Cliff Landis

Social networking sites

Getting friendly with our users

Social networking sites have grown in popularity over the last few years, particularly among teenagers and young adults. These are often the populations that academic institutions reach out to for both recruitment and retention. It is not surprising, then, that academic libraries and librarians have joined the movement to include social networking sites in library marketing, outreach, instruction, and reference efforts.

At its most basic, social networking sites consist of individual pro les that are publicly viewable. Users can then link their pro les by Friending one another, to draw a connection between them that others can see. Additionally, a user can interact with their Friends by leaving comments on their Friends pro les. Beyond these three basic criteria, social networking sites may include additional features, such as private messaging, sharing music/videos/photos, blogs, groups, and user-created applications.[1]

Growing alongside social networking sites have been other Web sites that include social networking features (sometimes referred to as social media sites). Web sites primarily dedicated to sharing photos, blogging, or podcasting may include user pro les that other users can Friend and comment on. Librarians have begun to extend their outreach efforts to these services as well, and entire communities of librarians and library users have sprung up within each of these sites. As social networking sites add more tools, and as more social media sites add pro les, the line between these two types of Web site will continue to blur.

Social networking sites are quick to grow and change. This is also true of the efforts of librarians within these sites, as well as the body of research on these topics. This article introduces a few of the many examples of how libraries are using social networking sites. Additionally, it gives both librarians and researchers the initial points for staying current on this topic.

MySpace

MySpace. The largest social networking site, MySpace began with a strong teenage presence but now has a diverse age range. This site allows users to custom design their pro les, which many libraries have taken advantage of as they have created pro les that re ect their main library Web pages. MySpace pro les have built-in blog, calendar, bulletin, and music sharing capabilities. *Access:* http://www.myspace.com/.

Brooklyn College Library. The library uses the calendar and blog features of MySpace to market upcoming programs. *Access:* http://www.myspace.com /brooklyncollegelibrary.

Bryant University Library. This library uses a similar color scheme as the library s Web page to brand its presence, provides ample linking to library services, and even has a cell phone number to text message a librarian. *Access:* http://www.myspace.com /bryantuniversitylibrary.

Libraries on MySpace. With nearly 400 members, this is one of the largest groups for institutional library accounts on MySpace.

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The group page provides resources for learning about designing a library presence on MySpace, as well as free Web tools for crafting a pro le. *Access:* http://groups.myspace.com/myspacelibraries.

UIUC Undergraduate Library. Includes videos, pictures, a library catalog search box, and a link to the library s Facebook group. *Access:* http://www.myspace.com/undergradlibrary.

walking paper. This is the blog of Aaron Schmidt, director of North Plains Public Library, who publishes and presents extensively on social networks in libraries, particularly MySpace. Schmidt also provides a lighthearted and passionate review of user services, and explores ways to remove obstacles to excellent customer service in libraries. *Access:* http://www.walkingpaper.org/.

Facebook

Facebook. Often discussed by college and university librarians, Facebook remains the standard social networking site for many college students. The site does not allow institutional pro les, but individual librarians can join to reach out to students. Although Facebook pro les cannot be changed in appearance, users can add individual applications to increase interactivity. *Access:* http://www.facebook.com/.

FacebookAppsForLibraries. For librarians interested in creating Facebook applications, this group serves as a place to view examples, get help coding, and discuss issues. *Access:* http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2469777131.

JSTOR Search. JSTOR is in the lead as the only database provider offering a Facebook application to search its database. *Access:* http://apps.facebook.com/jstorsearch/.

Librarian. This Facebook application was written by library school student Brad Czerniak. It allows users to access scholarly resources provided by both users and librarians. Additionally, the application provides an Ask a Librarian service, staffed by librarian volunteers who use Facebook. *Access:* http://apps.facebook.com/fblibrarian/.

Librarians and Facebook. A place for general discussion of the intersection of Facebook and libraries, this group allows librarians to relate their views and experiences on privacy, censorship, outreach, and marketing within Facebook. *Access:* http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2210901334.

Mini Library. This Facebook application performs a federated search of the national libraries of Europe. Library consortia and not-for-pro ts have begun using social networking sites as marketing tools and access points. *Access:* http://apps.facebook.com/minilibrary/.

UIUC Library Search. This Facebook application allows users to perform a UIUC (University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign) federated search from its Facebook pro le. It is one of many applications that has taken libraries catalogs and spread them to social networking sites. These efforts can improve both the library s visibility and access for its users. *Access:* http://apps.facebook.com/uiuclibrary/.

Selected other sites

Bebo. At one time considered a contender for MySpace s throne, Bebo continues to grow in popularity, particularly in the United Kingdom. *Access:* http://www.bebo.com/.

Classmates.com. Appealing to an older audience, Classmates.com reconnects old friends from colleges, workplaces, and military service. *Access:* http://www.classmates.com/.

Friendster. Originally appealing to urban young adults, Friendster was one of the rst social networking sites to really take off. Friendster s demographic has since opened up, and it is now especially popular in Asia. *Access:* http://www.friendster.com/.

