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Twitter as a Marketing Tool for Libraries

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Chapter 10: Twitter as a Marketing Tool for Libraries

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Why Twitter?

Twitter is a microblogging service that allows users to post messages (tweets) of up to 140 characters and broadcast those messages immediately on the Web. According to the Pew Research Center, 15% of online adults use Twitter, with 8% making use of it on a typical day. The same report showed higher Twitter use among certain demographic groups, particularly African Americans, at 28% and young adults, with 31% of the 18-24 age group using Twitter (Smith & Brenner, 2012).

Twitter is one of the easiest ways to start testing the social media waters. No specialized tools are required to use Twitter, and with more than 140 million active users of Twitter, there's a good chance that at least some people in your community are using Twitter ("What is Twitter?," 2012).

Libraries are using Twitter for a variety of communication purposes. Some libraries use it to listen to what their customers are saying about the library. Steven Bell states that Twitter is a "golden opportunity to connect with members of the library community." (Bell, 2012) Some libraries use Twitter to make connections to people and organizations within their communities to build community online. (Gunton & Davis, 2012) Some libraries use Twitter to promote programs and services, including those of the library, but also those of other organizations. Twitter can be an excellent way to learn what your customers are thinking, to build conversations with your users, to address customer concerns, and to advocate for your programs and services.

Establishing Your Twitter Plan

Setting up a Twitter account is a straightforward process that can be completed in a few minutes. Individuals set up accounts and can choose to use them, or not. Most people who decide "I think I'll try Twitter" can experiment with Twitter and, if they don't tweet often, or decide not to use it, it doesn't have any impact. Organizations can experiment with Twitter too, but need to recognize that as they start using social media, they need to maintain their presence just as other public service points are maintained. You'll need to spend time planning your library's approach to Twitter. (Bell, 2012 and Jennings, 2012) Think about your customers' viewpoints and what you want them to experience if they follow you on Twitter or read your library's tweets. Establishing objectives will help you decide what to tweet, and how often, once your account is set up. In addition, having a plan in place will help you to evaluate the success of your Twitter efforts.

Start the planning process by doing some background research. This will help you get a sense of how your customers are using Twitter, and how other libraries are using Twitter. First, listen to

Twitter to find out if your community talks about the library already, even though your library doesn't have a Twitter presence. A simple way to do this is to search your library's name using the search Twitter feature, search.twitter.com. Are people talking about your library, and if so, what are they saying? You may want to consider incorporating regular "listening" into your overall Twitter strategy. *(See Figures 10.4 and 10.8 for examples of searching Twitter.)*

Take time to identify libraries similar to yours that have a Twitter presence, particularly if there are other libraries that your organization uses as models or peers. Evaluate their Twitter presence in terms of both the frequency of tweets, and the content that is tweeted, to get ideas on how your library might use Twitter.

After you've done some background work, you'll need to think about how you will use Twitter. Are you going to use it to connect with other organizations? Are you planning to promote your programs and services? Regardless of your intent, it's important to recognize that by establishing a public Twitter presence for your library, you are creating a virtual service point. Customers will expect to interact with you and receive responses, so you'll need to address how your library will manage those interactions in a timely fashion.

If your library already has a social media strategy, think about how Twitter will be incorporated into the strategy. For example, how will your tweets differ from Facebook posts? What will you post, and how often? If Twitter is the start of your library's social media efforts (good for you!), think about how where the information you post to Twitter will come from – does your library already have regular programs and events for you to tweet about?

You will also need to think about who is going to tweet on behalf of your Library; is this one person's duties, or will you have a group of tweeters? If you have multiple people participating, make sure that you have agreed-upon processes to manage who is doing what, and when. While having one enthusiastic person to manage Twitter regularly and lead the library into the Twittersphere is a fantastic start, you can create buy-in and support in the library by having additional people involved. This can also help with continuity of service when people are out sick, on vacation, or if personnel leave – so considering how your library will sustain its Twitter presence both short- and long-term is an important part of the planning process.

Establishing Your Twitter Account

Now that you're ready to go, head over to www.twitter.com to set up your account. *(See Figures 10.1 and 10.2, Joining Twitter.)* You'll need an email address, a strong password, a username and an icon to associate with your account. Use a general email account from your library, rather than an email account associated with a specific person within the library. If you don't have a

general email account for the library, now's the time to set one up using Google's Gmail free email service, mail.google.com, or another free email service.

