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Using a blog and social media promotion as a collaborative community building marketing tool for library resources

Alyson Vaaler and Steve Brantley

In an era where digital services and resources are accessed without the need to enter a library building, marketing our print resources is an ongoing effort. Our physical collections continue to be of great value, and despite the ongoing growth of born-digital and digitized materials, resources that cannot be replicated online continue to serve important functions in student and faculty research. It was with this idea in mind that the “Ref News” blog was created for Booth Library at Eastern Illinois University (see [Figure 1](#)). Booth Library already had a WordPress blog called “Library News” that served as a general marketing tool and a way to announce exhibits and events. Ref News was created as a place to showcase specific resources in our collections (physical and electronic and often both) that might otherwise go unnoticed. Ref News is also produced as an effort to demonstrate the relevance of library resources in the everyday lives of our user community.

When writers began posting, we knew it was important that the Ref News blog should be easy to share across multiple platforms to ensure the broadest access. We knew that patrons would need to have easy “clickable” access from Twitter, Facebook or email blasts in order for the posts to have wide exposure. We also wanted a free resource that was easy to use and one where multiple authors could collaborate on posts. By installing WordPress on our library servers, we created a blog that easily integrates into our library website, is widely used and therefore well supported and has many plugins that can extend its social media marketing capabilities.

The authors of Ref News and its companion blog, “Gov News”, which is used for government information specific posts, can be any librarian or library staff interested in drafting a post that falls into the scope of the blog. Most of the librarians at Booth participate in creating book displays and curating exhibits. These displays and exhibits are excellent fodder for blog content, because they bring our internal marketing to the whole world! There is a main editor and as many authors as want to write. We have two or three core librarian authors, with volunteer authors submitting posts less frequently.

Workflow

Our process starts when a new book display goes up, we hear about a news item or we publicize a library or campus event. When a book display is erected, each book is scanned and sent to cataloging as a list to temporarily change the item location in the library catalog. This practice has been going on for as long as we have had an online public access catalog (OPAC) and book displays. The writers of Ref News simply asked that the barcode list also be emailed to them. With this list of barcodes, we create a visually appealing and hyperlinked booklist using a PHP script, conveniently called “List it!” (see [Figure 2](#)).

The “List it!” tool pulls bibliographic information including cover images from the library catalog and generates HTML for a booklist from the barcodes. “List it!” was written in-house by our head of technology services. The HTML created by “List it!” can be simply pasted into a draft post of Ref News in

WordPress where it can undergo additional editing. This is a clean and attractive way to list our books and is fast and easy to use.

After our “List-it!” HTML has been generated and pasted into the WordPress post, pictures and introductory text are added and the blog post is reviewed and scheduled for publishing. Posts are generally published twice a week. We do not want to overwhelm our followers with too much information. After the post is scheduled, a short URL is created using the open-source “YOURLS” “Your Own URL Shortener”, which we have branded as booth.eiu.edu. The social media aggregating service Hootsuite.com is then used to schedule tweet(s) and Facebook posts to the library’s social media accounts. An all-staff email is also often sent to library staff advertising the latest post.

Topics of blog posts

Books displays

Our library has book displays in a hallway to catch patrons’ eyes as they walk through the library. Topics are seasonal, based on current events or chosen to support course research topics. Often, we have repeating displays such as job interview books during the spring semester or college success resources during the fall. An advantage to having an electronic record of these displays in Ref News is that we can reuse the blog post again every year and retain a record of past displays that have been created to reference in the future.

Reference books

Reference materials are sometimes an overlooked part of a library’s collection. Highlighting particular

Figure 1.

