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The Facebook Frontier: Harnessing the Power of Facebook Live

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Abstract

Facebook Live offers librarians the opportunity for ongoing engagement with their community, even during a pandemic. During the COVID-19 quarantine, community organizations of all types used the site to continue to connect with their community. Kimbel Library used the social media platform to hold virtual versions of annual face-to-face events and create reference education for students and faculty. While there is no replacing the dynamics of face-to-face interaction with patrons, Facebook Live offers opportunity for continued safe social contact. It also is a "safe" place for less outgoing patrons to attend or even participate in library events they would not normally join, building relationships that can be further developed when normal programs resume.

Keywords

Social Media, Facbook Live, Marketing, Engagement

The Facebook Frontier: Facebook Live

Programing is a normal and important part of library services. Not only does it educate and

increase information literacy, it creates a sense of community. Such engagement should not stop just

because the building closes. Given the prevalence of social media in our culture – along with the fact

that it is free to use – such platforms make perfect alternatives during extended closures.

Facebook Live offers librarians the opportunity for ongoing engagement with their community.

During the COVID-19 quarantine, community organizations of all types used the site to continue to

connect with the public. At Coastal Carolina University, Kimbel Library used the social media platform to

hold virtual versions of annual face-to-face events and create reference education for students and

faculty. While there is no replacing the dynamics of face-to-face interaction with patrons, Facebook Live

offers continued safe social contact. It also allows patrons who do not usually participate in programs to

foster relationships.

Social Platforms and Audiences
Platforms

Different social media platforms are made for different information formats. Twitter is very limited in

character space. Instagram requires great visuals. TikTok's sole focus is personalized short videos. Most

library programs and events, however, translate well to Facebook Live over other platforms. "Facebook

Live streaming practices differ with respect to how user-generated content is presented and

experienced. Live streaming gives users a greater sense of presence than more traditional social media"

(Skjuve & Brandtzaeg, 2020). The ease of interaction between viewers and streamers also makes it a

great choice for those librarians who suddenly find themselves responsible for moving from face-to-face

to virtual without much (or even any) digital live-streaming experience.

Facebook Live allows for live interaction during the event and continued interaction as viewers

watch post-broadcast. Recording in Facebook Live also allows for videos to be shared outside of

immediate audience members, garnering continued engagement long after the event. Kimbel's

Facebook Halloween celebration, where our librarians shared photos, scary stories, and streamed the

popular game *Among Us*, has continued to climb in reach numbers that far exceed our normal posts.

Facebook Live also allows for multiple presenters, inclusion of pre-recorded segments, and video game

streaming. Facebook does not require viewers to have an account to watch, making it all the more

accessible. Additionally, Facebook Live streams can be embedded in the library's website and viewed

from there.

Audience

Just as with face-to-face programs, it is important to identify the particular patron group you are

hoping to engage with your Facebook Live event. The more defined your audience, the more

personalized content can be. Pew Research found that "Facebook is popular among all demographic

groups," 74% of which visit the platform at least once a day (Gramlich, 2019). This means regardless of

library type, chances are your target audience is on Facebook already. Tapping into Facebook Insights

will show how the library's current online audience relates to face-to-face patronage. Using this

information will help in forming programing, setting goals, and knowing where more attention may be

needed.

As an academic library, Kimbel has a very clear vision of who our target audience is: CCU

students. However, our primary Facebook followers are Alumni, parents, and other community

members. Knowing this, we were able to go to our primary virtual student audience – in this case,

Instagram – and promote our Facebook Live events to them there. While not all of our Instagram

students follow us on Facebook, many are willing to jump on and watch if they know there is an event.

Though Facebook Live is easy and essentially free, there are still existing access barriers. Not

every student has internet service or a way to access Wi-Fi. Following the initial quarantine, through

support of the university, Kimbel boosted its laptop lending and added lendable hotspots to meet

student needs, though not every library has that budget.

There is also the issue of catching your audience at the right time. When we kicked off our game

stream for Thursday afternoons, we did not get much initial engagement. After inquiring with our

institutional research center on campus, we learned we had chosen a time when the vast majority of

CCU students were in class. We adjusted our schedule accordingly and saw an increase in our reach.

Since much of our services revolve around academics, we wanted to offer tutorials and

information literacy streams. These videos filled a gap left when students could no longer visit the Help

Desk to ask simple reference questions. Public libraries may find benefit in offering reference to their

online collections for typically face-to-face patrons.