Choose your username

The username will be how your library is known on Twitter and the name people will use when mentioning your library specifically, so think about what you choose. Keep the username short and recognizable. Short, because every character in your username is one less character available for the content of a tweet that mentions your library, and recognizable, so that that your Twitter account is clearly linked to your library brand. (Lacy, 2011) Consider some of these library account names as examples of short and recognizable Twitter account names:

- @NYPL – New York Public Library
- @Provlib – Providence Public Library
- @gsu_library – Georgia State University Library
- @pimalibrary – Pima County Public Library (this system has additional accounts for each branch), such as:
    - @MainLib
    - @NaniniLib
    - @WoodsLib

If you have multiple branches you can choose to do this if the programs and services offered at each branch are distinct, but remember that it will take more work to keep each account updated regularly.

Provide your full library name as the real name for your Twitter account. People can search for your library's name if they don't know the library's username, so this gives them one more way to find your library on Twitter.

Figure 10.1, Joining Twitter

Tip: You can fill in the full name, email, and password on the above screen, or leave the information blank, click on the yellow Sign up for Twitter link, and proceed directly to the following screen. (See Figure 10.2, Joining Twitter)

Figure 10.2, Joining Twitter

Your Twitter Icon and Profile

Next, you'll want to customize your Twitter profile (*See Figure 10.3, Twitter Profile*). While some Twitter users don't add images or photos to their accounts, you'll want to make the most of your library's social media presence by adding an image. Use your library logo if you have one. This is all part of branding the account as belonging to your library. People are visual, and existing logos are something that they will recognize. If you do not have or cannot use your library logo, use a picture of your library or your staff. Whatever picture is used, it needs to be specific to your library, not a generic library image.

Figure 10.3, Twitter Profile
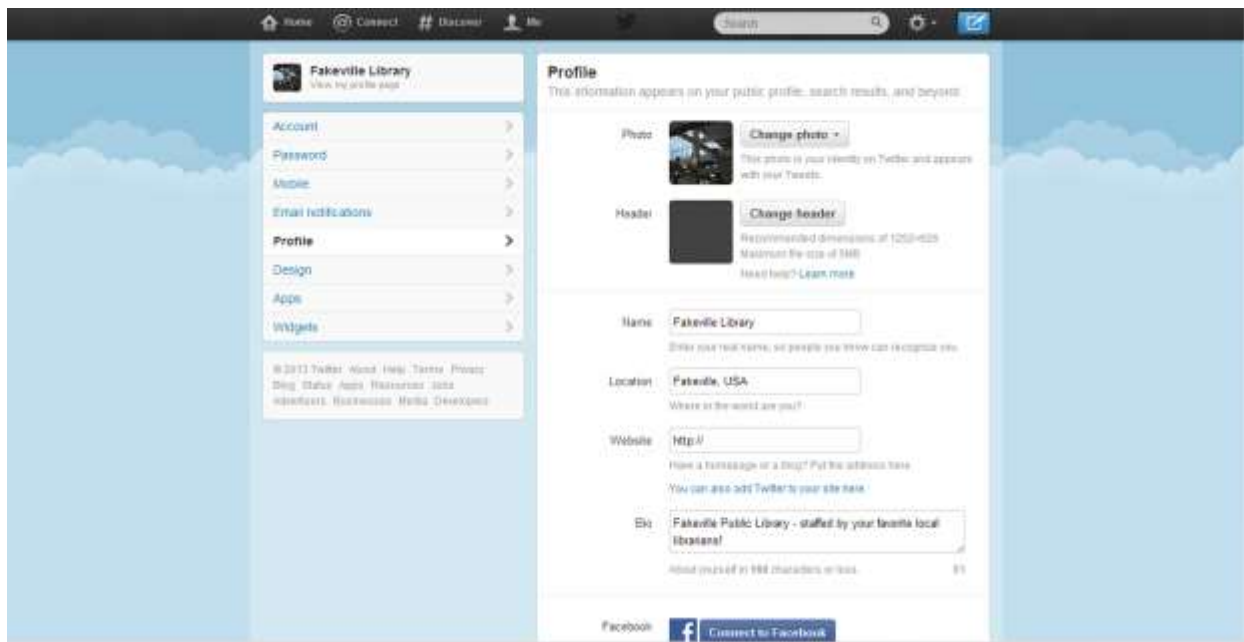
You can write a short biography for your account if you choose, but if you've associated your full library name with your account, you don't have to.

