

*See Also: the University of British Columbia iSchool Student Journal  
Vol. 3 (Spring 2017)*

## **Pinterest in Academic Libraries: Social Media Policy on Visual Social Networks**

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**Keywords:** Social Media, Pinterest, Academic Library, Planning

### **Abstract**

Social media has come to dominate the world of online communication. As a result, the social media ecosystem has come to support a diversity of social media platforms to meet various user needs. A unique user need that has recently emerged is the desire for visual communication, which is typified by social media platforms, such as Pinterest. This briefing examines the emergence of Pinterest as a specific example of a visual social network and proposes a framework to develop a social media plan for Pinterest from literature on the use of Pinterest in academic libraries.

### **Introduction**

It has been over ten years since the launch of Facebook in 2004. In the intervening decade, a whole ecosystem of social media platforms has developed and transformed the way that people communicate. Of particular interest, there has been a transition from the written word to a system of visual communication, which is typified by social media platforms such as Pinterest (Baggett & Gibbs, 2014).

Pinterest offers several opportunities to make the library a fun experience and eases patrons' information seeking challenges. Pinterest's visual format allows patrons to quickly scan book covers as part of their browsing activities. Librarians can share their passion with a wider audience. Patrons can take a more active role by commenting on library posts and sharing content with librarians to include on the library Pinterest board.

## **Pinterest**

Pinterest is a visual book marking service. Using a Pinterest account, users can book mark webpages of interest and associate each webpage with an image; these images are pins. Users can also organize pins into broad categories called boards (Thornton, 2012).

What makes Pinterest unique for users is the ability to search and follow boards that the users find interesting. This allows organizations and individuals to develop an audience around specific topics. Retailers have already used Pinterest to rapidly increase traffic to their stores and drive sales. Libraries can use the same tools to grow and enhance patron engagement with their collections and services (Thornton, 2012).

## **Creating a Plan**

When implementing a new social media account, the critical first step is to develop a plan for its use and growth. A Pinterest plan should layout several key points (Thornton, 2012):

- Content
- Keywords
- Boards
- Tone
- Editorial Schedule
- Assessment
- Copyright

### *Content*

Account managers should decide on what content to share with users. This might include:

- Recommended books
- Study suggestions
- Images from digital collections
- Inspiration quotes or images appropriate for the library

Multiple content types are also encouraged (Thornton, 2012).

### *Keywords*

Once the content for the account is selected, it is necessary to consider the keywords that will be used to describe the content. These keywords will help patrons find the content on Pinterest and guide the titles and descriptions of the images.

Account managers should avoid keywords that are too general or too specific. Instead, words or phrases that patrons commonly use to ask for help in the library's physical space and online presence should be used. The library you are working with should also be consulted to see if they have a set of standard keywords for the organization, but you should also be receptive to adding keywords, as deemed appropriate by library personnel (Hansen, Nowlan, & Winter, 2012).

### *Boards*

Account managers should decide on the boards that will be used to organize the content, as it is often simplest to organize boards by the content types. Keywords should also be considered when deciding on boards and board titles (Thornton, 2012).

### *Tone*

Deciding on a tone for social media is critical to engaging with patrons. Consult with the library and see if they have a style guide or social media plan that outlines the tone of the library. Generally, writing in a casual tone and using a second person voice will work best online because the dialogue will sound more conversational and will draw more users in (Redish, 2012).

### *Editorial Schedule*

Regular posting on the account is critical to engaging with an audience, and a publishing schedule will help keep the social media plan on track (Thornton, 2012). A publishing schedule should detail:

- The types of pins that will be published
- The audience the pin is directed towards
- The publishing date of the pin
- The individual(s) responsible for publishing the pins

### *Assessment*

Account managers should develop a system for tracking the account's activity and reach. Some basic metrics to track include:

- followers
- re-pins
- likes
- pin views
- board views

Time should also be set aside to evaluate these metrics and consider changes to the plan (Baggett & Gibbs, 2014).

### *Copyright*

When an image is pinned on Pinterest, a copy of the image is created. When selecting and pinning images, special consideration should be given to copyright and licensing restrictions, and a list of image sources for the library should be developed to assist in identifying sources and avoiding copyright infringement (Hansen et al., 2012).

There are several sources and practices that are best to avoid when looking for images to pin (Hansen et al., 2012):

- Do not find images to pin using google images search;
- Do not pin images from external websites that do not give permission for third parties to pin the website's content;

- If there is ever doubt about an image's copyright status, do not include it on the account.

As part of the plan, identify several image sources, which allow pinning and are easily accessible by your team members. Some places to look for images to pin include:

- Images created by library staff;
- Librarything.com;
- Images created by partner organizations that grant permission for the library to pin their content;
- Wikimedia (be sure to read copyright documentation beneath images on this site).

### **Implementing the Plan**

Once the plan is brought forward, it is time for the plan to be implemented. It is good to keep some suggestions in mind as the agreed upon account managers carry out the plan.

#### *Automated Posting*

Automated posting allows staff to set aside a single time during the week to post the majority of the library's Pinterest content. Some automated Pinterest services include:

- Viralwoot (free)
- Buffer
- Viraltag
- Curalate

Be sure to stay engaged with patrons by setting aside several 10-15 minute time slots throughout the week, as this will allow account managers to check on comments and re-pin content from people who follow the library (Redish, 2012).

#### *Post Descriptions*

When posting images, be sure to include a unique image description that will help readers understand the image and the resource it points to. Use the keywords from the plan to focus these descriptions (Hansen et al., 2012).

#### *Post Links*

Include a link back to the webpage with the image's location so that patrons do not have to search through an entire website. For books and cataloged resources, this can be particularly important so patrons can easily find the resource in the library (Hansen et al., 2012).

#### *Integrate with library work flow*

The library's work flow should be used as a source of content for Pinterest. If the library has a blog, or is bringing in new materials, account managers can post these items as pins.

This usually limits the amount of copyright issues since the content is internal to the library and photos of these items can be taken by library staff members. Pinning content that is internal to

the library also allows the account managers to reuse existing content instead of continually creating new content (Hansen et al., 2012).

#### *Connect with Library Partners and Patrons*

Library patrons and partners should be included on the Pinterest account. Account managers should develop and follow a list of partner websites and re-pin content that is relevant to the library's boards and patrons.

Encourage patrons to share content with the library as well; if the content fits within a category type and meets with the library's copyright policy, re-pin the content and let the patron know the library has used their content. This helps patrons become active members of the library (Hansen et al., 2012).

#### **Conclusion**

Pinterest is a fun way to actively engage with the library community. Pinterest allows librarians to share their interest and collections with a global audience, enhances engagement with library partners and the community at large, and allows library patrons to grow their active participation in the library and explore the library in new ways.

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