Changing Channels

New online tools can provide even more opportunities for communicating about archives and archivists. Don't limit yourself to traditional media; try changing channels!
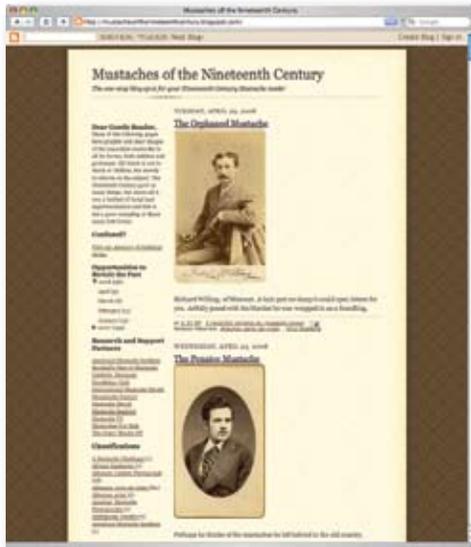
Social media. Social networking. Photo sharing. Blogs. RSS feeds. It's a deluge of new media! Wrapping your head around how these online communication tools work can be daunting – but it can also be fun and useful….

"Social media" encompasses various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos, and audio. These Web-based mediums are by nature dynamic, interactive, and flexible. They do more than push out content to an audience (like a regular Web page does). They use content to engage people by enabling their participation in the flow of information.

If you're a novice in the world of social media – which is all about sharing information and experiences – here's a quick reference to help you distinguish among the social media buzz words (source: Wikipedia at www.wikipedia.org). Also provided are examples of how the archives profession is already using these tools to help raise awareness about archives, archivists, and archival issues.

A wiki is a piece of server software that allows users to create and edit Web page content using any Web browser. It's a composition system, a discussion medium, a repository, a mail system, and a collaboration tool. ("WikiWiki" is Hawai'ian for "quick.") One example of a popular wiki: Wikipedia.

A blog (from web log) is a website where entries are written in chronological order and commonly displayed in reverse chronological order. Many began as personal online diaries; many more are evolving into very large and active digital communities. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. To learn more about setting up a blog: Blogger or Google Blog. Examples from the archives community:

University of North Carolina: A View to Hugh: Processing the Hugh Morton Photographs and Films at www.lib.unc.edu/blogs/morton/

University of Kentucky: Mustaches of the 19th Century at mustachesofthenineteenthcentury.blogspot.com/

Photo sharing is the publishing or transfer of a user's digital photos online, thus enabling the user to share them with others (whether publicly or privately). This functionality is provided through both websites and applications that facilitate the upload and display of images. In addition to being a popular website for users to share personal photos, the photo-sharing website Flickr (www.flickr.com) is widely used by bloggers as a photo repository. Examples of popular photo-sharing sites: Kodak Gallery, Flickr, and Snapfish. Examples from the archives community:

Library of Congress: www.flickr.com/photos/Library_of_Congress; project description at www.loc.gov/rr/print/flickr_pilot.html

National Museum of Health and Medicine, Otis Historical Archives: flickr.com/photos/99129398@N00

RSS feeds are Web formats used to publish frequently updated content (such as blog entries and news headlines). The RSS (Real Simple Syndication) document, which is called a feed, contains either a summary of content from an associated website or the full text. Feeds permit instant distribution of content and the ability to make it "subscribable." For an introduction to how RSS feeds work: Feedburner. Examples of popular feeds: BBC News Headlines, Amazon.com, and Yahoo! Examples from the archives community:

Wisconsin Historical Images: www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/subscribe/

National Coalition for History: feeds.feedburner.com/historycoalition

Like all new processes, using social media can have a flipside. Be cautious about copyright and remember that information conveyed via social media is *very* public. Projects should be monitored carefully and evaluated regularly due to the evolving nature of the 'Net.