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Worth 1,000 Words: Using Instagram to Engage Library Users

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Abstract

Instagram has taken our technology-driven culture by storm, particularly among younger smartphone users. This popular app allows users to quickly snap a photo, transform it by adding filters and effects, and share it across numerous social media platforms. With 40 million photos uploaded each day, Instagram users are driven to share, like, and interact with fellow camera phone enthusiasts. College students, known for their interest in sharing their experiences on social media, are drawn to this free app. According to a Pew Internet Survey, Instagram is especially appealing to adults aged 18-29. Academic libraries have an opportunity to engage with their primary user base through this new social media tool in very creative ways.

This paper will describe how the technology works and how the authors use Instagram on behalf of their institutions. With creative planning and timely photos, their libraries have successfully connected with students, members of the campus community, and other libraries across the country. Examples will inspire attendees to think about implementation, or how to improve an existing presence. This paper will cover creating content, driving "followers" and "likes", but also workflow considerations and tying existing programming to Instagram.

Introduction

Take a picture, edit it, and share it with friends. This is the process that 90 million Instagram users know and love. Instagram is a free and simple photo app, available for iOS and Android devices, that allows users to document and share their lives in photo form. Launched in 2010, the app sought to make taking mobile photos "fast, simple, and beautiful" ("Welcome to Instagram"). Instagram was insanely popular right out of the gate, ranking number one in the App store a mere twenty four hours after its release ("First Three Months"). Currently, one hundred million users share close to 40 million pictures a day through the popular app that also links to other social media sites, including Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and Foursquare ("Join the Instagram Team").

The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that thirteen percent of Internet users surveyed identified themselves as Instagram users. Pew also discovered that this app particularly appeals to adults 18-29, African-Americans, Latinos, women, and urban dwellers (Duggan and Brenner). Businesses such as Nike realized the app's instant popularity with their key demographic and developed tools, like Nike PHOTOiD, that integrated their product into the Instagram experience. Users can upload an Instagram photo to the NikePHOTOiD website and

create a sneaker with colors from the photo. Users then share their pictures in an online gallery powered by the Instagram API (applications programming interface) and can even have the sneaker custom made (Nike PHOTOiD). Libraries are taking cues from the business world and embracing the app as a way to share their library's brand with users.

Literature Review

The use of social media by libraries is a newer but popular topic. Descriptions of the application of social media to libraries can range from a broad overview of the different tools ("Social Media") to using social media to reach a specific goal, like advocacy (Dankowski). A full analysis of case studies of libraries and their use of specific tools can be practical and useful.

Burkhardt encourages libraries to consider why they want to use social media and what they hope to gain from it (10). Each library is different, so the end goals and preferred social media tool(s) may vary institution to institution. Kho found that the immediate nature of social media can improve response time to positive and negative feedback, which relates to providing valued customer service (31). Creating social media channels and sharing with followers allow libraries to engage with new technologies as powerful communication tools.

Instagram was listed as one of 18 "great technology initiatives" for libraries because it creates a visual representation for events, services, and resources available (Kroski 52). Although many libraries have a presence on Instagram, the literature on academic libraries and Instagram is very limited. This paper seeks to fill that gap in the research and provide practical insight on using this popular mobile app to engage users.

How Libraries Use Instagram

Lessons from Rice Library

Rice Library at the University of Southern Indiana (USI) serves a diverse population of undergraduate and graduate students in Evansville, Indiana. Social media responsibilities fell to the Reference Department but were often ignored or neglected. The library maintained a Facebook page that experienced sporadic interactions with different user groups. When analyzing the Facebook data, one thing became clear. Users responded well to pictures, especially pictures of the different spaces within the library. When thinking about how to move the library's social media presence forward, the department knew they wanted to invest time in a platform that was visually stimulating and dynamic, and allow the library to share posts to Facebook and other channels. Several staff members were personal Instagram users and recognized the potential of this platform to fit the needs of the developing social media plan.

