THEODORE CALVIN PEASE AWARD

To Like or Not to Like: Understanding and Maximizing the Utility of Archival Outreach on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

This study describes interviews with twenty-three archivists across the United States who currently maintain Facebook pages for their respective institutions. The interviews were conducted to determine why these institutions have chosen to utilize Facebook and social media more broadly, what guidelines could be drawn for future archival participation on Facebook, and whether Facebook-based outreach is effective. Based on the interviews as well as on analytical data, most of the institutions included in this study have had success using Facebook as an outreach tool. They use Facebook to conform to expectations, raise the public profile of their institutions, and share collections. The interviews also reveal four guidelines that could help archivists have further success on Facebook: highlight visual items; work collaboratively with other institutions to take advantage of Facebook's sharing tools; profile items with intrinsic value; and establish a narrow identity that focuses on one or two specific subjects.

KEY WORDS

Outreach, Social Media, Social Networking, Web 2.0, Facebook, Digital Access

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Consider for a moment the number of people who interact with an archival institution during a given day through in-person research and remote reference queries. At the busiest repositories, that number is probably nowhere near 10,000 unique visitors. Yet 10,000 is only 0.001 percent of the billion users on Facebook, the globe's largest social network. If every archival repository could reach 10,000 users each day, the possibility of raising the profile of each institution and the archival field as a whole is very real. For example, imagine 10,000 people viewing a newly digitized photograph and sharing it with their friends. A conversation begins about the photograph, and several users notice a business in the background that does not appear in the item's description. Those users contact the repository's staff members who, after confirming the accuracy of the description, eagerly add the newly created, crowdsourced metadata to the item. In this scenario, access to the item is much wider than if it had gone live on the institution's website with no additional publicity. As a bonus, the repository has its researchers create an item-level description. It is a win-win scenario and it is quite feasible—if the repository can reach that level of Facebook success.

Do not start jumping for joy just yet, however. Having a Facebook presence is potentially a great opportunity for an archival repository wishing to boost its public profile and outreach efforts—but success on Facebook is far from certain. Unfortunately, no magic formula exists for developing the kinds of content that generate the most "likes" and the highest level of interactivity for archives (or any other organization). Archivists can take stock of what repositories are currently trying on Facebook to determine what is working and how to improve their own Facebook efforts.

This study seeks to achieve that goal by examining the current state of selected archival institutions on Facebook through an analysis that combines interviews with over twenty archivists at diverse institutions across the United States with a quantitative examination of those institutions' Facebook analytics. These data allow for a discussion of why archivists first looked to Facebook as an outreach tool and what they are currently doing on Facebook to reach both new and established users. This study examines the types of content that archivists are posting on Facebook and what reaction those posts are generating as demonstrated in the analytics. The ultimate goal of this study is to create a set of suggestions that can significantly increase the odds for institutional success with Facebook for repositories of all sizes.

A Primer on Facebook

Before going further, it is first necessary to provide a primer on Facebook pages. A *page* is a specialized type of Facebook account designed, in the words of Facebook, to provide "a voice to any public figure or organization to join

the conversation with Facebook users."[1] Public figures, organizations, and other groups use pages rather than the more common personal profiles (*timelines*). Designated page administrators have access to a wealth of analytics, known on Facebook as *Insights*. Available for viewing from the home screen of a page administrator, Insights provide data about the demographics of the users who follow the page's updates. In addition, the page administrator can use the Insights to determine what sorts of content updates are garnering the most interest based on an analysis of likes, comments, and shares.

Indeed, the most valuable feedback for posts on a page is their likes, comments, and shares. A *like* requires users to click "like" on any given item and thereby claim to like that item. Facebook equates a like with a "thumbs-up" or an endorsement of the content provided. Since liking requires only one click, many users will like a great deal of content as a quick way to provide feedback. Page administrators strive for every content update to garner the most likes possible. *Comments* are self-explanatory; users can add their thoughts to any posted item. Users' comments are usually composed of text; however, users can add links to a comment. Comments can provide page administrators with invaluable feedback, and they often inspire productive or enlightening discussions. Regardless of the positive or negative nature of comments, most page administrators would like their content to lead to more comments rather than fewer.

Shares stand out from likes and comments as the only feedback mechanism that will definitively increase the audience of any given post. When users share content, they go to another profile or page, take an interesting piece of content, and place it on their own sites. (The likes and comments in the original post do not migrate with the shared item.) If one thinks of each user's site as a bulletin board, sharing entails copying a flyer found somewhere else and putting a copy on his or her own board. What is the result of this action? More users will see the original content because their friends (for personal users) or their users who like them (for pages) will now see the original content even though they have no relationship with the initial creator of that content. Depending on the settings of a site of a particular personal profile or page as well as the frequency with which a user interacts with a page, a like or a comment by an individual on a page's post can also make that page's content show up on his or her own site. However, sharing is the only reactive mechanism on Facebook that will ensure that the maximum number of friends or those who like the page will see the content in its original form.

