant campuses. It is hoped that the strategies and tips in this chapter can be applied in numerous library situations, even for branches within a public library system.

BACKGROUND

Many decisions have to be made before establishing a library Twitter account. These range from how the account will be handled, who will contribute content, how they will be trained, and how they will represent the library online (Appleton & Tattersall, 2015; Burkhardt, 2010; Farkas, 2009). Clear assessment goals and expectations should also be formulated at the outset to keep library Twitter use on track (Ramsey & Vecchione, 2014).

It is also important to have a clear sense of mission. Academic libraries have taken to Twitter for a variety of reasons. Some focus on sharing library news, promoting services, and building community (Loudon & Hall, 2010; Vassilakaki & Garoufallou, 2015). Others have centered their efforts on promoting the physical library environment and providing access to content (Harrison, Burrell, Velasquez, & Schreiner, 2017).

The intended audience is also a vital element of a Twitter strategy. Students, an obvious choice for academic libraries, may prove the hardest audience to cultivate. Twitter use among people in the typical college-aged demographic, 18-24-year olds, stands at just 45% (Pew Research, 2018). However, college students have also expressed a preference for receiving library information over Twitter (Howard, Huber, Carter, & Moore 2018). For branch campus libraries, which may be serving smaller student populations to begin with, other audiences can be just as valuable. Studies have shown that the most important followers for an academic library are other accounts from within their institution, such as academic departments and administrative units (Kim, Abels, & Yang, 2012; Shulman, Yep, & Tomé, 2015; Stewart & Walker, 2017).

However the audience is defined, engaging with them is critical and yet this engagement is something that academic libraries have at times struggled to do well (Emery & Schifeling, 2015). Built on

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