The library began testing the Instagram waters in the summer of 2012. An account was created and linked to various social media channels including Facebook and newly established Twitter and Foursquare accounts. Without many events in the library or on campus during the summer, the account focused on showcasing overlooked parts of the library building. Pictures of artwork, the library exterior during a sunny day, and even the intricate patterns of the library's carpet were shared. The library also showcased future events and services that were launching the following

semester. Little by little followers of Rice Library began to grow. Current students as well as alumni and staff began to follow the library's account and comment on pictures. By the end of the summer the library had a modest but promising total of 43 followers.

As the fall semester began, the library officially promoted the Instagram account and actively courted potential users. Signage was posted throughout the library with account details. Posts were made across other social media channels encouraging users to follow the account. In addition to posting pictures of the Rice Library and its activities, the library started to engage with the Instagram community at-large. The library became a model for using Instagram on the USI campus. Soon, other university departments, like News & Information, set up accounts as well. The library's Instagram presence continued to grow over the next year and as of June 2013 the library had 122 followers.

Lessons from Roesch Library

Roesch Library serves faculty, staff, and students at the University of Dayton, located in Dayton, Ohio. After successfully implementing a presence on both Facebook and Twitter, the library decided to sign up for Instagram following a student worker's suggestion. Student workers are a great source of information regarding social media trends, particularly student preferences on campus. Similar to other instances where a librarian began using social media channels on behalf of Roesch Library, the librarian who initially set up the account was already an Instagram user with a personal account. This allowed the librarian to see how users interacted with one another (likes, hashtags, etc.) before introducing the library as a user.

At the time, Roesch Library was undergoing major exterior construction. One of the first photos shared was a posed picture of a student wearing a pair of free ear plugs that were available at each service desk (see fig. 1). The caption described how the library may get noisy during this academic year and that the ear plugs will help cancel out the construction noise. Instagram became a great way for the library to communicate news and construction progress.

Fig. 1. A student promotes free ear plugs. The caption read, "Is construction noise distracting your studying? We offer ear plugs at our reference desks!"

Photos with a filter effect are recognizable as a product of Instagram. The photo of the student wearing ear plugs (with a filtered effect) was used in other marketing materials related to the construction and availability of the ear plugs, including a bulletin board poster, quarter sheet fliers, and website/social media posts. By using the photos from Instagram in print and other online outlets, audiences will know about the library's use of Instagram. It's a great way to promote a new or established presence on Instagram.

One staff member cannot be everywhere to document events so sharing Instagram responsibilities is an important consideration. Student workers can be a great resource for providing Instagram content. The library's marketing and events student worker has provided Roesch Library followers with a student perspective, thanks to her frequent posts. To a student, uploading a photo to Instagram may be second nature to them already. This can mean a constant flow of new content while the student is in or outside the library.
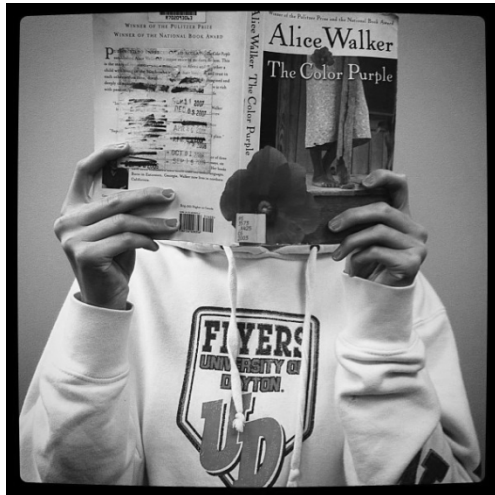

Fig. 2. Banned Books Week photo. The caption read, "The Color Purple by Alice Walker was banned for homosexuality, sexual explicitness, and offensive language #bannedbooksweek".

Instagram provides Roesch Library an opportunity to rethink its programming and outreach to students. The library's 2012 Banned Books Week promotions were nearly all on Instagram, featuring a series of photos of students with their favorite banned books (see fig. 2). Contests, which are covered in a later section, have helped promote new spaces and services. Overall, Instagram has been a new and fun way to connect with students and other libraries through photos.