Study Methodology

This study examined two key aspects of the current usage of Facebook by archivists and others who administer pages for archival institutions. The first

aims were to determine why the selected institutions created Facebook pages and whether they use Facebook as part of a larger social media strategy. This section delves more deeply into the specific goals that institutions have for their Facebook pages as well as the audiences that institutions are trying to reach that way. Second, using a combination of self-reported observations by the interviewed subjects as well as supporting evidence from Facebook Insights, this study set out to determine what kinds of content-sharing have the most impact with users, thereby leading to a set of best practices for archival collection-based outreach on Facebook.

Answering the aforementioned questions required in-depth, qualitative interviews with current users of Facebook who manage pages for archival institutions. The first step in this process was to gather information relating to the above questions from at least twenty archivists at four kinds of archival institutions: college and university archives and special collections; state, national, and presidential libraries (i.e., government repositories); local historical societies; and other repositories that do not fit into one of the three previous groups (i.e., corporate archives, subject-based repositories, film repositories, etc.). This information was ultimately collected through telephone or Skype interviews with at least one representative from each participating institution. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes. (Two institutions could not coordinate a time during which to accommodate an interview and instead submitted written responses to questions prepared in advance.) Each interview was based on a set of questions written and submitted to the respondent at the time of recruitment while acknowledging the right to ask open-ended, follow-up questions as warranted. At the conclusion of each interview, participants received instructions for exporting their Facebook pages' Insights for further analysis.

To bolster any conclusions drawn from the qualitative data gathered through interviews, each participant was asked to provide quantitative analytics. The requested analytics were page-level data and post-level data, including a month's worth of information, starting one month prior to the interview and ending on the day of the interview. Page-level data included information on the total number of likes for a page (i.e., the number of users who follow a page), the demographics of those individuals, information on where mentions of the page are coming from, and the degree to which the page has a high virality figure. (Virality is a statistic used by Facebook to describe the extent to which a page goes viral, defined as a large expansion of reach in a relatively short time. Think of this figure as the exponential growth of reach.) While all of these statistics could potentially prove helpful for archivists hoping to target specific users, the focus remained on the overall trend of the number of likes a page had as a key metric. If a page's like count grew, then the page was extending its reach due to the inherently higher number of people who saw its content.

In contrast to page-level data, post-level data delves into the reach, virality, and interactivity of each post generated by the page administrator. This information shows the number of likes of, comments on, and shares of each post and can be used to examine successful trends among posts. Both the page-level and post-level data contain a great deal of quantitative evidence that page administrators can use to improve their current practices.

Likewise, researchers have plenty of data to parse to conduct assessment studies. However, this study confined itself to using the quantitative metrics to either substantiate or refute the claims made by the interview respondents. Thus, it focused exclusively on the trend in likes for a page and the likes, shares, and comments garnered by specific posts that the respondents singled out as particularly successful. How best to use the Insights as guides for future Facebook behavior could be the subject of an entire study. It is the hope, however, that focusing on the qualitative feedback will reveal trends that the analytics simply cannot demonstrate or that are fundamentally unquantifiable.

To conduct a study based on interviews with staff members from archival institutions active on Facebook, the first task was to create a population for sampling by determining what archival institutions are on Facebook. To achieve this goal, each U.S. institution on the comprehensive list of archival institutions published by the University of Idaho's Special Collections (maintained by staff member Terry Abraham) was entered as a search term in Facebook to try to find any pages connected with it.[2] This search yielded 523 archival institutions with Facebook pages, although limitations in Facebook searching and the wide variety of institutions that could contain archival content mean that the 523 total is not definitive.

Recruitment began by first randomly sampling institutions (using a random number table) from the total population so that the total set included 10 institutions from each repository category given above.[3] In cases where categorization was difficult, such as a subject-based repository affiliated with but not administered by a university repository, the institution was placed into one of the relevant categories at random. Wherever possible, sampled institutions were contacted by email.

A total of 23 institutions were ultimately included in this study out of 100 that received initial contacts. Of those, 6 came from the college and university archives category; 6 were national or state archival institutions; 3 were local historical societies; and the remaining 8 came from the fourth miscellaneous category. In several cases, more than one respondent participated in the interview process. When that occurred, each respondent was assigned a random letter for identification purposes (i.e., Respondents 5A, 5B, and 5C). In addition, from the total batch of 23 respondents, 17 institutions were able to successfully submit their Facebook Insights for analysis. Most of the institutions that were

unable to export their analytical data encountered technical difficulties that could not be resolved remotely.

The Procedures and Practices of Archival Institutions on Facebook

Before moving to a more in-depth discussion of the goals of Facebook usage, it is important to briefly describe the policies and practices under which archival page administrators are currently operating. Unfortunately, no uniform habits for how archivists behave on Facebook emerged from the gathered data. Some institutions maintain a strict schedule for posting content, while others fluctuate depending both on the availability of content—such as collections or items to highlight, event announcements, relevant links to share—and the time crunch of staff contributors. At least four institutions reported using Facebook's feature for creating posts in advance, which also allows the content creator to decide when to publish the material. No consensus emerged in terms of how often or at what time of day to post content. One institution found that postings on Monday and Tuesday performed significantly better than others, but no one else reported this phenomenon. In terms of staffing, several institutions have staff members or interns whose primary responsibility is social media outreach. In other cases, Facebook content falls under the aegis of staff members with full-time responsibilities away from social media.

