Solomon, L. (2013). Getting started. In *The librarian's nitty-gritty guide to social media* (pp. 15-24). Chicago : ALA Editions, an imprint of the American Library Association.

(This reference information is provided as a guide only, and may not conform to the required referencing standards for your subject)

GETTING STARTED

Instead of researching the best ways to engage, many
businesses create accounts across multiple social
networks and publish content without a plan or purpose.
However, businesses that conduct research will find
a rewarding array of options and opportunities.

—BRIAN SOLIS, AUTHOR OF *ENGAGE!*

GOALS FIRST: WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Setting goals is a step that many libraries choose to skip over, believing that their mere presence on a social network is the only goal. Do not, repeat, *do not* allow your library to enter social media without knowing what it wants to get out of it! If there is no clear picture of what "success" looks like, your library isn't ready to enter these communities. It's essential to figure out what your library wants from its efforts and how it plans to achieve a successful outcome.

What might goals for a library social media program look like? After all, when there isn't a specific product to sell, how can you measure success? It doesn't have to be very complicated. Some examples might be the following:

- More people at events and programs
- Better overall awareness of the library
- More blog subscribers
- New knowledge about your patrons and how they view the library
- More "buzz" about the library

Focus on just a few goals, no more than three to begin with. Keep these at the forefront of all of your library's social media work. Whenever your library posts a status update or uploads some kind of media, look at the list of goals and see which one it's contributing to. If the answer is none, reframe it or drop it and do something that will better serve the library's objectives.

If one of your library's goals is engaging with patrons, then make sure that you're always trying to answer the question, Will this post/update/item cause more patrons to start a conversation with the library? Chances are, if your library is simply promoting a program, it's unlikely to elicit any real response. Efforts to engage patrons may require creativity and planning to be effective.

The next step is to figure out how you're actually going to measure your goals. For instance, will you quantify buzz as a certain number of blog comments or Facebook wall posts? Can you quantify awareness with a particular number of retweets on Twitter? If you can't find a way to measure whether or not you're meeting the goal, then the goal is likely not a good one or needs to be refocused. As with any new undertaking, it's important to know how to benchmark results in order to evaluate the undertaking as a whole. Otherwise, you won't know if your efforts are worthwhile in the long run.

BOTTOM LINE ▸ Figuring out your library's social media goals doesn't have to be terribly complex, but it does have to be the first step.

CHOOSING SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

A question I am often asked is, What social media should my library spend time on? There are, of course, pros and cons to each site, and new networks are appearing all the time. It certainly makes the most sense to invest time in only those that are popular and have critical mass. But how do you know which ones? Libraries are often short of both time and staff and need to be able to focus their efforts where they will really count.

In the case of a business, a social media strategist would begin by investigating which social networks most closely match the target demographic for that business. This can be more difficult to do in the case of a library, which draws patrons from many different demographic profiles. Since the likely goal is to reach as many people as possible with the least amount of effort, it makes sense for a library to pick those sites that are most popular. Beyond popularity, the library needs to be able to support the type of content featured

on a particular social site. For instance, if a library isn't planning to release new, original videos regularly, YouTube will not be a good choice.

Keep the library's objectives in mind as well. Assuming that at least one of the library's goals is to converse directly with patrons, make sure that the site supports ways to send messages and share links.

Lastly, conduct some in-house market research. Poll your patrons! You may be surprised to find most are on MySpace rather than on Facebook, or vice versa. You may find that many people in your area might have moved to Google+, believing it to have feature or privacy advantages over Facebook. It's never ideal to guess at what your patrons want. Instead, begin your library's immersion in social interaction in the offline world by asking people what social media they participate in. This is also a good way to gather a core interest group to which you can promote your new social media presence.

BOTTOM LINE ▶ There is no single "right" social media service that will fit every library. Spend time doing research with patrons and know what kind of content your library can consistently support.

COMPARING SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

When you start doing your research, it's important to know what kind of social media your library is interested in. A blog is not the same as a social networking site, which is a very broad-based social tool. Social networking sites also are not the same as microblogging sites (e.g., Twitter, where posts are extremely short and functionality is much more limited).

