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Review of Doing Social Media So It Matters: A Librarian's Guide

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Review of Doing Social Media So It Matters: A Librarian's Guide

Keywords

Librarians, social media

Review of *Doing Social Media So It Matters: A Librarian's Guide*

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Solomon, Laura. *Doing Social Media So It Matters: A Librarian's Guide*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2011. 65 p. ISBN: 978-08389-1067-2

One of the dangers of writing a topical book on the fast-moving trends of the Internet and in particular, social media is becoming irrelevant before reaching publication. A popular social network of today may become outdated in six months or a new way of communicating may change the paradigm of how we think about social interaction on digital devices. Laura Solomon's *Doing Social Media So It Matters: A Librarian's Guide* approaches this topic head-on and acts as an instructional guide through the perils of successfully implementing a social media strategy within a library setting.

Readable in one sitting, *Doing Social Media* is an entertaining, informative guidebook on how to effectively use social media to further both outreach and personal communication within libraries. Solomon leads the reader through the steps required to become acquainted with social media and how to make important policy decisions based on informed insight. For example, she describes social media as a tool that is of little use if the wielder does not know how to use it. Understanding the library's place in social media can and should reflect the view librarians often have of the role of the library as a community center. Building trust and reciprocity in social media, described as *social capital*, is an important step in establishing the library's role online. Solomon suggests,

Think of social capital like a sort of intangible bank account; you earn it by listening to, engaging with, and doing favors for others. Each time you make a request, you are drawing on that account. If no social capital 'account' has been established,

actions requested of others are likely to be ignored.

In order to begin building social capital, there needs to be administrative and staff buy-in. The importance of administrative approval is discussed and the steps proposed for seeking it are helpful. One possible solution describes showing that social media will have a direct benefit for your library by presenting an education campaign for coworkers unfamiliar with social media, one that focuses on telling success stories, highlighting facts and diminishing fears, and downplaying the technology side of things.

The very nature of social media services can present potential hazards regarding the public image of libraries. Solomon addresses these concerns by including an informative chapter for developing an institutional social media policy and summarizes it this way:

A social media policy doesn't have to be a long, wordy document. The point is not to cover every possible contingency or make using social media so intimidating for the library's employees that they won't want to engage in it. Rather, the idea is to show that the library actually supports employees' efforts and acknowledges social media as something that staff very likely wants to participate in. Providing written guidelines gives these employees a strong foundation on which to stand.

Solomon also includes a list of URLs citing examples of social media policies already in use at major academic and public libraries, a helpful place to begin in writing your own library's policy.



On the applicative side of the discussion, there are talking points on developing strategies for social media success such as managing account profiles, acquiring vanity URLs, linking profiles for efficient distribution of information, and customization of sites to match your library's branding. Solomon encourages setting goals based on desired impacts such as positive press, blog comments, re-tweets on Twitter, increase in friends/fans/followers, positive word of mouth, and social media mentions. Each chapter reads like a blog post filled with equal doses of informative insight and snarky comments and that concludes in a short, Twitter-sized "Bottom Line" summary to bring the point home.

Judging from the title, it is easy to assume the book takes a decidedly pro-social media stance. While this is true, it also asks the important question, "What if it's not working?" This very real scenario is approached with helpful suggestions for evaluating the effectiveness of your social media strategy such as using the wrong social channel, using the wrong people, creating poor content, lack of content, lack of buy-in, and the inability to change. If the decision to ultimately discontinue social media participation is reached in your library, Solomon provides a guide to when and how to withdraw from the online community. She offers these imperatives, "Be firm, but honest, about explaining the decision to stop participation in a particular network. Be clear about where the library will be online going forward."

As mentioned earlier, the Internet is a difficult topic to write about in the print world. Go to your local bookstore and look at the books on the shelf. How many of them are already outdated? Solomon successfully avoids this trap by remaining topical yet broad enough to be applicable to most types of social media for the foreseeable future. For example, since the publication of this book, Google Inc. released their Google + (pronounced, 'Google Plus') social media platform. The lessons taught in *Doing Social Media* easily translate to this new website and would lend advantage to any reader looking to expand in to the world of Google's new social endeavor.

In conclusion, *Doing Social Media So It Matters: A Librarian's Guide* is an informative, concise, and sometimes, dare I say, fun read aimed at the librarian with an interest in social media but who is not quite sure where to begin. For those of you who spend countless hours on Facebook and have received 12 tweets while reading this review, have no fear. There are lessons to be learned by all and you will find yourself returning to it time and again as a reference guide to hone your own social media strategies.