Each respondent also listed the platforms on which it is currently active, including any blogging and/or podcasting ventures. Of the 23 participating institutions, 10 use Facebook exclusively for social networking. Several institutions out of that group of 10 have parent organizations that use other social media platforms, but the respondents in this study could only speak to their experience with Facebook. Thirteen institutions have Twitter accounts. Within that group, some see Twitter as reaching an entirely different audience than Facebook does. For example, Respondent 18 at a state historical society said that Facebook reaches the institution's core audience, while Twitter reaches "history nerds and the media."[4] Others post the same content on Facebook and Twitter, either manually or using an aggregating tool such as HootSuite.

The third most popular social networking platform is Flickr, where 7 out of 23 participants have made digital collections available. In fact, Respondent 7 (representing a corporate repository) claimed that Flickr is more important for her institution than is Facebook.[5] Five institutions discussed their blogging activities and, for each of them, announcing a new blog post on Facebook is a common practice. Respondent 15 at a corporate archives stated that "The blog is still the mother ship, but the other [platforms] are important for getting content out."[6] Three institutions maintain a Tumblr presence, although the respondents did not provide information as to how their Tumblr pages differ from their

Facebook pages. Eight institutions make audio and/or video content and share that content through a variety of platforms, including YouTube, the institution's website, and podcast series. Only one respondent (18) stated that his institution has a Pinterest account, but it uses that platform exclusively to highlight its museum exhibits. Finally, 2 institutions have experimented with Google+, but the first had just started that account and could therefore not speak to its effectiveness. The second felt that it is a waste of time when compared with other social media platforms.

It is important to consider the total online presence of any of the institutions included in this study. Thirteen out of the twenty-three institutions are not using Facebook exclusively, while nearly all of the institutions have detailed websites that relate basic information about the institutions and their holdings. Therefore, while the remainder of this analysis focuses exclusively on Facebook activity, such activity is not occurring in digital isolation.

The Rationale for Facebook Usage: Conformity, Promotion, and Collection Outreach

The results of this study are separated into two sections, concerned respectively with rationales for creating and maintaining archival Facebook pages and devising a set of best practices for how to conduct collection-based outreach using Facebook posts. This first section focuses on the rationales provided for Facebook page creation and usage. Three such reasons emerged: to conform to expectations that all institutions must have a Facebook presence, to promote the institution's public profile, and to conduct collection-based outreach.

The first rationale, conformity to expectations, was encapsulated best by Respondent 17 from a university's digital collections: "Everyone is doing it, so should we."[7] In other words, having a Facebook presence is expected for public institutions, and therefore the archival institution should have one as well. There is an inherent logic in this rationale for building a page, as Respondent 7 at a corporate archival institution described: "People expect that everybody has a Facebook page. If you don't have a good web presence, people wonder why you wouldn't."[8] The implicit concern in Respondent 7's statement is that a user may think an institution without a Facebook page is not technologically savvy or is perhaps not interested in social media outreach. Furthermore, both quotes signal a paradigm wherein individuals expect institutions and corporations to maintain a Facebook page. This perspective indicates that Facebook's hybrid identity as both a place for personal connections and for business and nonprofit communication with customers and clients is now considered the status quo, at least in the minds of Respondents 17 and 7.

The clearest example of an ambiguous beginning leading to ineffective Facebook activity came from a local historical society. Respondent 8 stated, "I'm not too impressed with Facebook but everybody's doing it."[9] Respondent 8 also experienced some difficulty with the mechanics of Facebook as a novice user. She described her initial Facebook experiences: "I found out that the people who wanted to connect with Facebook were either current friends, high school friends, or people that want to connect with the whole world."[10] She was frustrated that her outreach efforts only reached personal contacts or those who connected with as many institutions as possible. Sadly, her frustration translated to a Facebook page that was effectively abandoned. In the two years of the page's existence, Respondent 8 posted only once: a combination of collection-based outreach and seeking donations. As of February 2014, Respondent 8's page no longer exists. Thankfully, the dire situation of Respondent 8 does not reflect the majority of the institutions sampled in this study.

In fact, many of the respondents found success in aiming for the second primary goal of creating a Facebook page, that is to raise the public profile of their institutions, both locally and on a wider scale. Four variants of the "raising the profile" goal emerged: reaching and increasing the audience of the institution and thereby hopefully garnering more interest in the institution itself; explaining and justifying the institution's activity to the public at large; event-focused marketing; and reaching new donors where applicable.