Hi5. Oriented toward a broader international audience, Hi5 has remained popular with Indian and Spanish-speaking users. *Access:* http://www.hi5.com/.

OpenSocial. Not a social networking site, OpenSocial allows users to create applications that are not restricted to a single social networking site, but work with multiple sites. This is Google s response to Facebook s applications, and promises to bring a new level of both cooperation and competition to social networking sites. *Access:* http://code.google.com/apis/opensocial/.

Orkut. A social networking site owned by Google, Orkut is noted for being popular in Brazil. Orkut is gaining ground in the United States, which may speed up with the creation of OpenSocial. *Access:* http://www.orkut.com/.

Windows Live Spaces. Tied in with MSN Hotmail and MSN Messenger, Spaces is Microsoft s native social networking site. *Access:* http://home.services.spaces.live.com/.

Lists

List of social networking websites. Although no list of social networking sites can stay absolutely current, Wikipedia s list provides helpful additional information, such as the description and focus of each site, a user count, and any restrictions on registration. *Access:* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites.

Social Networking God: 350+ Social Networking Sites. This Mashable list breaks down social networking sites according to categories of site focus, such as books, business, hobbies, friends, family, and students. *Access:* http://mashable.com/2007/10/23/social-networking-god/.

Research

apophenia. The blog of danah boyd, a PhD student in the School of Information at the University of California-Berkeley, who studies social networking sites and their influence on and relationship to culture (particularly youth culture). She provides clear (and often humorous) explanations of developments in the world of social networking sites. *Access:* http://www.zepohria.org/thoughts/.

Association of Internet Researchers Listserv (AOIR). With more than 1,500 subscribers, this is the largest electronic list for Internet studies. The AOIR is a member-driven organization dedicated to the cross-disciplinary study of the Internet. *Access:* http://listserv.aoir.org/listinfo.cgi/air-l-aoir.org.

Dr. Larry Rosen. Rosen researches the psychological impact of technology on individuals on this blog. He has also researched the experiences and attitudes of teenagers and parents who use MySpace. *Access:* http://drlarryrosenmemyspaceandiblog.blogspot.com/.

Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication (JCMC). JCMC has been in publication since 1995 and covers a broad range of social science research on computer-mediated communication. An upcoming theme issue will cover social networking sites. The journal is both open-access and peer-reviewed. *Access:* http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/jcmc.

JOURNAL OF **COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION**

Sharing, Privacy, and Trust in our Networked World. This report from OCLC surveys members of the public from six countries and library directors from the United States on social networking and privacy. The report covers both social networking sites and social media sites, and provides a revealing look at how the public uses and feels about these tools. *Access:* http://www.oclc.org/reports/sharing/default.htm.

Unit Structures. This is the blog of Fred Stutzman, a PhD student in Information Science at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Stutzman is a researcher and commentator on social networking sites, and offers balanced views on the place of social networking sites in academia. *Access:* http://chimprawk.blogspot.com/.

News

Friends: Social Networking Sites for Engaged Library Services. Written by Gerry McKiernan, science and technology librarian at Iowa State University, Friends is a blog that selectively republishes social networking news that is relevant to librar-

ies. *Access:* http://onlinesocialnetworks.blogspot.com/.

Mashable. The world s largest blog on social networking, Mashable provides a constant stream of news on the ever-changing world of social networking sites. The blog covers a wide range of developments and is updated several times a day. Readers can subscribe to RSS feeds for news on particular sites, such as MySpace, YouTube, and Facebook. *Access:* http://mashable.com/.

Wired Campus Blog. Produced by the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* this blog covers a broad range of news stories on the impact of technology on education. *Access:* http://chronicle.com/wiredcampus/.

Notes

1. boyd, danah. (2006). social network sites: my de nition, www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2006/11/10/social_network_1.html. ✒

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of a class period to address renovation issues and a 50-minute bibliographic information session the following class period to deal with library instruction. This tactic not only increases face time with the students, but it also allows students to consider follow-up questions for the second visit. I have found that most professors are willing to give up the additional 15 minutes at the end of one of their lectures to address students anxiety.

If your library remains open during the renovation, as ours has, it can be a very scary, dusty, and noisy space. Students may not want to come if they can avoid it. I see students every day who avoid using print materials if it means coming to the library or initiating a delivery from temporary storage. They are intimidated by the construction zone and convinced that retrieving print materials is an unmanageable task. If collec-

tions or services will remain in the library, start instruction sessions by acknowledging the students reluctance. Encourage professors to schedule tours and browsing time, offer incentives to get the students in the building, create assignments that pull them in, or organize rides to the storage facility. It will take extra effort to ensure that print materials are used.

Finally

There are as many ways to teach library instruction as there are librarians. The uncertainties of the library renovation have caused me to re-examine my teaching techniques and philosophies, as well as reconsider the needs of the users. While a library renovation poses unique challenges for instruction, those trials can lead to exploration and growth for instruction librarians. ✒