Using Social Media to Connect Users to Digital Archives
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Background
There are few comprehensive studies that explain discrete outcomes and effectiveness of the social media incorporation in archives, specifically looking at the user end. Without this knowledge archives are unable to make targeted efforts whose benefits outweigh the costs, and to know whether online efforts are reaching as many people as we are led to think. More studies are needed to understand the hard evidence behind archival institutions who have implemented social media, and the cost benefit analysis of what the ‘free’ applications have accomplished.

Methodology
• The exploratory study provides insight into the methods employed by archivists in their use of social media applications, in conjunction with a quantifiable data set.

• Participants
  • Stambaugh Archives, Carthage College
  • National Archive and Records Administration in Chicago
  • Parkside Archives & Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Parkside
  • Ward Irish Music Archives

• Data Collection
  • Observations
  • Semi-structured interviews
  • Quantitative data sets from social media usage of archive institutions

Preliminary Findings
1. Discovery process
   • All institutions reported reference questions being asked through social media applications instead of using traditional methods.

2. Archivists’ posts
   • Although no set evaluation tools were established by the institution, each archivist was self-evaluating what he or she was posting each week. The self-evaluation was able to develop as the archivist learned what bits of information were well received by their user base.
   • The decision of what to post had several variables, however the selection of what to post was divided equally amongst
     • Time of the archivist
     • Week itself
     • Pre-planning of posts

3. User engagement
   • Certain posts engaged more users than other posts. Due to unique nature of archival institutions involved in the study, the users likes varied to some degree.

Social Media Posting

Moving Forward
Social media makes it seem possible for an institution of any size to reach a potentially limitless number of users. However, the user’s interaction and satisfaction with the social media tools need to be continuously re-evaluated.

Google Analytics is a client side tracking tool as opposed to a traditional web server log. Client side tools, such as Google Analytics, are able to provide much richer data about the user’s behavior as they are run from the user’s browser.

A continuation of usability studies from a log analysis and qualitative user analysis will both be needed in order to ensure the best social media use in archive environments to increase functionality for users and archivists.

Possible research questions include:
• R1: What is the user’s query behavior?
• R2: How did users enter the [archive] website?
• R3: What was the movement of users once they had entered the site?

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