Several respondents reported a general goal of reaching their current audiences or gaining new audiences by maintaining a Facebook presence. For example, Respondent 18, representing a state historical society, stated that Facebook is an effective platform for "reach[ing] and increas[ing] [Respondent 18's] core audience."[11] Respondent 19, from a university archives and special collections repository, rephrased this goal, stating that Facebook enables "community engagement."[12] Respondent 10A, from a subject-based repository, stated that "[Facebook] was a way of advertising and a way to connect to the community."[13] Respondent 16 (from a government archives) referenced the potential for Facebook to reach new users by stating, "[Facebook] reaches people who couldn't normally visit and those who wouldn't otherwise think to visit."[14] More specifically, some institutions chose to venture onto Facebook as part of a larger strategy to garner interest from younger members of the public. Both Respondents 12 (from a local historical society) and 15 (from a corporate archives) reported that Facebook helped to raise their institutions' profiles with younger users.[15] Respondent 11, at a government repository, stated this goal explicitly by connecting reaching younger users with remaining relevant:

> If you want to be relevant, you want to be up to date, you want to reach out to the younger element out there, you need to use what they're using. If Facebook is now going to be the way that people communicate and get

> information out about who they are and what they do, then we need to be using it. If not, you're going to be seen as a dinosaur, not up to date, not in the hip crowd.[16]

Respondent 3, representing a repository of the records of the diaspora of a particular ethnicity that has many members throughout the United States, is also targeting a younger audience. Respondent 3 stated:

> Through Facebook we hope to connect with younger [members of the ethnicity whose records constitute the institution] and researchers [from that ethnicity] who will [then] contact us through our website.[17]

The underlying theory of this rationale is that Facebook and other social media platforms skew young, especially when compared to the average researcher in an archival repository. Using Facebook is therefore a way to connect to an age demographic that the institution may not otherwise reach using other outreach methodologies.

In fact, in at least one case, this strategy is paying off. Respondent 15 is succeeding in reaching younger users. As of September 19, 2012, the age group that comprised the highest percentage of those "fans" who like that institution's Facebook page was individuals aged 25 to 34, totaling 889 users in this demographic. However, the total number of users for ages 18 to 24 is 640, a drop from both the 25 to 34 demographic as well as the 35 to 44 demographic (813 users).[18] Respondent 15 felt that the youngest demographic is not being reached as effectively because Facebook is "graying" as its users age, while younger people prefer to use other social media platforms such as Tumblr, Pinterest, and, increasingly, Instagram. With recent trends indicating that fewer teenagers are using Facebook as their primary social network, targeting a younger audience through a Facebook page may not prove as successful in the future.

The second reason given for using Facebook to reach new audiences is the need to reach potential users where they already are. The perception is that potential new users are on Facebook, and it is therefore logical to set up a Facebook presence to reach them. As Respondent 5A at a government repository with an attached museum put it, "We have to bring the museum, the engagement, and the content to [the public] in a different platform."[19] Respondent 20, representing another government institution, stated:

> We're not getting the crowds that we used to, so now we need to go to them. . . . We're trying to make a determination as to dwindling resources and where we put those, and undoubtedly social media is one of the resources where we need to be focusing.[20]

Both Respondents 5A and 20 want to establish continuity in outreach between what existed before social media and what is posted on Facebook. In other words, Facebook does not inherently necessitate new outreach tactics. Rather, it enables pre-existing outreach activities to continue because it represents the most convenient location for reaching the core audience. If one believes that Facebook and other social media platforms represent the best outlets for continuing outreach at large, then allocating resources to social media despite a tight budget makes sense.

The second variant of "raising the profile" is using Facebook to explain and even justify the activities of an archival institution. Respondent 1 works at a local historical society that is not well known beyond its regular researchers. She found that her Facebook page's audience is learning both about the archival profession as well as about her specific institution through her regular updates:

> Facebook has made the profession relevant and it has made the historical society relevant. My friends say that [my posts] are really cool. . . . [My friends] always thought history was really cool, but they didn't really know it.[21]

The reason Facebook makes the archival profession relevant in the opinion of Respondent 1 is that she can update her personal friends as well as members of the local community on the day-to-day activities of the historical society. Collection-based outreach—sharing digitized materials—helps in this endeavor. However, the goal of explaining the archives can encompass event announcements, exhibit openings, interesting historical information that relates to collection holdings, and even staff news such as conference presentations.

Different kinds of archival institutions can take advantage of Facebook as an explanatory tool in ways specific to their holdings and outreach concerns. For institutions that have a relatively low profile or exist in areas where archives are not common, utilizing Facebook as a tool to explain what archives are and what they hold is a great idea. Members of the local community who may have the misconception that research is restricted to academics may be pleasantly surprised when they learn that local records are available to them. Government repositories can introduce their functions to taxpayers who may not understand the significance of archives. Respondent 16 put this rationale into stark relief by stating, "Facebook doesn't replace [traditional] outreach, but it does expose [users] to new content and shows them that their tax dollars are going to a good program."[22] When members of the public question what Respondent 16's institution does for them, she can point to its Facebook page as a representative sample of the plethora of activities that put tax dollars to work. Facebook can act as a tool for college and university institutions striving to increase their exposure by introducing them to students who may pass by their entrances without knowing anything about their archival holdings. In

fact, Respondent 21, from a university archives and special collections repository, stated his goal is "to make it a little clearer what we have," especially for university students who need to use the institution's collections for their senior theses.[23] Using Facebook and other social media to tell potential users what kinds of materials an institution collects, or even to simply inform the community that archives do in fact hold one-of-a-kind items, will most certainly raise the profile of the institution.