As pointed out previously, social media sites are being created or upgraded constantly. A good way to find feature comparisons of the most popular sites of the moment is to search online. Side-by-side comparison charts are easy to find via your favorite search engine, but be very sure that you are using the correct terminology in your searches. For example, searching for "social networking sites comparison" may not bring up microblogging tools such as Twitter or Pheed; in other words, be sure you're doing "apples to apples" comparisons.

There are hundreds of sites in this genre, so make sure that your initial research includes obtaining the most recent metrics possible. As of this writing, some major social media websites have hit mainstream use. Some of these may be better suited for your library's needs than others. Table 2.1 gives you

some basic demographics for the social media sites that libraries are the most likely to use.

TABLE 2.1 **Demographics for top social media sites used by libraries**

	Percentage male in 2011	**Percentage female in 2011**	**Average age in 2011**
Facebook	51%	49%	38
Google+	70%	30%	Most popular with ages 25–34 (no average yet available)
Twitter	45%	55%	39
MySpace	36%	64%	32

If your library's decision is going to be based primarily on numbers, there's no question that Facebook is at the top of the heap. Not only does it have the highest number of active users, but more than 50 percent of those users log in to their Facebook accounts every day and more than 1.5 million businesses have pages on the site.[1] No matter the size of your library, if it can choose only one place to have a social media presence, Facebook is almost certainly the best bet across most demographics.

As widespread as Facebook use is, however, it may not be the only place your library should be. Once again, you'll need to go back to your original goals. Not every social media tool will be a good fit for your objectives. For example, if you are using social media primarily to spread the word about an upcoming tax levy, MySpace is probably not a good choice. Not only is the average age of MySpace users younger (meaning that a good part of the demographic is not even old enough to vote), but also your library's content is not a good match for the kinds of content that these users want. On the other hand, if you are looking mostly to have a presence that may create more conversations with teens, MySpace may be the way to go (although more current metrics indicate both Twitter and Tumblr are better options for connecting with teens). If your library is promoting an event that will draw mostly women, pushing it hard on Google+, which is primarily male, will unlikely get many attendees. Figures 2.1–2.3 summarize the kinds of content that users seek on Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. Note that Twitter is a significantly better tool for spreading breaking news than either Facebook or

MySpace. If your library needs to get a message out urgently, Twitter is the best pick by far. This is a reason why libraries should, whenever possible, maintain at least a Twitter *and* a Facebook account. They are different tools with different strengths.
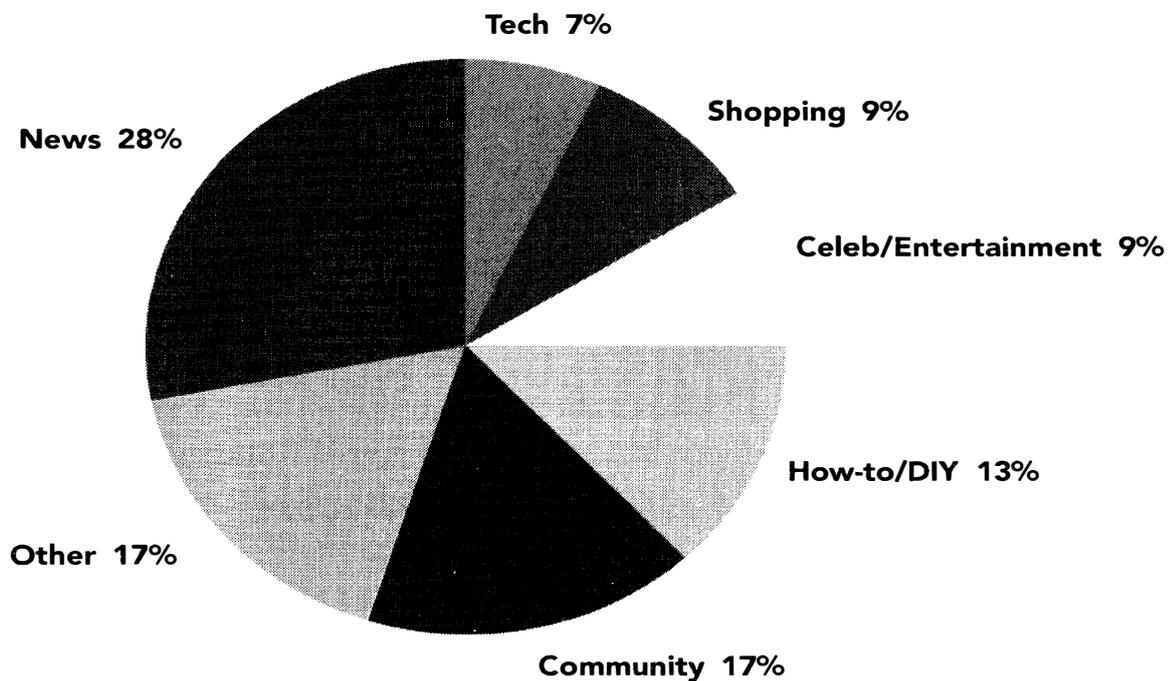