Fellow Instagramers

Academic libraries have embraced Instagram as a social media tool. Rice Library and Roesch Library get many of their content ideas for Instagram by following other library accounts. In this section, ways to use Instagram will be explored using other academic libraries as examples.

Event and Student Promotion

Your library's events can instantly be promoted with an Instagram photo. For example, UCLA Powell Library (http://instagram.com/ucla_powell_library) pays particularly good attention to showcasing upcoming and current happenings in the library, especially during their finals week period. Powell constantly uploads new photos to share the wide range of finals week activities such as visits from therapy dogs, origami crafts, and free coffee. Powell Library doesn't limit Instagram content to library offerings; it has the whole campus in mind and uses their account to promote other units' finals week services to students.

This library has also found a clever way to showcase student-produced content. Using a screenshot of a student's photo, Powell Library uploads the screenshot on their Instagram, adding kudos and the creator's username in the caption. This approach shows user engagement and library-focused marketing with unique hashtags. People may feel encouraged to share with the library's Instagram account in order to have a photograph featured.

Status Updates

North Carolina State University Libraries (http://instagram.com/ncsulibraries) has an Instagram account that highlights the construction and completion of their new library, Hunt Library. NSCU Libraries created an engaging contest to promote student photography of the new building, using the hashtag #myhuntlibrary ("Show the World Your New Library and Win an iPad Mini"). The library created an online gallery of photos with #myhuntlibrary using the Instagram API. Select photos are accessioned to the NSCU Archives in order to document and preserve the story of Hunt Library ("About"). This type of contest promotes participation and increases the variety of images of a new, state-of-the-art library for archival purposes.

Duke University Libraries (http://instagram.com/dukelibraries) uses Instagram to share behind-the-scenes looks of their conservation area and staff using the hashtag #conservation. This promotes a typically unseen department within academic libraries. The photographs document conservation staff processing collections, exhibits, and sights around the library.

Instagram provides a venue for libraries and librarians to network with each other by seeing and sharing library activities. By following other libraries, you can easily gather ideas not only on Instagram content, but spaces, services, and beyond.

How YOU Can Use Instagram

Setting up an Instagram account is a relatively painless process. However, it should be noted that the account must be created through an app on either an iOS or Android device as there is currently not a registration interface on the web. If you maintain a personal Instagram account, you will need to log out of the personal account to create a new library account. You will also need to log out each time you wish to post to your library account. When creating an account, libraries will want to tie the account to a generic library email address. This allows multiple staff members to post and administer the account if need be. Each Instagram account has a small amount of real estate for profile information. It is important to fill this portion out and let users know who you are. Many libraries provide their URL in this space and their slogan or branding message.

Perhaps the most important part of setting up your Instagram account is linking it to other social media platforms. In order to link your Facebook or other social media account to Instagram, you first must be sure that you have the proper administrator rights for the different accounts. Once verified, you simply follow the steps within the app to connect, making sure that you are linking the Instagram account to the library social media account rather than a personal account. Once you set your sharing preferences, you will verify each time you post which account the picture should be shared with (see fig. 3).
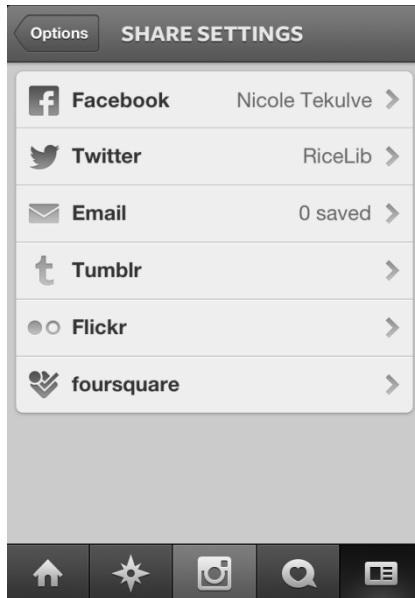

Figure 3. Share Instagram photos to other social media accounts.