The third variant of the "raising the profile" rationale for Facebook usage is to promote events. Sixteen of the twenty-three participating institutions in this study reported using Facebook to promote upcoming events, although it is more central to the social media strategy of some of those institutions than others. Respondent 2 (from a subject-based archives) stated that event promotion is the top goal of her Facebook activity: "Our main goal on Facebook is to get exposure for our events so that people get to know us and recognize us. Our second goal is to educate people about the history that we have here."[24] Respondent 4 from another subject-based repository echoed this sentiment: "[The goals of our page are] to serve as a vehicle for announcing events at our library and archives, as well as all other events including performances, discussion groups, and gallery showings."[25] These two responses suggest that announcing events on Facebook will bring in first-time visitors and inherently expand the core audiences of their institutions. Furthermore, technology-savvy users can link events to their calendars and thereby use the institution's event updates as reminders to attend.

Amazingly, all of the institutions that use Facebook to promote events have found success to varying degrees. Although no quantitative data exist to corroborate the reports of the respondents, each one who mentioned event promotion said that attendance has increased due at least somewhat to social media activity. Multiple respondents reported event attendees mentioning Facebook by name as the place where they either learned of the event or were reminded of the event's date, time, and location. In an intriguing twist, Respondent 23 at a university archives and special collections repository reported that one user posted on his Facebook page asking that an upcoming event receive more attention to increase its attendance.[26]

The final variant of the "raising the profile rationale" for Facebook usage is to gather new donors for archival repositories. Local historical societies have been especially active in using Facebook for this purpose. For Respondent 1 (from a local historical society), out of 100 new likes for her institution's Facebook page in the calendar year prior to the beginning of this study, 60 of those individuals became contributing donors.[27] Respondent 12, also from a local historical society, stated:

> Sharing images helps to get the collection out there, but it also has the unintended consequence of connecting the Diaspora of those who used to live here back to us and create a potential pool of donors.[28]

Respondent 12's quote explains how Facebook is an effective tool for donation solicitation. Posting new content (i.e., the institution's photographs) as well as promoting an institution's activities and events, helps potential donors see on a daily or nearly daily basis that their money will go to a worthy cause. Furthermore, existing donors can see the progress on efforts to which they have contributed. While Respondents 1 and 12 reported success in gaining new donors, further research is needed on how effective social media is as a tool for successfully soliciting donations. Specialists in development should look at how their institutions' social media presence could draw in (or repel) donors.

The third major category of Facebook rationales falls under "collection-based outreach," or any variant of sharing the holdings of the institution with new and existing users in the hope that such activity will lead to more in-depth research. Collection-based outreach can certainly have the effect of raising an institution's profile, especially insofar as it can explain what the institution does. However, this section deals specifically with posts on Facebook that contain information about particular collections or items. Usually these posts include digitized content, either culled from previously digitized collections or scanned specifically to be shared on Facebook. Collection-oriented outreach can also include discussion of content held in physical collections or of finding aids. For example, Respondent 14 reported posting finding aids of newly processed collections as a way to announce to researchers that a collection is now ready for use in the reading room.[29]

Most respondents who conduct collection-based outreach do so to encourage users to dive into *bona fide* research projects. For example, Respondent 17 (representing a university's digital collections) provided the following three-pronged mission for his page: first, he wants to reach students at the university who want to see what their digital collections include and what sorts of primary materials are available to use for class projects. Second, he hopes to reach the rest of the on-campus community as well as visiting researchers who could use materials for more in-depth projects. Finally, he hopes to reach his local community to promote upcoming events.[30] While the third plank of that mission statement falls under the "raising the profile" rationale discussed above, the first two are both variants of collection-based outreach. In other words, if you post content, you will likely gain researchers; think of Facebook like an archival "field of dreams."

Guidelines for (Usually) Achieving Facebook "Success"

Given that archivists are using Facebook for different goals yet nearly all are conducting some sort of collection-based outreach, it is natural to transition to a discussion of what archivists can do to better their Facebook presence and achieve whatever metric of success they are seeking. Harry Glazer provided guidelines for academic libraries when he stated that content creators should 1) create a link between the Facebook page and the library's website; 2) be interesting to users; 3) be interested in what users post to the page; 4) run contests and quizzes; and 5) post content that goes beyond the confines of their libraries.[31] His guidelines are all good starting points, and archivists would do well to follow them generally. Thus, the guidelines that follow apply specifically to archival content and how best to promote that content given Facebook's inherent strengths, quirks, and limitations.