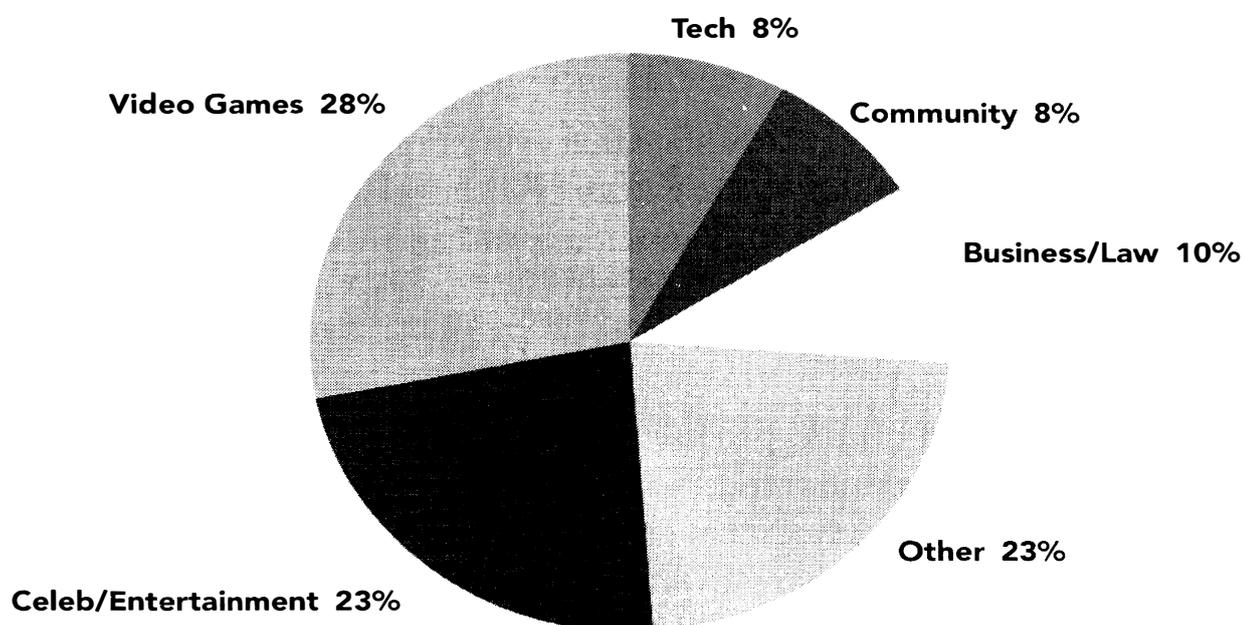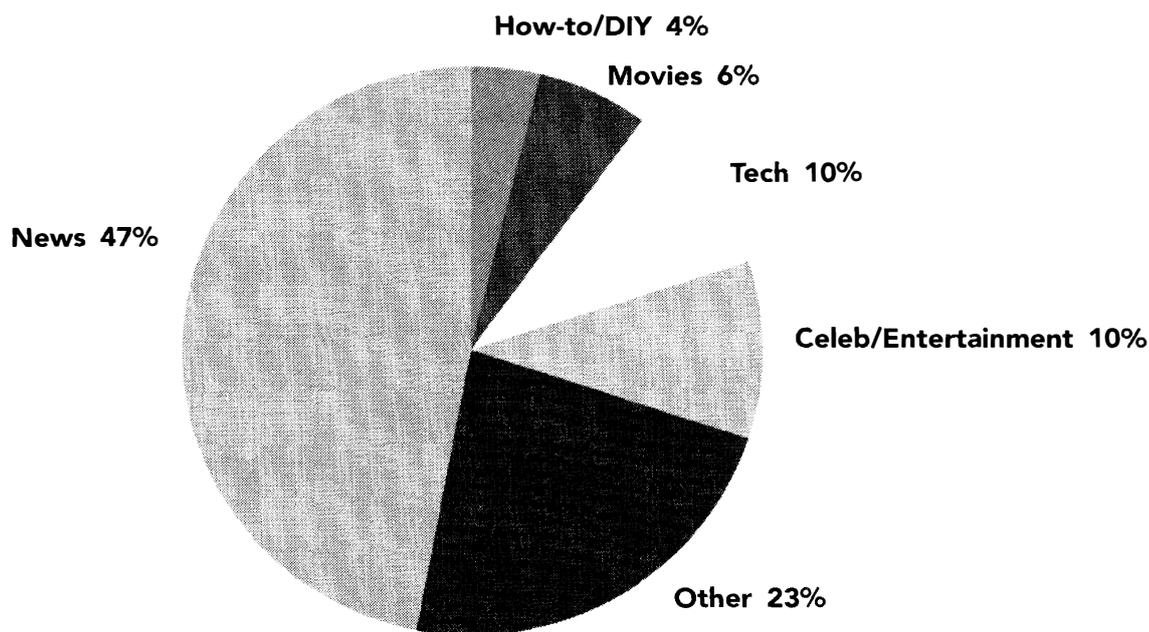FIGURE 2.1 **Facebook content breakdown**

