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Twitter for Special Libraries: Professional Development Committee Webinar Report

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twitter for Special Libraries
Professional Development Committee Webinar Report

Submitted by Lorrie Pellack,
Sci-Tech Division Professional Development Committee Member

The Sci-Tech Division webinar "Twitter for Special Libraries" was presented on May 12, 2010. There were 57 registrations (some of which were groups). Presenter Joe Murphy (libraryfuture – http://twitter.com/libraryfuture) of the Yale Science Library shared his insights on using Twitter to communicate with library clients and answered questions from the audience in a lively Q&A session. Thanks to the American Institute of Physics for generously sponsoring the webinar!

The Twitter hash tag for the event was: #twitsla.

What is Twitter?
It emerged in 2007. According to Wikipedia, "Twitter is a social networking and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read other user messages called tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page. Users may subscribe to other author tweets — this is known as following and subscribers are known as followers. Users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website, compatible external applications (such as smartphones), or by Short Message Service (SMS)." Joe stressed that the key to understanding and utilizing Twitter is setting it up well. Given a 140 character limit to messages, constructing them to be meaningful but concise is important.

Best practices:
- Committing to it.
- Setting it up – profile elements (such as background and images to use), keep it simple.

Library uses:
- Advertising services and events.
- Customer services – real time responses to problems.
- As a contact point – put your Twitter handle in your Library Directory and other places you provide your library street address, phone number, and email addresses.
- Reference – for public conversations (to reply to popular questions) and also peer-to-peer private conversations (you have to "follow" each other for private messaging to work in Twitter).

- Instruction – supplemental tool – there are many instances now of back channel interactions in classrooms as well as front channel which can inform instructors about problems students are having.
- Collections – e.g., messages about new titles or aimed at alerting researchers in particular subject areas to cool/new things the library has in collections.
- Leverage Twitter Lists for subject expertise.

Metrics:
An interesting future possibility is to utilize Twitter metrics in measuring "reach and impact" on the profession – e.g, number of followers.

Archived tweets are now available via project with the Library of Congress – so can be studied, researched, and accessed as institutional or topic repository.

Engaging Patrons:
Frequency of tweets can be annoying or too infrequent.

Skills for Librarians:
- Understanding.
- Using.
- Leveraging.
- Feedback loop.

Skills for patrons:
- Current awareness.
- Searching.
- Understanding value.
- Applying it.

Future:
Be prepared and be flexible.

In summary, Joe recommended pulling back

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from instant messaging and using text messaging and Twitter instead. Texting can allow tweets to be filtered into the texting environment. He feels that everyone needs to be Twitter literate. They don't have to use it, but do need to understand what it is and how it can be used. The bottom line is that it is a good way to engage users where they are.

You can view a recording of the webinar by following the link at the Sci-Tech Division's website at: http://units.sla.org/division/dst/

By the way – did you know the Sci-Tech Division has a Twitter account? If interested, go to http://twitter.com/sla_dst and click on "Sign Up" or set your Twitter account to follow @SLA_DST. ❖