

Public libraries have changed dramatically in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with focus shifting from shelves of books to community hubs for technology, workforce development, learning and entertainment. Social media's role in this change is often overlooked, but has emerged as the most influential method of patron engagement. As patrons become more attached to social media, the occasional library Facebook post or clever tweet won't do. Libraries must devote time, staff and even funds to developing a social media strategy that helps the library to achieve pertinent goals.

### **Going to Where the Patrons Are**

According to [Pew Research Center](#) (*Social Media Fact Sheet, 2.5.18*), seven in ten Americans use social media “to connect with one another, engage with news content, share information and entertain themselves.” Connect, engage, share and entertain are words libraries often employ in mission statements and strategic plans; Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter (among others) provide measurable means to put those words to use while putting the library in patrons' hands every hour, every day.

### **Engagement Versus Broadcasting**

Social media is more than just a way to increase awareness of programs, materials and other services available to the public; libraries that use social media most successfully provide service and build connections through their social media platforms. The creation of engaging content, delivered with the same regularity and care as brick and mortar services, is key to providing a valuable service via social media. The social media platforms libraries use should be a reflection of which patrons the library wishes to reach, with the library using a number of outlets, such as a Tumblr or Instagram account for teens and a Facebook page just for children's services. It's worth eliciting feedback from patrons as to which social media platforms they use most, but don't be surprised if the most common answer is Facebook – 68% of Americans use Facebook, and of that number, three-quarters use Facebook at least once a day (Pew Research Center: [Social Media Fact Sheet, 2.5.18](#)).

### **Some Investment Required**

As Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and other sites become more central to library service, they in turn demand more of the library's resources, in terms of staff and funds. Strategic planning, budget drafting, job descriptions/ salary schedules, technology planning and even building plans should take social media into consideration. Many libraries are turning to paid PR firms and social media advertising as a way to reach the increasing number of patrons who may rely on the internet – and social media in particular – for news, weather and entertainment that they may previously have gotten from newspapers, television or radio.

### **The Inevitable Drawbacks**

While social media is an invaluable tool for libraries, there is always the risk of having accounts misused in ways that can damage the library's reputation. Assigning staff time to monitoring social media is imperative, as is adopting policies that set guidelines for staff and patron social networking ([an example can be found on KDLA's website](#)). As for trustees, follow and enjoy library social media accounts, but remember that it is [your duty under the law](#) not to use social media groups or messaging platforms to inadvertently violate [Kentucky's Open Meetings and Open Records Act](#) by discussing library business outside of public meetings.

