

Harry Glazer

# “Likes” are lovely, but do they lead to more logins?

## Developing metrics for academic libraries’ Facebook pages

A lot has changed in the five years since the Rutgers University Libraries set up our first Facebook page.

When the university librarian approved our initiative in fall 2006, academic libraries’ outposts on Facebook appeared to be far from common. In the article “Do you Facebook? Networking with Students Online,” Brian Mathews noted that he conducted a global search and found “a handful of other libraries had created profiles” on Facebook.<sup>1</sup>

So as we launched the Rutgers University Libraries’ Facebook presence, the effort felt like pioneering into relatively uncharted territory. And when we published an article in *C&RL News* two and a half years later about our initial efforts on Facebook,<sup>2</sup> the response from colleagues to the article reinforced that impression.

In 2011, the norm has changed, and now it is far more common for academic libraries to have Facebook profiles. A recent quick search on Facebook revealed that, in New Jersey alone, in addition to our page, the libraries at Princeton, Fairleigh Dickinson, NJIT, and Kean universities have active Facebook group pages. Nationally, there were active pages as well for the university libraries at Columbia, Michigan-Ann Arbor, Nebraska-Lincoln, Tufts, Penn State, Washington, Wisconsin-Madison, Pittsburgh, UCLA, Virginia, and Yale among others.

With the growth in academic libraries’ Facebook pages, there has been a corresponding growth in attention to the uses of these pages in library conferences and in library literature.<sup>3</sup> Yet if we can judge by

national conference topics and tables of contents in our leading publications, there is one area of this booming field of libraries activity that is woefully underdeveloped. That void exists in the lack of reliable metrics, which we can use to assess the strength of our Facebook pages and their “return on investment” for our libraries.

In this article I propose a set of simple measures that an academic library can use to gauge the impact of their Facebook activities and offer some suggestions on how to increase the viability of a library’s Facebook page.

### Choose appropriate goals, in advance

In an article in the May/June 2010 of *American Libraries*, David Lee King suggests that setting goals for your library’s Facebook page is a critical part of the planning process.<sup>4</sup> This advice is echoed by Andrew Burkhardt, emerging technology librarian at Champlain College, in the article “Social Media in Libraries.”<sup>5</sup> Different writers will recommend different goals. How do you select the best ones?

In a study of 12 library Facebook pages published in January 2011, Terra B. Jacobson notes that libraries often consider Facebook a vehicle for six different uses: announcements/marketing, reference services, forum for users, RSVP for events, OPAC/database search,

---

Harry Glazer is communications director of the Rutgers University Libraries in New Brunswick, New Jersey, e-mail: hglazer@rulmail.rutgers.edu

© 2012 Harry Glazer

and employee communication. Jacobson compared these six envisioned uses with the actual content on the libraries' Facebook pages. She concluded that: "The results presented here show that many libraries are using Facebook primarily as a marketing tool and it may be valid to assert that this is currently the best use in the library realm."<sup>6</sup>

It appears from this study that, whatever goals you do set for your Facebook page, it is sensible to focus them on marketing activities. Yet given the different sizes, locations, and campus environments of academic libraries, there are not marketing oriented goals that suitable for all. Your library will have to judge what goals are best for your environment.

Based on the Rutgers University Libraries' experiences on Facebook, I suggest that each academic library's marketing goals include some of the following components:

- the number of fans for your page and direction that number is going,
- how often fans "like" items posted and how often they post comments,
- anecdotes that illustrate your page is having an impact, and
- the size of the "impressions" of many of the items posted on your page.

### **Are fans lining up?**

A few authors of articles in recent general interest publications have noted that one of the barometers of the health of an organization's Facebook page is how many people have chosen to link to it and whether that number is stable, slipping, or increasing.<sup>7,8</sup> In this vein, at Rutgers we've found it useful to compare our numbers to those of our peers. Jacobson noted that the average number of fans per page was 231.<sup>9</sup>

In our experience, the numbers of fans per library Facebook page may be higher—of the 16 active academic libraries Facebook pages located in this author's recent search, the average number of fans was 550. This average is skewed by two blockbuster academic library Facebook pages—the ones for the Yale University Library (2,553 fans) and Princeton University Library (1,002) fans.