Guideline 1: Think Visually

Respondent 2 (from a subject-based archives) stated that her institution uses "digital images as a menu for what [they] have."[32] She used the phrase "digital images" rather than "posted content" on purpose. Most respondents in this study reported that posting visually arresting items, especially photographs, maps, drawings, and artwork, generates significantly more interest than any other kind of post. This observation makes sense given that users are scanning their Facebook newsfeeds at a quick clip, and a photograph may stop a user's scanning just long enough to get that individual to read the accompanying metadata. Respondent 15 (from a corporate archives) stated summarily that "Facebook is made for pictures. If you don't see a picture, you don't click."[33] While there are exceptions when users may click an item without an image (see the third guideline), Respondent 15's observation is generally correct.

Guideline 2: Think Collaboratively

The second guideline is not so much about what a post is but where it is. Taking advantage of the sharing function built into Facebook is a great way to expand the audience of any given post to users who otherwise would be unfamiliar with an institution. In effect, it is to the benefit of archivists to work collaboratively with institutions that have larger "fan bases" by asking them to share the originating institution's content. When that occurs, the users who like the larger institution will see the original institution's content and will have the chance to link directly to its page. In most cases, the original institution's

page will garner several likes from users who may not have known about the archives until they saw the content shared somewhere else.

Archival repositories should work with institutions that are "one step up" from them, administratively speaking. Archivists who administer a page for a center that is a part of a college's special collections department should ask the department as a whole to share their content. Conversely, those who administer a page for a special collections department should target the page for the academic library as a whole or even the college's page(s). Another good idea is horizontal collaboration, meaning that archival repositories should form collaborative relationships with other repositories that share similar subject interests or collecting foci. Respondent 2 stated that she is already collaborating by sharing content from archival repositories in Europe and Africa that have similar subject-based collections.[34] Another collaborative posting relationship that could greatly expand the audience for an archival repository is working with corporations that have many more likes than most archival repositories could ever garner on their own. If an institution has records that pertain to the history of a particular industry, say early soda marketing, sharing that institution's content with Coca-Cola or PepsiCo might garner more attention for the archives.

The best example of collaboration is within the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). While each branch of NARA operates its page independently of the central agency in Washington, the members of the agency's Social Media Team regularly assist page administrators in setting up their pages, troubleshooting when necessary, and sharing content from branches on the main page of the agency. Respondent 16 reported that, when the main agency page shares her institution's content, its reach skyrockets: "Whenever [the main NARA page] highlight[s] one of our records, we see an incredible increase in friends."[35] The collaboration is not only from the top down; branches of NARA share each other's content with great effect. In fact, the collaboration on social media has become part of NARA's organizational culture. Archivist of the United States David Ferriero has made social media into a major component of NARA's outreach and access strategy. Respondent 16 related the following anecdote: when Ferriero visited her institution and was informed that he had not "liked" its Facebook page, he pulled his smartphone out and liked the page immediately.[36] NARA's Social Media Team stated that NARA views social media as providing access in an entirely new way and that social media is certainly one of the agency's major priorities.[37] Amazingly, NARA as a whole has 95,000 likes among all of its constituent pages. While the name recognition of NARA helps that figure, the collaborative spirit throughout the agency only makes the number continue to grow.

Guideline 3: Think Intrinsically

This guideline asserts that appraisal is actually an important aspect for selecting what to post to an archival institution's Facebook page. When conducting collection-based outreach, archivists should not focus on content that is informationally dense or indicative of evidentiary value. Rather, archivists should strive to post content that has intrinsic value. The picture of the Constitution posted by the institution of Respondent 13 did not garner as many likes as the picture of the World Trade Center, but it still elicited nine likes. For a scanned document, that is actually a good number. Of course, the Constitution is the epitome of a document with intrinsic value, but an institution need not post an item with equivalent intrinsic value to meet this guideline. Intrinsic value for Facebook content is not quite the same as intrinsic value evaluated when making appraisal decisions for content accessioning. While looking at "the thing itself" is still important, other factors play a role in increasing the intrinsic value of an item. If an institution's particular audience is extremely interested in a subject, an item with content relating to that subject has a higher intrinsic value (see the next guideline for a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon). For example, a picture of a notable basketball game in a university's past may have intrinsic value for alumni of that university, while it may have little value for people who like a NARA page. Another major factor in determining intrinsic value is recency. If a particular subject is in the news, its intrinsic value for social media increases as long as that topic remains current.

The best example of an intrinsically engaging post found in this study was published by the institution of Respondent 11. In the days following the death of Neil Armstrong, it posted a photo album commemorating the late astronaut and including the iconic photograph of his boot print on the lunar surface. The moon landing (and NASA more broadly) has a built-in intrinsic value. When compounded with the huge increase in interest in Armstrong following his passing, the post resonated with the institution's audience like none other before or after within the sampled time period. The post had 21 likes and 10 comments; the next highest post had 5 likes and 3 comments. The Armstrong post reached 227 unique users; the next highest reached 165 unique users.[38] Perhaps more significant than the feedback on the Armstrong post is that the total number of likes for Respondent 11's page went up by 6 users on the day that the post went live. No other day's increase reached that level.[39] Clearly, the Armstrong post with its high intrinsic value succeeded as an outreach tool.