That's it – you've got an account set up and you're ready to start tweeting! With your account set up you can go ahead and link it in to your library's other social media accounts, such as Facebook, as well as a social media management suite (more on these later!) if you're using one.

Tip: What are verified accounts?

You may see some accounts with a blue check mark next to the name, such as @LibraryJournal. That's your indication that Twitter has taken extra steps to ensure that account is actually associated with a specific person or organization. When verifying accounts Twitter concentrates on "highly sought users in music, acting, fashion, government, politics, religion, journalism, media, advertising, business, and other key interest areas. We verify business partners from time to time and individuals at high risk of impersonation." (Twitter, 2012) Very few libraries operate as verified accounts, and those that do tend to be government agencies like the Library of Congress. This isn't an account feature you can request. Instead, if Twitter decides your account needs verification, they will take the steps to do so. Since most accounts on Twitter aren't verified, do not be concerned if your library account is not verified by Twitter.

Tip: Public vs. Protected Tweeting

In your account settings, there is an option to "Protect my tweets". (Twitter, 2012) The idea of protecting your tweets may sound like it's something you want to do, but in reality, it's not a

good strategy for your library's Twitter account. What Twitter means by the term "protecting" is marking every tweet you send as private, so only those followers you've approved can see your tweets. While this is useful for individuals who use Twitter to communicate with each other, your Twitter objectives are probably to communicate and engage with your user community openly. Let your tweets be public. When you're using Twitter to connect with your community, share information, and promote programming such as an author event, you want to let people know! You can protect your Twitter account's integrity in other ways, like establishing strong passwords and limiting account access.

Finding, Following, and Tweeting

Now that your library's account is set up, you can start following people and organizations, and start tweeting!

So, how do you find others to follow? During the account setup process, Twitter will prompt you to choose ten people or organizations to follow. You can start or stop following others on Twitter at any time. In order to find more people or organizations to follow after the setup process, enter names of people or organizations, or topics, in the Twitter search box. (*See Figure 10.4, Twitter Search*)

Figure 10.4, Twitter Search

Public libraries may find it very useful to follow local organizations, leaders, and select businesses in your community. For example, the Pima County Public Library has chosen to follow a wide variety of people and organizations, both local and national. (*See Figure 10.5, Following*) Clicking on the followers list for their main account (@pimalibrary) on October 26, 2012, showed that they were following approximately 1,700 people including:

- @SeisCurbside – a local food truck
- @EllerCollege – the business school at the local university
- @IdeaFunding – a local entrepreneurship center
- @TucsonArtInformation

Figure 10.5, Following

Tip: In addition to serving as an example of a "following page", the above screenshot is an example of customizing your Twitter account with a different look and feel. You can choose from premade themes, or add your own colors and design customizations. To customize your Twitter screen presence, click on the Settings button (gear icon), choose to edit your profile, and go to the Design section.

Academic libraries should follow local organizations, too, but also look for offices, colleges and departments on their campus, student groups, and the like. These are all a great way to keep up with what's going on, and if other campus units are active tweeters, you may be able to grow useful new connections to share information.

Start small with the number of people to follow and remember that you don't have to follow back everyone who follows you. Read some of their tweets – and decide if you think they'll be useful to follow. They may be spammers or bots that automatically follow new accounts.

You can start tweeting at any time by clicking in the *Compose new Tweet* box on your Twitter homepage. (*See Figures 10-6 and 10-7, Tweeting*) The question is, what will you tweet about? If you approached Twitter by determining the purpose of your Twitter account as was

recommended earlier, you can now implement your strategies. Depending on how you've decided to use your Twitter account, you might tweet about:

- Events and programs
- New books
- Pictures of your staff and your library
- Unique or fun things that your library has. For example, the Fairfield, CT public library (@fairfieldpublib) had life-size cardboard figures made of some of their librarians and staff. The library's webmaster, Merry Uk, set up a Twitter account for the cutout of her, with the account @CardboardMerry. While not an officially sanctioned library account, CardboardMerry did promote the library through her tweets.
- Reply to comments people make about your library
- Interesting links (see the bitly section of this article for more information on strategies for handling links)

Figure 10.6, Tweeting

To tweet, click in the "Compose new Tweet" space in the upper-left corner of the screen – to get to this screen, click on the Home button.