Posting pictures on Instagram could not be easier. Instagram allows you to shoot directly from the app or import the pictures stored in the photo library of you smartphone or tablet. Any photo or visual in your photo library can be uploaded to Instagram. Once you either take or select the photo you'd like to share, you can begin to transform the photo. Built in tools allow you to crop, rotate, frame, blur, or enhance your photos. Instagram currently offers twenty different filters to alter your image (see fig. 4). Users can stick to the basics of point, shoot, and share or get creative using the many built-in tools.
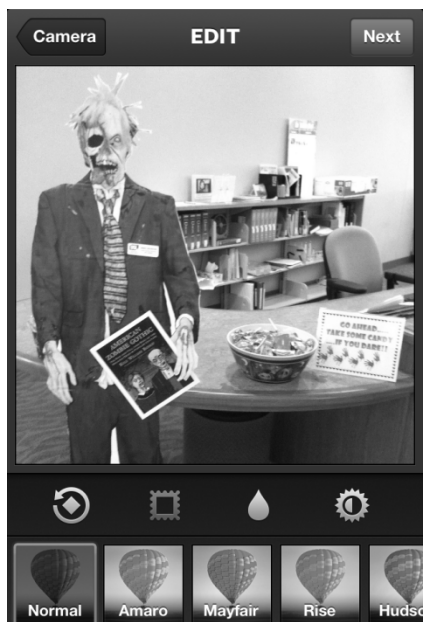
Fig. 4. Ways to edit your photo.

Features

Users of Instagram can choose to share the location of where a photo was taken. This creates a link of all photos taken at that particular location, which can be a quick way for libraries to see photos taken in and around the library. Libraries should use this location feature, so visitors can see the library's Instagram photos mixed in with other users' uploads. Content from users that have enabled privacy settings will be hidden from the search results. Users with private accounts restrict their content to only the followers that they approve. Even with the absence of some user photos, searching for Instagram photos taken at your library's location can give you a unique perspective of how students are using your building.

Instagram users have created a variety of hashtags that libraries may use to promote their services, resources, or events. Hashtags are both searchable and hyperlinked so a group of photos using the same hashtag can be easily found. People use hashtags to find and be connected to similar photos. Hashtags are not required, but are often a popular way to find and categorize photos. At Roesch Library, students often use the hashtag #clubroesch (the student-created nickname) to indicate the photo was taken in the library. Photos that use hashtags can be retrieved by using Instagram's search feature or by clicking on the hashtag. This way, other students can see the other photos using #clubroesch in addition to their own. Similar to the location feature, searching for hashtags associated with your library can inform libraries about student experiences with events and spaces.

Roesch Library's account frequently uses the widely used hashtag "#tbt" which stands for "Throwback Thursday." The library uses #tbt as an opportunity to showcase a relevant or timely photo from its Archives and Special Collections on Thursdays. One of the more popular #tbt posts was a 1982 photo of an annual student summer trip to Daytona Beach, Florida, right before the 2013 trip was to take place (see fig. 5). The library tagged the trip's Instagram account, which then "re-gramed" (re-posted) the photo, which received 54 likes between the two

accounts. Hashtags and tagging other accounts make for an effective photo caption in order to communicate with other Instagram users.

Fig. 5. A popular "Throwback Thursday" post using a photo from University of Dayton's digital library, digital.udayton.edu. The caption read, "#tbt Dayton to Daytona, 1982.@dyt2dytna".