Excluding these two impressive outliers, the average number of fans per academic library Facebook page among the remaining fourteen libraries in the recent search was 375. As of this writing the Rutgers University Libraries' Facebook page has 585 fans and is slowly growing. So on this measure, our score inspires confidence.

### **But do they like what you say?**

To gauge if your fans are interested in the content your library posts on its Facebook page, look at whether they're clicking the "Like" button on specific posts and offering their own comments. In a story on the authoritative blog AllFacebook.com, the author describes these two measures as "the most important metrics to focus on."<sup>10</sup> This observation is echoed by other social media experts.<sup>11,12</sup> In our experience, these likes and comments need not be evidence in volume at specific posts but, rather, can be spread out over a semester. I was heartened to see that many of our posts over the previous few months received one, two or three "Likes" and/or comments—what was significant was that the "Likes" came from dozens of different fans, collectively, over the course of the semester.

At the same time, comments or "Likes" in significant numbers on specific posts do provide solid evidence of engagement with your fans. In this vein, we were encouraged to see 18 "Likes" on a recent posting about the summer progress of construction of a new café in our flagship library, and 12 responses to a contest asking fans to each name one librarian in our system.

### **Look for anecdotes of success**

Sometimes, however, the impact of a library's Facebook page can be summed up neatly in the story of one significant fan's reaction to a particular posting. An example from our experience illustrates this point well.

In the beginning of the spring 2011 semester, the Rutgers University cable TV network's morning news show reported on a change in policy in our Music Library, which now allows users to check out music CDs and DVDs (and

not just use them in the library). The student reporters on the show were so enamored with the policy change that they also produced a public service announcement to promote it.

Funny thing was that we had never posted a news story about this policy change, and the student paper never reported on it. The one place we did promote it was a small item on our Facebook page, in the previous semester. We believe the Facebook item led directly to the RU-tv report because they used nearly identical wording in the news report that was in the Facebook item, and the RU-tv producer (a staff person) is a “Friend” of mine on Facebook and, I believe, a “Fan” of our libraries’ Facebook page.

In the words of the American Express commercial, such a connection is “priceless.”

### **Where do your posts go?**

One measure that Facebook now provides to a group page’s administrator, which is not visible to regular Fans, is a number of “impressions” per each posting. Blogger Thomas Baekdal defines “impressions” as the number of times a posting has been viewed throughout Facebook, either on your group’s wall or in particular user’s news feeds.<sup>13</sup>

The size of your post’s impressions may be driven by a number of factors, such as the day and time of the post, the number of fans your page has, their interest in a particular post, the information your fans have posted in their own profiles, and your fans’ responses to particular earlier posts. Still, you should be able to use impressions as a meter of the popularity of a particular post. In that vein it probably should have been no surprise to us to see that a posting about the construction of the new café received over 1,700 impressions, far more than a post three days later announcing the arrival of a new science librarian.

### **Some recommended rules of the road**

Now that we’ve identified some worthwhile measures for assessing the viability of your Facebook page, what can you do to boost its impact? I offer a few suggestions.

#### **1. Have your Webmaster post the Facebook icon, with a link to the page, on the front page of your library’s Web site.**

This one measure, facilitated by our library system’s IT director (thanks, Tibor!), has led to many dozens of new fans joining our page this past year.

**2. Be interesting.** When deciding what to post, don’t think in terms of what news your library wants to disseminate. Think about what your fans’ interests are; then select and phrase your posts accordingly.

**3. Be interested.** If someone comments on a posting on your page, respond promptly and positively. It builds tremendous good will.