FIGURE 2.2 **MySpace content breakdown**

FIGURE 2.3 **Twitter content breakdown**

BOTTOM LINE ▶ If your library can be in only one place online, Facebook should be it. Ideally, however, your library should maintain an active presence at least on Facebook and on Twitter. They are very different social instruments with different strengths. Find the best fit for your library based on the demographics you are trying to reach and your library's goals.

WRITING A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR YOUR STAFF

Many social media experts clearly state that every organization should have a social media policy. The very public nature of social media services may bring potential hazards that you should anticipate and address. Stories abound of awkward incidents involving social media and oversharing or hotheaded comments. (There's even a website devoted to embarrassing Facebook threads, www.failbooking.com.)

It's unrealistic (and counterproductive) to ban a library's employees from using social media or mentioning their workplace online. A better approach is to plainly spell out guidelines that employees should keep in mind. A social media policy can go a long way toward preventing PR fiascoes.

Ellyssa Kroski, writing for *School Library Journal,* laid out several criteria that should be included in such a policy.[2] The most important of these are as follows:

- *Include a disclaimer.* Include a statement on blogs and social sites in which the employee points out that his or her statements are not those of his or her employer, the library.
- *Don't share confidential information.* This includes information about coworkers or patrons or information that is sensitive in nature.
- *Use good judgment.* Employees should always consider the image they might be portraying of the library. Everything an employee posts will be archived by search engines, permanently. Remember the newspaper test: If the post wouldn't survive scrutiny in a newspaper or some other vehicle of mass media distribution, it's not appropriate. If in doubt, consult the employee manual or a supervisor.
- *Respect copyright law and accuracy.* Employees should give credit when they quote others, regardless of which social media site they may be using. A direct link to the quoted material is the preferable convention. If something later turns out to be inaccurate, the employee needs to take full responsibility and post a retraction or correction. It's far better to admit a mistake quickly than to attempt to camouflage or ignore it.