The reason intrinsically valuable items work on Facebook is because they instantly engage users. Much like photographs, any item with a great intrinsic value will cause users to pause their quick scanning of their newsfeeds. For example, Respondent 20 reported posting a telegram announcing the

declaration of the First World War to naval personnel. That post was quite successful even though it lacked photographic content because the declaration of a world war has an inherent value. When posting intrinsically, archivists should try to "whet the appetite" of their users. Hopefully, users who stop to examine an intrinsically engaging item will then visit the institution's website and look for more informationally rich content.

Finally, it is necessary to discuss a word choice in this guideline. Many respondents said that they strive to post "interesting" content on a regular basis. Even Harry Glazer suggested that librarians should strive to be interesting on Facebook.[40] Why, therefore, is it preferable to use the word *intrinsic* rather than *interesting*? The simple reason is that *intrinsic* has a grounding in archival theory and is more narrowly construed than *interesting*. A twentieth-century book that details how monks created illuminated manuscripts during the Middle Ages could be quite interesting for its informational content, but it is not nearly as intrinsically valuable as an actual image of an illuminated manuscript—even if that manuscript is in a language that most users do not read.

Guideline 4: Think Narrowly

This guideline is the most counterintuitive but, ironically, it seems to yield the most interaction in the way of comments from users. "Thinking narrowly" means that an institution should refrain from sharing items that run the gamut of its collections and instead should establish an identity as the go-to destination for one or two specific subjects.

Why does thinking narrowly work? Part of the answer is that a Facebook search lends itself to pages with descriptive names that include their subject areas. "The John Smith Library" may have several likes, but "The John Smith Library for Sociology and Demography" will garner attention from users who search for sociology or demography and not just for the word *library*. Of course, this rationale only works when an institution is committed enough to a subject to add it to its page name. However, that step is not necessary for thinking narrowly to work. If an institution establishes itself as the best Facebook page for learning about a specific subject, then word will spread through likes, comments, and collaborative sharing. One institution included in this study has not changed its name, but its page has become a *de facto* destination for anyone interested in the history of a particular region.

Thinking narrowly also implies that an institution will do as Glazer said and leave the confines of its own collections when posting new content.[41] If an archival institution has established its Facebook identity as the portal for all information relating to the history of suffrage, then it suddenly has a justification (and an expectation) to share links about current debates concerning the

Voting Rights Act in the U.S. Supreme Court. Respondent 10C from a repository that specializes in music stated this philosophy as follows:

> The archives are not just for people who are writing books. . . . The archives have a relevance to everybody. If you're interested in [our subject], you're interested in us. Think of us like a friend with a great record collection.[42]

This institution's philosophy of having a Facebook page where all who are interested in its particular genre of music can learn and interact with each other is proving effective. It is gaining likes from users across the world who have no real "archival" interest, but who know that this page will provide them with interesting content.

Two examples illustrate the power of thinking narrowly. The first is Respondent 3's archival repository for a specific ethnicity. Respondent 3 readily admitted that the institution is not very active on its Facebook page, yet the number of likes of the page continues to climb for no clear reason.[43] Thinking narrowly actually explains this phenomenon, as people of that ethnicity are finding the page because the ethnicity's name is in its title. Then they like the page because it's a place for them to connect with one another. If this institution capitalized on this inherent interest through more regular postings, its Facebook success would increase exponentially. The second example comes from Respondent 14's nonprofit's archives. Its page is successful insofar as it has 6,126 likes as of February 2014. However, the institution decided to create a page dedicated solely to the papers of a famous economist that it holds. It has since molded that page into a clearinghouse for all kinds of information about that economist and his theories, as well as his family life as documented in his records.[44] Although this page is much newer than the page for the institution as a whole, it has 6,769 likes as of February 2014. One collection has garnered nearly as many likes as the institution's overall page that includes content from all of its collections. This discrepancy exists because people are searching for the economist and finding his specific page. They then like that page because of their inherent interest in his work. Furthermore, the posts on the economist's papers' page attract a higher frequency of likes and comments that often lead to spirited but academically engaging disagreements between other economists (both amateur and professional).

How can an archival repository think narrowly about its Facebook page? Archivists can follow the model reported by Respondent 14 and make separate pages for "celebrity" collections. They can also makes pages for collecting centers or even collecting foci. If more pages are not possible, the institution can then decide administratively that it wants its page to become a destination for any of its subject foci. Based on that policy decision, content creators can mold the page to fit this need. Of course, thinking narrowly does not mean that an

institution can never post about content outside of its chosen focus. Most users understand that repositories have many different collections and, hopefully, once users are hooked thanks to the narrow focus, a post introducing other kinds of collections could be enticing. However, a broad approach that tries to highlight all collections will be less likely to resonate with users than a narrowly focused page.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

If qualitative evaluations are truly significant for judging the impact of Facebook for the sampled institutions, then Facebook as an outreach tool is indeed quite effective. Of the 23 respondents to this study, 19 said with no reservations that Facebook is a good or great outreach tool. Two respondents stated that it could be a great outreach tool given more time and effort. Only 2 respondents felt that their experiences with Facebook have not yet been worthwhile. These findings are a clear endorsement of maintaining an archival presence on Facebook.