Figure 10.7, Tweeting

After you click in the Compose new Tweet field, you'll see that Twitter counts how many characters you've typed, so you know how many you have left to work with. In addition, you have options for adding a photo, and for adding a location. You can also edit your location in your profile, so that tweets from your library are always indicated with the location.

If you're tweeting directly to another person or organization, include their username with the @symbol so they receive your tweets. You can also tweet to them directly from their Twitter page.

Tip: Listening to Twitter

One of the useful ways to use Twitter is to search it regularly to find out how people are talking about your library. The most direct way people may mention your library on Twitter is by using your username, in the format @yourlibrary. These mentions are easily found as part of the Connect function on your Twitter home page. Other people may not know your user name or may not bother with finding it. You can still find and respond to what they're saying if you choose to. *(See Figure 10.8, Listening to Twitter).*

Twitter has a good search function built in that lets you easily save searches. Any searches you save on the Twitter site also bring results into social media management suites that you may use, or you can set up RSS feeds into a reader for search results.

Saving searches like these can help you find a good portion of what's said about you. You may not find everything, and if your library name is similar to others, you might bring in some noise,

but that's better than not seeing what people are saying, and you can always change your saved searches to be more precise.

- "Full library name"
- City name "public library:
- "university name library"
- "short form of university name library"
- Any of the above with the word problem included
- University abbreviation and problem, or the nickname for problems at the school such as
  - TUproblems (Temple University) (determining who will tweet for your library, what kind of content will be tweeted, and how, 2012)
  - BigOrangeScrew (University of Tennessee, Knoxville)
- Use Twitter's advanced search with any of the above to include Tweets that may be positive or negative (indicated by the :) or :(emoticons) or that include a question mark.

Searches, information on the operators available, and access to the advanced search screen is available at http://search.twitter.com

Figure 10.8, Listening to Twitter
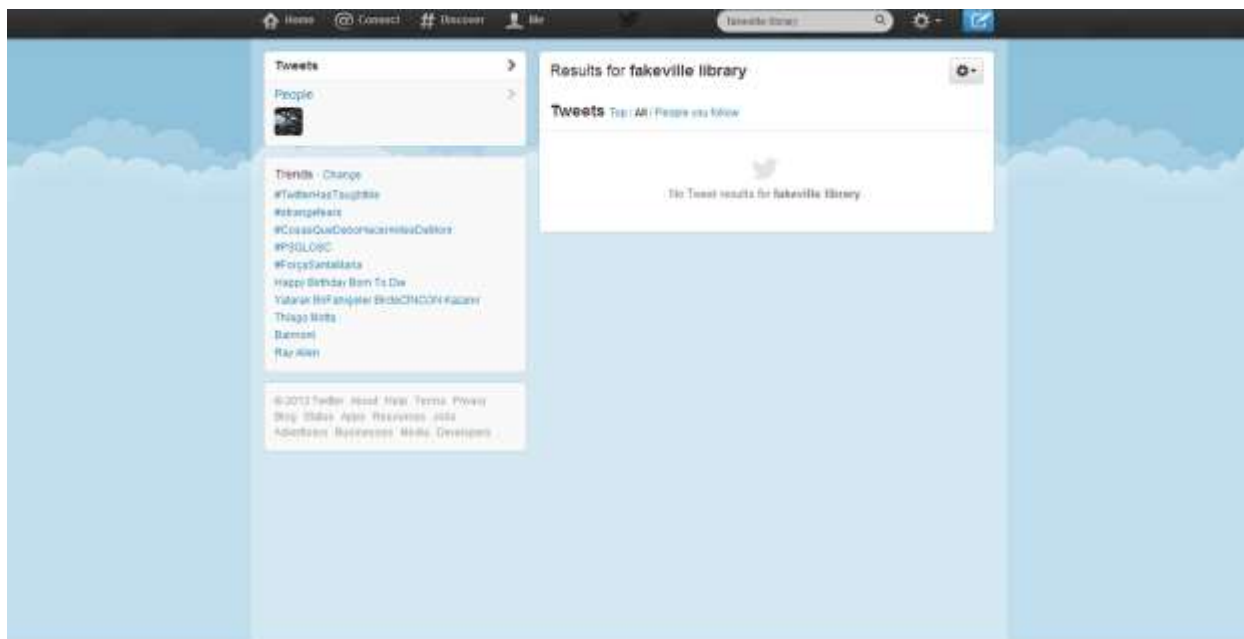
Tip: Search variants of your library's name to find out if people are mentioning your library on Twitter.