Rice Library made a concerted effort to follow other academic libraries for inspiration. One trend that emerged from examining other libraries' Instagram accounts was collective hashtagging. Much like the #tbt hashtag, libraries are developing their own unique hashtags to promote their collections. UCLA Powell Library uses the hashtag #BooksYouDidntKnowWeHad to showcase interesting items from their physical collection. Rice Library began participating in this hashtag and posted photos of odd reference titles, books with unique covers, and books related to upcoming seasons, holidays, or events (see fig. 6). This hashtag also became a way to showcase more popular titles in the collection that students assumed the library did not have.
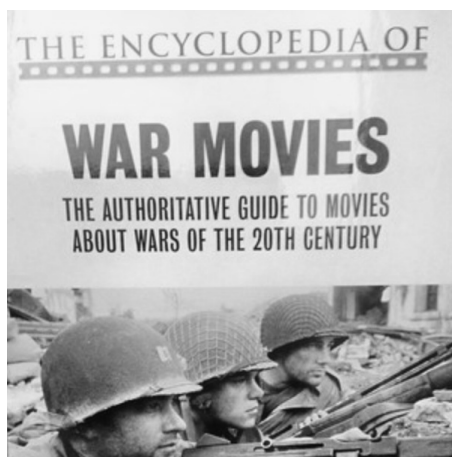
ricelibrary #booksyoudidntknowwehad#book

Fig. 6. Promoting unique titles with the hashtag #booksyoudidntknowwehad.

Hosting a photo contest is a way to promote a new presence and encourage photos in and of the library on Instagram. Roesch Library ran a photo contest using only Instagram during the State Library of Ohio Snapshot Day Week in October 2012. The goal of Library Snapshot Day Week is to show how libraries each day have an impact ("Snapshot Day: A Day in the Life of Ohio

Libraries.") and the library hoped people would share their own experiences through Instagram. Students submitted photos simply by tagging their photo as #clubroesch. The student who took the photo that received the most likes won an iTunes gift card. Everyone who entered won a USB drive. Winners were "tagged" by their Instagram username within the caption of a photo with directions on how to retrieve the prize. The winning photo, with 32 "likes," was a shot of the sunset out one of the top floor windows.

Another contest Roesch Library held via social media was voting on the name for a new piece of group study furniture. The library wanted the students to make it their own while giving it a recognizable name. People voted on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to decide whether it would be called Sync Space, Media Runway, or Tech Table. Instagram users posted a comment on the photo of the new furniture in order to vote using Instagram (see fig. 7). Tech Table won the contest, with most of the votes coming from Twitter. This was also a fun way to market the new furniture, while encouraging engagement with students using three social media presences.

Fig. 7. Furniture naming contest. The caption read, "Hot new group study spot in#clubroesch! What should we call it? A. Media Runway B. Sync Space C. Tech Table".

The most popular contest at Roesch Library is the recurring Club Roesch V.I.P. contest. The prize is a key to a private study room and stress-relief prize pack for finals week. The week before finals, students are invited to retweet the contest announcement on Twitter and 'like' the Instagram photo with the contest announcement (see fig. 8). A username is drawn at random and that person becomes the V.I.P. 140 entries came through Twitter and 62 entries were from Instagram for Spring semester 2013.

Fig. 8. Announcing the #clubroesch V.I.P. contest. The caption read, "Do you come here often? Like this today (4/22) to enter the drawing for the Club Roesch V.I.P contest! The V.I.P gets their own study room and prize pack for finals week!"

Contests and fun new activities using Instagram may get you positive press on campus. The University of Dayton alumni magazine's online newsletter covered all three contests at Roesch Library, which opened up the opportunity to increase followers even more. Include contest information on your library website, newsletter, or other platforms to increase awareness.

Conclusion

Rice Library and Roesch Library consider their use of Instagram a success. Followers increased after the libraries promoted their presence and engaged with fellow users. Libraries can use the app to reach a student population that is accustomed to 'following' and 'likes' to engage with others. At the submission of this paper, Instagram announced an upcoming video capability. Libraries may also find using short videos on Instagram as a creative way to communicate.

Libraries can be part of Instagram and use the tool as a part of ongoing promotions, contests, and events. Using popular hashtags or creating a new one specifically for the library can allow libraries to join the larger Instagram community in an effective way. An inside look of students' experiences within the library building can build up librarians' knowledge about events, space use, and more. Instagram allows academic libraries to be where the students are (virtually) and communicate using a mobile app that is fun to use.

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