Further study is necessary to determine how best to utilize the Insights that Facebook provides as complementary tools with qualitative feedback. Specifically, archivists should examine the reach and virality statistics to determine their viability as a metric for "success." In addition, archivists should examine the methods for correlating Facebook Insights with Google Analytics and other website tracking measurements to answer the question of whether likes equal logins. Further study is also needed on the interaction of money with social media. How can social media, and Facebook specifically, generate interest among potential donors? In addition, does paying to promote a page generate enough increase in audience to justify its cost? While one institution was successful in paying for advertisement and gaining new likes, it discontinued that practice before the study began. Finally, further research is needed to determine if the guidelines provided above work for other social media platforms or if they are specific to Facebook. While the four guidelines could (and likely would) work for other social media platforms, this study has no definitive data on this crucial question.

Even given these unanswered questions, it is clear that archival institutions have experienced success when using Facebook as an outreach tool. Respondent 1's claim that Facebook and other social media are helping to make the archival profession relevant is not an exaggeration. If they use social media efficaciously, archivists can now reach individuals who do not even know what archives are. Those archivists with a vested interest in keeping outreach and access viable for years to come will have to venture into this new digital frontier, even if they do not "like" it. As the NARA Social Media Team stated, "[Social media] is only going

to get bigger and better. . . . Social media in general is a new way of communicating. If Facebook isn't around in a few years, there will be something else."[45]

Notes

This article was based on a master's paper prepared under the direction of Helen R. Tibbo.

1 Brian Carter and Justin Levy, *Facebook Marketing: Leveraging Facebook's Features for Your Marketing Campaign*, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Que Publishing, 2012), 69.

2 Terry Abraham, "Repositories of Primary Sources," University of Idaho Special Collections, http://www.uiweb.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Other.Repositories.html.

3 The table of random numbers used for this study was posted on a subsidiary website of the State Government of Massachusetts, but it is no longer available for download. For an equivalent example, please see a table used by the World Health Organization: http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/d/Jwhozip14e/9.html.

4 Respondent 18, phone interview with author, Durham, N.C. (October 11, 2012).

5 Respondent 7, phone interview with author, Durham, N.C. (September 21, 2012).

6 Respondent 15, phone interview with author, Durham, N.C. (October 1, 2012).

7 Respondent 17, phone interview with author, Durham, N.C. (October 5, 2012).

8 Respondent 7.

9 Respondent 8, Phone Interview with author, Chapel Hill, N.C. (September 27, 2012).

10 Respondent 8.

11 Respondent 18.

12 Respondent 19, phone interview with author, Raleigh (October 18, 2012).

13 Respondents 10A, 10B, and 10C, phone interview with author, Raleigh (September 28, 2012).

14 Respondent 16, phone interview with author, Durham, N.C. (October 3, 2012).

15 Respondent 12, phone interview with author, Durham, N.C. (October 1, 2012); Respondent 15.

16 Respondent 11.

17 Respondent 3, email interview with author, Raleigh (September 17, 2012).

18 Institution 15, page-level Insights, collected for September 1, 2012, through October 1, 2012.

19 Respondents 5A and 5B.

20 Respondent 20.

21 Respondent 1.

22 Respondent 16.

23 Respondent 21, phone interview with author, Chapel Hill, N.C. (October 9, 2012).

24 Respondent 2, phone interview with author, Raleigh (September 18, 2012).

25 Respondent 4, email interview with author, Raleigh (September 18, 2012).

26 Respondent 23.

27 Respondent 1.

28 Respondent 12.

29 Respondent 14.

30 Respondent 17.

31 Harry Glazer, "ACRL TechConnect: 'Likes' Are Lovely, but Do They Lead to More Logins?: Developing Metrics for Academic Libraries' Facebook Pages," *College and Research Libraries News* 73, no. 1 (January 2012): 18–21, College and Research Libraries, "News," http://crln.acrl.org/content/73/1/18.full.

32 Respondent 2.

33 Respondent 15.

34 Respondent 2.

35 Respondent 16.

[36] Respondent 16.

[37] National Archives and Records Administration Social Media Team, phone interview with author, Durham, N.C. (October 3, 2012).

[38] Institution 11, post-level Insights, collected for August 28, 2012, through September 28, 2012.

[39] Institution 11, page-level Insights, collected for August 28, 2012, through September 28, 2012.

[40] Glazer, "ACRL TechConnect," 22.

[41] Glazer, "ACRL TechConnect," 22.

[42] Respondent 10C.

[43] Respondent 3.

[44] Respondent 14.

[45] NARA Social Media Team.

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