**4. Run contests and quizzes, offer prizes.** Many other offices and units on campus are likely to be promoting themselves through clever promotions, some of which only tangentially relate to their work. Get in on the action! It’s a great way to build interest in your page.

**5. Talk about things other than your library.** Did you read some unusual news about Facebook, college life, a new Web site or a recently published book? If it might suit the interests of your users, post a short item with a link on your Facebook page. Adding variety can increase your audience’s engagement with the page overall.

One recent posting on our page that got lots of traction was about a new Intel app, which lets users create a “Museum of Me” based on the material on their Facebook page. It received more than 2,100 impressions.

While many academic libraries may now have active Facebook pages, for relative newcomers the benefits and demands of Facebook can seem puzzling and poorly defined. I hope that the suggested metrics and “rules of the road” in this article, drawn from the Rutgers University Libraries’ five years of experience on Facebook, offer a reassuring path to those who’ve decided to start their journey into the social media landscape.

### **Notes**

1. Brian S. Mathews, “Do you Facebook?: Networking with Students Online,” *College*

*and Research Libraries News*, 67, no. 5 (May 2006), p. 306-307.

2. Harry Glazer, "Clever outreach or costly diversion? An academic library evaluates its Facebook experience," *College and Research Libraries News*, 70, no. 1 (January 2009), p. 11-19.

3. As one example, the 2011 ALA Annual Conference featured at least three different sessions that referred to uses of 'Facebook' in their description.

4. David Lee King, "Facebook for Libraries," *American Libraries*, 42, no. 5/6 (May/June 2011), p. 42-45.

5. Nancy Davis Kho, "Social Media in Libraries: Keys to Deeper Engagement," *Information Today*, 28, no. 6 (June 2011), p. 1, 31-32.

6. Terra B. Jacobson, "Facebook as a Library Tool: Perceived vs. Actual Use," *Col-*

*lege & Research Libraries*, 72, no. 1 (January 2011), p. 79-90.

7. Kristie L. Cattafi, "What's it cost? ROI of social media can be intangible," *The Non-Profit Times* (May 15, 2011), p. 21-24.

8. Zuzia Soldenhoff-Thorpe, "Facebook Marketing in Six Steps: How to successfully manage your fan page," *Marketing Experiments* 1, no. 4, (2010), p. 162-164.

9. Terra Jacobson (January 2011), p. 84.

10. Nick O'Neill, "How to Measure Facebook Page Engagement," posted on [www.allfacebook.com](http://www.allfacebook.com) on April 22, 2011.

11. Cattafi, 24.

12. Soldenhoff-Thorpe, 164.

13. Thomas Baekdal, "What Per Post Impressions on Facebook Really Mean," posted on [www.baekdal.com](http://www.baekdal.com) on November 24, 2010. *zz*

## ***University of Oklahoma Libraries presents***

**29<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

**March 1-2, 2012**

**Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**

### **Incredible Transformations for Research Libraries: Back to the Future**

#### **Conference Chairman**

Sul H. Lee, Dean

Peggy V. Helmerich Chair

University of Oklahoma Libraries

#### **Speakers:**

Kevin Guthrie – President, Ithaka

Fred Heath - Vice Provost and Director, University of Texas Libraries

Charles Lowry - Executive Director, Association of Research Libraries

Frank Menchaca - Executive Vice President, Gale, part of Cengage Learning

Sarah Michalak - Assoc. Provost and Librarian, University of North Carolina/Chapel Hill

Rush G. Miller - University Librarian, University of Pittsburgh

James Neal - Vice President for Information Services, Columbia University

Allen Powell - President, EBSCO Information Services

Carla Stoffle - Dean of Libraries, University of Arizona

**<http://libraries.ou.edu/conferences>**

**REGISTRATION DEADLINE: February 15, 2012**

For more Information, please contact:

Sarah Robbins, [srobbins@ou.edu](mailto:srobbins@ou.edu),

University of Oklahoma Libraries

Phone: (405) 325-2611