Twitter Vocabulary:

- *Tweet:* a message of up to 140 characters posted on Twitter
- *Twitter stream*: series of tweets from a Twitter account
- *Retweet (RT)*: a tweet forwarded by someone to his/her followers
- *Followers:* these are individuals or organizations who choose to follow your Twitter account and receive all your tweets
- *Following*: these are individuals or organizations that you have chosen to follow on your Twitter account; you will receive their tweets
- *Mention*: using @username to talk to or mention a specific Twitter account in a Tweet.
- *Hashtags*: words or phrases preceded by # used as tags. Clicking on a hashtag will search for all public instances of its use; hashtags can also be included in saved searches.

Tip: about hashtags

In a very broad sense, hashtags are the subject headings of Twitter, but remember that there are no standards or authority control behind hashtags. Anything can be a hashtag – all you have to do is precede a word or phrase with the # symbol. If you use a phrase, make sure not to include spaces. For example: use #librariesareamazing, NOT #libraries are amazing

If you've attended a conference, you may have seen a statement of the "official" hashtag for the event. With this hashtag, people at the conference and beyond know what search to use so they can find Tweets coming from the conference and join in the conversation. There is no official governing body that designates hashtags; hashtags are declared as official by the organizer of the event. For example, the 2013 ALA Midwinter Meeting has the official hashtag #alamw13.

Hashtags can be used for other reasons. If you have a standing acronym for you library, like DCPL or NYPL, use it in your tweets and as something to search for. Participate in Twitter using established hashtags as well. There's a long-running hashtag of #fridayreads, where people put out what they're reading on a given Friday. There's also the #ff hashtag, which stands for "follow Friday". Use this and mention some of the accounts you follow along with their @name. These can result in a follow back, or at least a thanks from them, and can be a way to promote goodwill among Tweeters in your community. Finally, remember that hashtags can also be humorous, sarcastic, or anything in-between. For example, someone might tweet "I'm so excited to return these library books! #payingfinesyay!"

Making your tweet fit

You have 140 characters per tweet to share information. While there are services that allow you to write a longer tweet that is linked to from within one posted on Twitter, this is not a recommended technique. Your followers aren't getting the short, simple information they want.

If you include a link that's buried after a link to a longer tweet, followers will need to click twice to get to what you want them to see, and you will lose people before that second link. Those links may also be difficult for people using Twitter via mobile devices.

If you are tweeting about events or programs and people can opt to link to a webpage for more information, consider using bitly links within your tweets. bitly, https://bitly.com/, is a tool that you can use to create short links that will direct customers to your webpage. For example, compare and contrast the two links below:

- http://www.fakevillelibrary.org/eventsandprograms/
- http://bit.ly/Y9WwZv

Twitter will automatically shorten lengthy URLS with bitly when you type them into a tweet; however, you can also set up a bitly account and shorten URLs yourself. The advantage of using bitly URLs is that you can use bitly to help track how many people click on the links that you broadcast. bitly is a free service that you can use to "Organize your links, count your clicks, and share your links across Facebook, Twitter, and email." (https://bitly.com)

My Library Tweets!

Now that you've got your account set up and you are tweeting about the library, you will want to let others know that your library tweets. Make sure that all library staff know about the library's new Twitter presence, and promote your account on your library website. You can add icons and follow buttons to your library website to make it easy for people to find and follow your account. You can choose among several functions for buttons or between two different styles from those provided by Twitter. *(See Figure 10.7, Twitter Buttons)* Twitter also provides information about using their logo at https://twitter.com/logo

