

# Using the Library Staff and Statistics to Create a Dynamic Twitter Program

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## **Introduction**

Many academic libraries are using Twitter today. But how valuable is this tool and how often are the tweets noticed? The Sonoma State Library pulled together a group of library staff and librarians to start a new Twitter initiative. The interested librarians and staff were pulled together in the summer of 2009 to try a semester long pilot of using Twitter on the library homepage.

The interested librarians and staff agreed to contribute tweets on their various areas of responsibility and offered tweets on new library related resources, gallery events, workshop times, services for faculty and new online tutorials, campus lectures and more. A link was always associated with the tweet and stats were collected using the free tool Hootsuite, the Twitter client.

Once the semester pilot was over, the tweets were analyzed and divided in to four main categories: workshops, resources, events, and information about the library. The tweets were evaluated based on how many clicks per tweet were recorded. Statistics were pulled to see if certain categories of tweets garnered more interest.

The CARL conference discussion session focused on implementing a successful Twitter program in a library. We discussed who should be involved in the Twitter process, what statistics can be obtained to evaluate the process, and what Twitter best practices could be created by the people involved in the Twitter program.

## **Description**

The discussion session was formatted around a PowerPoint presentation, with ample time for both audience participation and discussion on the various strategies and focus of the Sonoma State Twitter pilot project. The project was started as a trial method for communicating library tools and as a venue to garner feedback (either through direct messaging or re-tweets). It was also a free tool (and the additional web tools used were free) so the project would only cost staff time. The pilot project started with calling together a meeting of interested participants. There were approximately ten interested people within the library including staff and library faculty. There was an initial meeting to brainstorm the Twitter rules (how many tweets per day, who would tweet, etc.) and the content that would be covered (should we include campus events, or just library events, etc.).

### *Tweeting Exercise*

After the introduction to the pilot program we broke off into groups and did a tweeting exercise. This was the prompt for the groups:

Of course you want the best sources possible! Just your luck, we have Articles, Books & Beyond, which leads you through the joy of finding top-notch full-text articles online, locating books & movies, and setting up your online access to all things library. No sign up needed. Tue, March 23, 10-10:30am <http://library.sonoma.edu/research/workshops/html>

We asked participants to come up with a 127 character tweet on the paragraph (which allows for a 13 character tiny url). All groups came up with a tweet, several re-wrote several times and all tweets were successful in getting across the message and completed within appropriate character limitations. It was discussed through this exercise that it does occasionally take an unexpected amount of time to write tweets and it can be challenging to talk about larger resources through the tweet format. The tweet we ended up with was: Articles, Books & Beyond 30 min workshop helps you find books, articles, media, all things library. 3/23 @10am (Rm 2016A) <http://ow.ly.WSMG>.

### **Key Points**

#### *Best Practices*

Through the Twitter pilot program, a best practices list was developed. Several of the best practices include:

- Using Hootsuite (which allowed us to add URLs and to track the amount of clicks on the link associated with each tweet)
- Shrinking all URLs with the Hootsuite shrinking tool; this allows us to track clicks on a posted link
- Putting the URL at the end of the tweet
- Consistently following up with a specific date (i.e. (10/12)) when using the word 'today' or 'tomorrow' Adding title, location, room number (when necessary), time, duration
- Agreeing to tweet at least once/wk (it turned out to be much more frequent)
- Creating a list of filler tweets in case nothing is happening in the library
- Agreeing to follow: Other libraries, all other feeds at your school or institution, local or regional news outlets, cultural institutions
- Tweeting about: New library material, hours of operation, sudden changes in database availability, library sponsored events, gallery openings, convocation, graduation, finals and mid-term schedules, campus emergency, freely available reference or research tools that may have a general audience appeal based on interest and usefulness, campus events

#### *Tools of Choice*

The pilot projects used four main free tools: Twitter, Hootsuite, Tweetake and Twtpoll. Twitter and Hootsuite were used to post tweets and collect statistics about how many times links associated with each tweet had been clicked on. Hootsuite was chosen because it is free, web-based (so we could use it at the reference desk or our desks or anywhere easily), has the ability to schedule tweets, includes an auto shrinking of URLs, collects statistics and has the ability for multiple user accounts. Tweetake was used to download all tweets. Tweets were then classified and assigned clicks (based on Hootsuite stats). We could then determine what categories interest our followers most.

### *Stats and Classification*

Once the tweets were pulled together from Tweetake they were organized in to 5 main categories:

- Resources (R): resources, websites, specific items, movies or databases, new library materials, non-library related search engines or articles
- About (A): changes in library hours, database availability, finals and mid-term schedules, surveys
- Workshops (W): library workshops
- Events (E): gallery events, campus lectures, convocation, graduation
- Misc. (M): miscellaneous, announcements about non-library changes, anything random

Total Tweets for all sections during Fall 2009 were 172. Total clicks for all tweets were 829. The most popular tweet category was events with an average of 6.4 clicks per tweet. The least popular category was workshops with an average of 3.9 clicks per tweet (A=4.2 clicks, R=5.5 clicks and M=5.3 clicks).

### *Lessons Learned*

It takes more time to tweet than originally thought. It is challenging to get event information into 140 characters. If there are multiple events and conflicting Twitter needs, it is important to communicate with all Twitter participants so accidental double tweeting and over tweeting does not occur. There are unusual statistical anomalies that can occur with Hootsuite and this should be watched carefully when pulling statistics.

So was the program successful? The answer: Sure, why not? The pilot program produced opportunities for faculty connections (several librarians received e-mail from faculty asking questions about what they saw in a tweet). There were a large number of hits which means even more people are seeing the tweets. It is an easy, and free marketing tool for programs and books.

A lot of re-tweets occurred. It is an opportunity for all library departments to promote their individual areas, services and collections.

Participants expressed a variety of successes and experiences within their libraries. Some participants were interested in the perceived value of the service and others responded positively to the statistics pulled from the SSU pilot project. There was also discussion that the statistics are

not all inclusive because of the potential volume of students/community members that could be looking at the tweets and not clicking through to the Twitter link, resulting in much higher reach ability than the statistics show.

The entire slide presentation from the discussion session is available online:  
<http://www.slideshare.net/joughm/using-the-library-staff-and-statistics-to-create-a-dynamic-Twitter-program>