

Empowered Community Outreach Online Tools for Everyone

Toby Greenwalt, Skokie Public Library
tgreenwalt@skokielib.org

(presentation slides may be found at www.theanalogdivide.com/2009/05/ala)

In looking at the many ways library staff make a connection with their communities, it's possible to sort them into the following five categories:

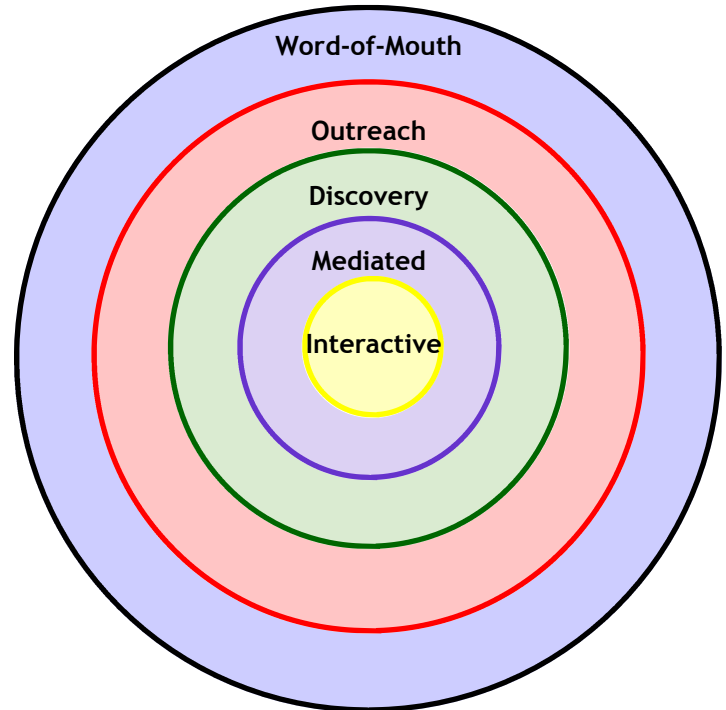
Interactive: All of those one-on-one interactions that library staff have with patrons on a regular basis. Can occur in person, by phone, or online.

Mediated: Resource lists created by library staff to provide instruction and to identify key elements of the collection. Booklists, pathfinders, and the like.

Discovery: Resources or services found by the patron, based on catalog/website inquiries. Also includes physical browsing.

Outreach: Actions taken by library staff to go beyond the walls of the building and connect with people and organizations in the community.

Word-of-Mouth: Traffic driven to the library from external websites and conversations held between non-library staff.



Monitoring the Online Community

Getting Started: The first place your public is likely to come across your organization is via a **Google** search. What do they see? Are there reviews? Is the URL, location, and contact info correct? Scan through the first few pages of results. How else do people talk about your organization? It's also a good idea to set up **Alerts** for this kind of information. Perform a similar search at blogsearch.google.com, and create an alert of your choosing. Email is a popular option, but RSS can also save a lot of time. Look for the logo and add it to your reader of choice.



Other Blog Searches: You can perform similar searches at Technorati (www.technorati.com) and Twingly (www.twingly.com). Twingly also has a Twitter search function.

Twitter Searches: In addition to Twingly and the main Twitter search page (search.twitter.com), sites like Twitter Grader (twitter.grader.com—look at the “elites” for your area), WeFollow (www.wefollow.com), and Twibes (www.twibes.com) can also help you identify local users.

Customer Reviews: There are a number of sites for user-posted reviews worth scanning from time to time. Yelp (www.yelp.com) is quite popular, but you may also want to check out Judysbook (www.judysbook.com), InsiderPages (www.insiderpages.com) and YahooLocal (local.yahoo.com).

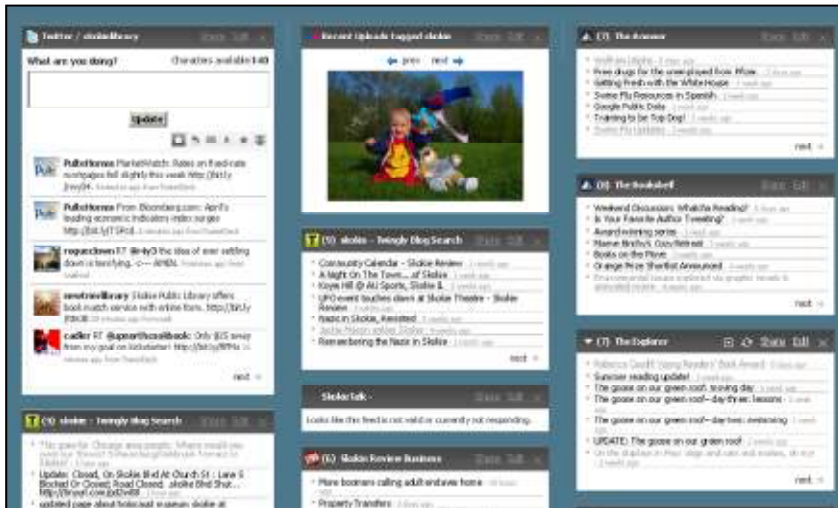
News Sites: Many newspapers are unveiling “hyperlocal” community sites, where users and reporters are encouraged to contribute content. These feed into local blogs and other sites dealing with local information. In the Chicago area, for example, there's TribLocal (www.triblocal.com), Chicagoist (www.chicagoist.com), and GapersBlock (www.gapersblock.com). Who is telling the stories here? Are they patrons? Do you have any stories or photos you'd like to share? Speak up!

Joining (or Starting) the Conversation

By now you should have an idea of what's out there. Now it's time to participate. Here are a few suggestions for representing your organization on the web.

1. **Be Yourself.** Make a point to indicate your role as a staff member of the organization. Let your personality come through, and speak to your online contacts as you would in person.
2. **Be Honest.** Candor and forthrightness is especially important, particularly on the web. Because of the way things can go “viral,” if you misrepresent your organization or go back on a promise, the potential backlash can haunt you for quite some time.
3. **Be Engaging.** The easiest way to do this is to play to your strengths. What are your interests? Where do you spend time on the Web? Does your organization have any resources or events that overlap with these pursuits?
4. **Share the Knowledge.** You are the organization's eyes and ears. Just as word tends to travel on the Web, ideas and observations must be shared with your coworkers. Never just assume that “everybody knows” about something you've discovered online. You'd be surprised to find out how often that isn't the case.

Keeping Track of it All



All of this can seem overwhelming. Fortunately, there are tools you can use to “feed” all these sources into one convenient place.

When you do a search of one of the above sources, look for the RSS icon. Click on it to add it to your feed reader.



I'm partial to Netvibes (netvibes.com, at right) for its nice visual layout. But you might like one of these other tools:

Bloglines: www.bloglines.com
Google Reader: reader.google.com
iGoogle: google.com/ig
PageFlakes: www.pageflakes.com

Selected Resources:

- Hunt, Tara. The Whuffle Factor. New York: Crown Business, 2009.
Levine, Mark, et.al. The Cluetrain Manifesto. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Press, 2001.
Shirky, Clay. Here Comes Everybody. New York: Penguin Press, 2008.

Further Questions?

Toby Greenwalt
Virtual Services Coordinator, Skokie Public Library
tgreenwalt@skokielibrary.info

www.theanalogdivide.com
On Twitter: [theanalogdivide](https://twitter.com/theanalogdivide)
www.skokielibrary.info