Figure 10.9, Twitter Buttons
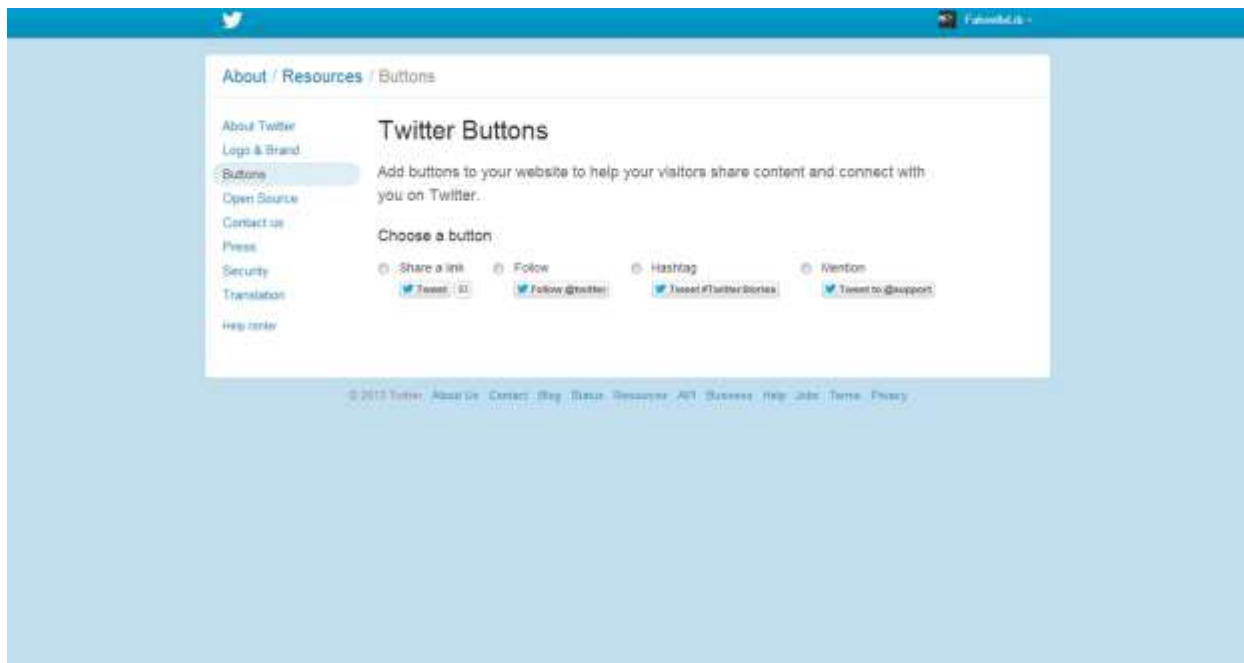
In addition to adding Twitter buttons to your library website, you can embed your Twitter stream directly into your website. Embedding your Twitter stream into your website lets people easily see your tweets even if they don't have an account. It also provides a link to your account so they can easily follow you if they are Twitter users themselves.

To embed your Twitter stream on the library website, go to https://twitter.com/settings/widgets . Click "Create New" to get the code for a widget that you can embed, and copy and paste the code into your website. *(See Figures 10.8 and 10.9, Widgets)*