For academic libraries in particular, it is important to recognize how social media is perceived

across the campus. "Previously demonstrated differences in scholarly communication hold true in this

new environment: specifically, differences are seen in age, academic rank, gender, discipline, country,

and language in the degree to which scholars adopt and use such technology… Perceptions of credibility

of social media vary by age, with younger scholars having a more positive perception" (Sugimoto, Work,

Larivière, & Haustein, 2017). Partnering with faculty can help boost acceptance of this new mode of

research and reference help. They can then recommend it to their students.

Further accessibility can be achieved by adding closed captioning. Facebook has several ways to

do this, the simplest – though not necessarily the most accurate – being to use Facebook's generated

video captioning. Since it is estimated around 85% of people watch Facebook videos on mute, closed

captioning will enhance viewing for a much wider audience (Castañeda, 2020).

Marketing

Marketing for Facebook Live events can be broken into two main categories: before and after.

Both are important and both help build a following for future events.

Before

Two weeks ahead of the event, create a Facebook "Event" that can be shared. Once someone clicks interested on an event, all of their friends and followers can see it as well. Facebook also suggests events to users within the area. This extends your reach far beyond your current followers. Please note that these "Events" are for promotional purposes only and do not actually link to the live feed.

Create a buzz before the event by teasing it on all of your social media platforms. Behind the scenes photos or preparations are very popular, especially on Instagram. Tag followers and other community accounts. Check with other faculty, staff, and patrons to see if they would help you spread the word on their platforms as well. Since our target audience is our students, we recruited our library student assistants to get involved with the process by making videos, joining game streams, and sharing posts. This type of word-of-mouth marketing is invaluable.

Even though Facebook Live is virtual, still advertise in-house with fliers, bookmarks, posters, etc. If your facility is closed, these promotional items can still be posted on community bulletin boards or in local businesses. Be sure to include social media events in your library's calendar, email lists, newsletters and website. Re-share the link to the event and post reminders on the day of across all of your platforms.

After

Following the live cast, embed the video on your website, link to it on your other platforms, and encourage your audience to share as well. YouTube is a great place to archive and organize all your videos for easy retrieval and later viewing. It is a social media platform in its own right at offers another free opportunity to reach new patrons.

Continue to monitor Facebook comments for anyone viewing the video after the live event. While it is not necessary to respond to each and every comment, it is good practice to respond to each and every commenter. Building a relationship requires engagement from you and them. Try to avoid

giving generic one-word answers like "Thanks" and make responses as individual as possible. Use their

first names whenever you can to make your conversations with them as personal as possible.

When it comes time to schedule your next live stream, tag recent attendees of similar events.

Let them know you think they may enjoy a certain event and why. Ask them if they would be interested

in helping out by being a promotor. Social media is driven by social marketing. A personal

recommendation from an online friend goes much farther than a poster.

Assessment

Facebook offers a lot of metrics and it can be overwhelming to try to keep up with them all.

Sitting down with planners and management ahead of time is essential. Decide which numbers are

important to your library and for your particular event. It is key to know what your overall goal is for any

given live stream:

- Is it for education, entertainment, or to promote the library?

- Are you trying to reach more people in your community?

- Draw people to your profile page?

- Is engagement a priority? Comments, likes, and shares?

Knowing the answers to these questions can help you choose which Facebook metrics to follow.

The top three are Views, Reach, and Impressions. Page views are the number of times a page's profile

has been viewed by people. Reach is the number of people who saw any content from your Page or

about your Page. (This metric is estimated by Facebook.) Impressions are the number of times any

content from your Facebook page or about your page entered a person's screen.

Engagement is also an important number to know. This is the number of people who clicked

anywhere on your post. It can be a like, comment, share, or visit to your profile page from the post itself.

If you are looking to promote community engagement, this is perhaps the most important number to

follow.

These metrics are available as soon as the video posts to your page. They are published in the

Posts section of your Insights and convey the number of people reached, post clicks, reactions, video

views, and how long those video views were.

Conclusion

Facebook Live is a great alternative for face-to-face programing while social distancing is in

place. It allows for continued community building and engagement with patrons. While there are

barriers, understanding your audience and their needs makes them easily surmountable. There are no

special training, software, or video editing skills required. Involving only a smart phone and library

Facebook page, live streaming is an affordable option for libraries under budget and staffing restraints.

It can also be a great way to continue to meet the needs of the community and the expectations of

stakeholders during quarantine.

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