A social media policy doesn't have to be a long, wordy document. The point is not to cover every possible contingency or make using social media so intimidating for the library's employees that they won't want to engage in it. Rather, the idea is to show that the library actually supports employees' efforts and acknowledges social media as something that staff very likely want to participate in. Providing written guidelines gives these employees a strong foundation on which to stand.

Two excellent examples of library social media policies are the following:

- University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center Library (http:// units.sla.org/chapter/ctx/UTSouthwesternLibrarySocialMediaPolicy_ LLT_Final.pdf)
- Whitman Public Library (http://aklaconference2011.pbworks.com/f/ whitmanPL-socialmedia.pdf)

If you'd like to examine social media policies from other nonprofits, government agencies, and various kinds of businesses, try the Social Media Governance Policy Database (http://socialmediagovernance.com/policies.php), which is fully searchable and has more than 120 examples.

SOCIAL NETWORKING
Board Policy:

The Library recognizes the value in the exchange of ideas and information through the various online community and communication opportunities available to its employees. The Library expects its employees to utilize online social networking communities in a manner that is consistent with the procedural paragraphs below.

Administrative Procedures:

A. Common sense should be applied by employees in that this policy cannot prescribe acceptable and unacceptable speech. Employees should have no expectation that what is said or written in an online community social network or blog will be protected by the same levels of privacy typically associated with a conversation.

B. Statements that may be construed as threatening, harassing or defamatory in the non-social networking environment are equally restricted in the online social networking environment. They will be subject to review and consideration under all other applicable Library policies and existing laws, and based on content and severity, may be addressed through provisions of the corrective counseling process.

C. Personal blogs should have clear disclaimers that the views expressed by the author in the blog are the author's alone and do not represent the views of the Library. Be clear and write in first person.

D. Employees should not represent their statements in an online social networking community as reflective of official Library policy or position. Nor should employees establish an online presence on sites such as Facebook or blog and represent it as the Library, or a Library-sponsored entity.

E. Under no circumstances should confidential Library strategies, personnel disciplinary situations, etc., be posted to an online community.

F. Information published on blog(s) should comply with the Library's confidentiality policy. This also applies to comments posted on other forums and social networking sites.

G. Do not reference or cite Library clients, partners, or customers without their express consent.

H. Respect copyright laws, and reference or cite sources appropriately.

FIGURE 2.4 **Columbus Metropolitan Library social media policy. Courtesy of the Columbus Metropolitan Library, Columbus, Ohio.**

I. Library logos and trademarks may not be used without written consent.

J. In the event that the Library sponsors a blog or social networking site, non-exempt employees are not required nor expected to participate on this site during non-working hours.

K. Other than for work-related assignments, non-exempt employees may access and utilize social networking sites while at work only during their approved lunch and work break periods.

L. Exempt employees are expected to limit their access and time spent on social networking sites during working hours to the period of time that is consistent with meeting the demands of their position.

M. Managers should address directly with the individual employee those situations where it appears the employee is engaged in excessive non-work-related online social networking activities.

Related Policies & Forms:
- Code of Conduct
- Confidentiality
- Harassment
- Official Statements on Behalf of the Library
- Use of Library Communications Technologies

The Columbus Metropolitan Library in Columbus, Ohio, has a very good policy that other libraries may want to use as a model (see figure 2.4). It's not overly long, yet covers the salient points.

BOTTOM LINE ▶ Effective social media involvement takes time and planning. Don't skip these steps.

NOTES

1. "Facebook Facts & Figures (history & statistics)," 2011, www.website-monitoring .com/blog/2011/10/14/facebook-facts-and-figures-2011-infographic.
2. Ellyssa Kroski, "Should Your Library Have a Social Media Policy?" *School Library Journal*, October 1, 2009, www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6699104.html.