Figure 10.10, Create Widget

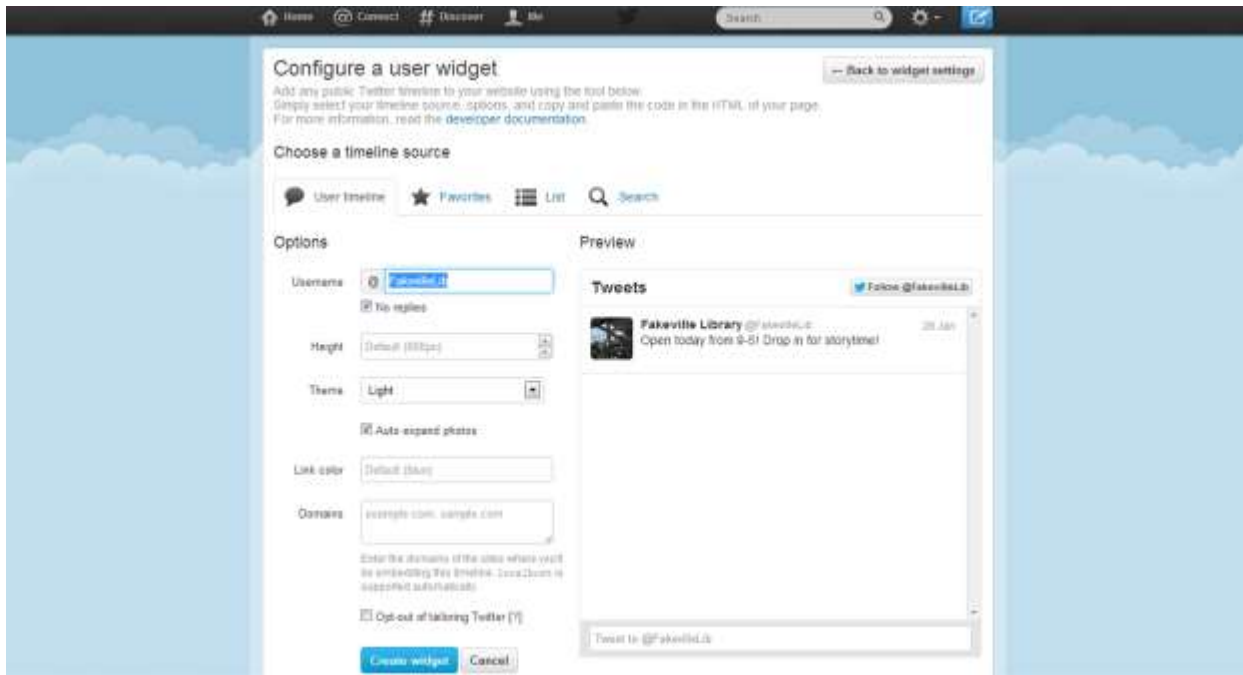Figure 10.10 is a screenshot of the Twitter webpage for creating a widget so you can embed your Twitter stream

Figure 10.11, Widget Embedded on Website

Figure 10.11 is an example of a Twitter stream embedded onto a website using the Twitter widget feature. This example is from the American Library Association's Midwinter Meeting 2013 webpage, http://alamw13.ala.org/. The Twitter stream has been labeled "Midwinter Buzz"

and updates in real-time. In addition, you'll notice the social media buttons below the Twitter stream that indicate how people can connect with the event.

In addition to adding buttons to your website and embedding your Twitter stream onto appropriate library webpages, you can tie your Twitter account into other social media accounts. If your library has a Facebook account, you can link the two, so that Tweets are automatically posted to Facebook, letting you connect with users there as well. On your Twitter profile page https://twitter.com/settings/profile, scroll down, click the Connect to Facebook button and authorize access. *(See Figure 10.3, Twitter Profile)* Your tweets will now automatically post to your library's Facebook account.

Social Media Management Systems

If you choose, there are social media management tools for maintaining one or more social media accounts. Two of the most used are TweetDeck and HootSuite. Both of these allow you to:

- Send tweets immediately
- Schedule tweets for later posting (great for planned advertising of events, contests or the like)
- Monitor your saved searches
- Track direct messages and mentions of your library
- Post pictures and links to your followers
- Post to Facebook and Twitter from the same site

TweetDeck offers a browser-based version, a Chrome app and a download while HootSuite is browser-based only. Both TweetDeck and HootSuite have mobile apps available for iOS and Android devices, which is a great option if you want to tweet directly to your followers from library events.

Both of these tools require you to set up a separate account, then link your Twitter account. If you use one of these, use a different password from your Twitter account. That way, if multiple people are tweeting from your library's Twitter account, you can give them the TweetDeck or HootSuite password, but not the one to your Twitter account.

TweetDeck has been part of Twitter and is free to use since December 2011. While this may lead toward more direct integration later, for now, it means that as new features roll out to Twitter, they are more likely to arrive at TweetDeck in a timely manner. TweetDeck allows you to link and update the library's Facebook page from that account.

HootSuite, on the other hand, is a separate company and has both free and paid levels of service. At the free level, you can add up to five profiles from social networks, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Foursquare and more. Hootsuite also allows you to add an unlimited number of HootSuite apps to increase your connections, so if you have Tumblr, Flickr or Youtube accounts, those can be brought in as well. If your library has an RSS feed for a blog or for new books, you can add two feeds with a free account and automatically send a tweet with those. The free HootSuite account also gives some basic analytics for your social media accounts, pulling information from services like Google Analytics into a report.

