Chapter 5
Finding Your Voice:
Developing a Content Strategy for Social Media That Works!

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to provide an indispensable introduction to content marketing based on industry best-practices and help academic libraries navigate this essential but often overlooked marketing practice. The chapter will begin by addressing some of the consistent challenges organizations have starting their social media marketing campaigns and developing a social media strategy. Next, the chapter will focus on defining the tone and voice of their social media messages. Then, it will discuss sustaining the campaign by curating content and avoiding "content fatigue." Finally, the authors share an example of how an academic library but them into practice. They are confident this chapter will give academic librarians the vocabulary and techniques they need to talk and walk their way through meaningful and engaging marketing campaigns for their libraries using social media.

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, Bill Gates wrote and published an essay titled "Content is King" where he declared the Internet was a "marketplace of ideas, experiences, and products-a marketplace of content" (Evans, 2017). Since that time, the predictions Gates made regarding the importance of content on the Internet have largely been accurate. Unlike television or radio, where consumers have advertisements interrupt their entertainment experience, consumers willfully search for content on the Internet. This drive to seek out and consume information by choice has made way for the rise of content marketing.

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According to the Content Marketing Institute, "Content marketing is the strategic marketing approach of creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action" (Content Marketing Institute, 2018).

Simply put, Content Marketing strategically positions content in front of the consumer. But what exactly is content?

Depending upon one's work, content can mean a lot of different things. In the field of marketing and communication, however, content has a very specific meaning and can be described as "the information and experiences that are directed towards an end-user or audience" (Lee, 2013). Other fields see content as an information exchange. It is the tangible information communicated through any point of contact between two or more entities; Business to Consumer (B2C), Business to Business (B2B), and in our case, Library to End-User. Yet it is important to emphasize, the content experience not only comes from the exchange itself, it's also the emotional value that the intended audience derives from that exchange.

With the ever-increasing rise and popularity of various social media platforms, it's no wonder that content marketing and social media seem synonymous. Successful content marketing almost always includes a strong social media component, and for the purpose of this chapter, focus is placed on the creation of a content strategy for social media.

BACKGROUND

One of the challenges in surveying the implementation of content strategy in academic libraries is a matter of terminology. The term "content strategy" has been attributed to web site governance rather than marketing. Rebecca Blakiston has penned a number of articles on web content strategies for academic libraries whereby content is "curated Web content that promotes, explains, and instructs users about various services and resources" (Blakiston, 2013). And Ilka Datig's article envisions "content strategy as a holistic tool that encompasses all library outreach platforms, including websites, social media, and other digital and print materials" (Datig, 2018). Combining web content with marketing is perhaps unavoidable as social media has become more pervasive but, as Darlene Fichter and Jeff Wisniewski assert in their article,

The world of content has changed. Regardless of the specific platforms, tools, or technologies, libraries need to strategically create and deliver content in ways that are efficient, effective, sustainable, and engaging. (Fichter & Wisniewski, 2014)

Although to date literature on academic libraries looking at content strategy strictly in terms of marketing purposes has been scant, librarians have written about marketing and outreach for some time. A recent white paper reported the results from a survey administered by the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) Marketing and Outreach Information Group. The survey found that many academic libraries do not have dedicated staff for marketing and that when outreach campaigns have launched they have not been analyzed to determine their impact (Park & Dantus, 2018). These results reinforce findings from a study conducted almost 10 years ago wherein although "libraries participate in different types of outreach, they often do so in informal and ad hoc ways without the benefit of systematic and well thought out outreach programs" (Carter & Seaman, 2011). Similar to the term "content strategy", the literature found on the concept of "user persona" is not directly associated with marketing.

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