At the paid level, HootSuite lets you have a team who can post to your account, so if you have multiple people among your library's staff who tweet, they can all have access from within HootSuite. One additional user comes with the paid account and each additional one will cost more. Paid accounts also provide a more detailed analytics report to subscribers.

You do not have to use either of these to get started using Twitter, but using one can make it simpler to respond to your users efficiently. In addition, the analytics tools offered may be useful as you evaluate your Twitter presence.

Evaluating and Assessing your Twitter Account

You will want to evaluate and assess your library's Twitter presence just as you evaluate and assess your library's other social media presences. In addition, think about assessing your Twitter presence as you do other service points, such as the reference desk or use of virtual reference services like chat. Think about the objectives you established when you planned out your Twitter presence, and ways to evaluate those objectives.

Simply counting the number of followers for your Twitter account is not necessarily useful, because the number will have no context – what is the number being compared to? What does it mean? In addition, you may have people who read your tweets, but don't choose to follow the library. While it may be useful to track how many followers the library has over time, it's important to think about what that number does or does not mean. It may also be interesting to the library to look at who is following the Twitter account – is it library customers, other organizations in your community, or other libraries?

If you've decided to use bitly links to lead users to your website, promotional materials, etc., you can track how many people who read your tweets clicked through for further information. This may give you some insight about your users' areas of interest, and you can customize future tweets accordingly.

"Listening" to Twitter is a strategy recommended earlier in this article. You should plan to periodically analyze mentions of your library on Twitter, noting positive, negative, and neutral

comments (Doshi, 2012). If your library currently has a plan for evaluating customer comments (e.g. a library feedback form or comment cards), evaluating Twitter comments could be incorporated into existing work.

Because customers will interact with you via Twitter and expect you to respond, you can incorporate your Twitter assessment into whatever method you use for tracking customer inquiries via other channels. For example, you can report on reference transactions or other inquiries that were initiated via Twitter.

Think about incorporating Twitter with other library evaluation processes; for example, make sure to include "Twitter" as an option on program evaluation forms that you use at library programs and events. (These are the kinds of forms that ask your patrons how they liked the event, and where they learned about it.)

In addition to assessing use of your Twitter account by customers, you'll also want to evaluate the time spent participating in Twitter, so that everyone understands the level of support needed to maintain this social media presence. While monitoring Twitter and posting tweets may take only a few minutes of someone's time each day, it is work that should be recognized by library management.

The above assessment methods may provide you with enough information to keep your library informed about the success of your library's Twitter account. In addition, there are a variety of tools to evaluate various social media applications, and tools are constantly changing and evolving. Twitter itself has discussed beta analytics tools, but these are still in development. Many of the tools are oriented to support marketing strategies for businesses, but libraries can take advantage of these tools too. You'll probably want to experiment with free analysis tools that can help you visualize data (Bea, 2013). These tools include Twitonomy, www.twitonomy.com, which helps you track Twitter conversations and show you how you've been using Twitter, and Twitter Counter, www.twittercounter.com, which you can use both to count numbers, and compare your account against another account. (For example, libraries you may have identified in your background research.)

Best Practices and Conclusions

After your Twitter account is up and running, there are some things to keep in mind in order to keep your account useful to both your library's followers and anyone who discovers your library's Tweets (for example, from your library webpage.)

Best Practices: Tweet Security

- Maintain strong passwords. The library's Twitter account does represent the library, and you do not want a password that's easily guessed.
- If someone with access to the library's Twitter account leaves the library, make sure to change the password.
- Do not click on links in direct messages if you don't know where it's going. This is one of the most common ways Twitter accounts are hacked. You don't want to be the account sending out bad links!
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Best Practices: Tweets and Content

- Create a plan for Twitter use and re-evaluate it periodically
- Stay active with the account – keep tweeting information for your followers to read!
- Set aside a few minutes every workday to "listen" for mentions of your library, replies to your tweets
- Keep your library informed and excited about Twitter; some of the best content ideas may come from other library staff
- Let your library's personality shine through your tweets

Twitter provides your library with new opportunities to connect with your library users in meaningful ways. You can share information, build community, start conversations, and listen to your users using a service that is free and available to anyone with an Internet connection. Twitter works well on its own, or as part of a comprehensive social media and promotions strategy. Join other libraries using Twitter, and start tweeting!

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