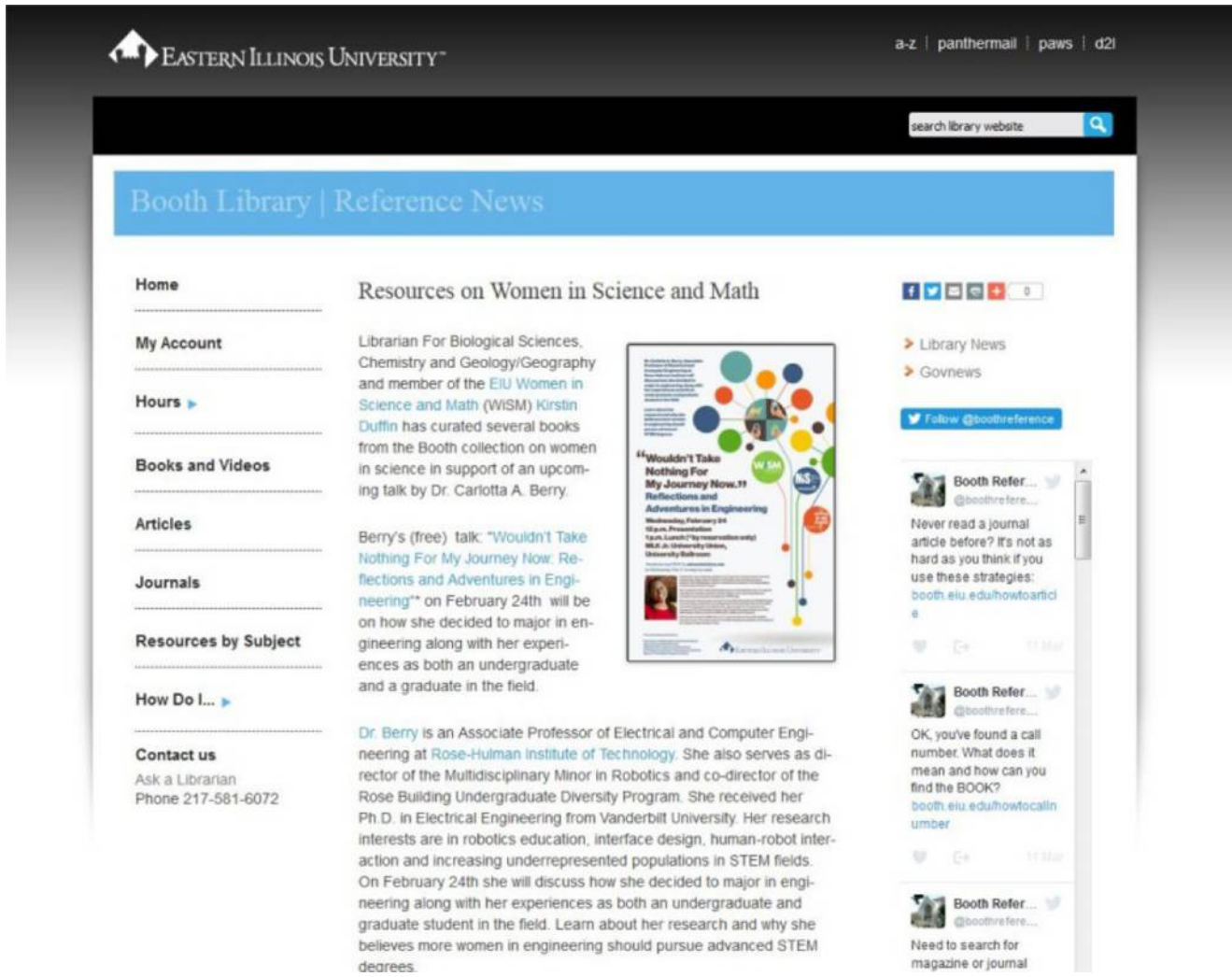
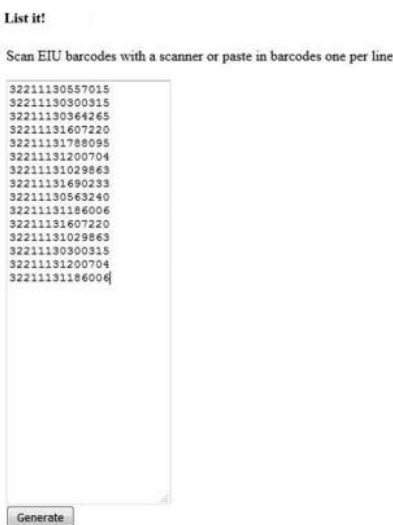


Figure 2.



reference books on a topic helps to raise interest in using reference books as part of the research process. We also use Ref News to promote the use of electronic reference resources such as the many electronic encyclopedias that we own.

Themed months

There is a day, week or month celebrating all kinds of things and all kinds of people. We are continually surprised at the resources our library has for these themes. Examples include Banned Books Week, Poetry Month and Latino Heritage Month.

New features, services or content

Our blog posts are not limited to booklists. Ref News also serves as a

vehicle for information about changes in databases, new research guides that have been created or faculty publications available in the library.

Electronic resources

An online blog is the ideal platform to advertise databases that we cannot physically put “on display”. Readers can directly click through to the search results in a database to immediately see the context of what the post is describing.

News and current events

With so many information outlets vying for our user’s attention, it is important to help show patrons that the library is relevant. We create posts related to current events or science

reports and connect these reports to related library resources or the study quoted in the report.

Campus events and conferences

A campus is a busy place and there are always conferences and events happening. One does not have to look far for an event that translates well into library resources. If the event is being held in the library, all the better! Featuring campus events showcases how the library is connected to other parts of campus and helps build and maintain relationships with other departments. Other departments like to see their events being promoted, and if they are active on social media, will retweet or share posts, expanding our blog post's audience.

Tools

WordPress (<http://wordpress.org/download>)

WordPress is an open source online publishing platform that supports multiple authors, making it a suitable platform for our collaborative blog. WordPress offers the option to use many plugins to customize the features of a blog. The plugins we found most helpful to our blog were the AddThis plugin (social sharing icons) and Yoast

SEO plugin (metadata, specifically Facebook images). Installing WordPress software on our library servers made our blog a cohesive part of the library's website.

YOURLS: your own URL shortener
(<http://yourls.org>)

YOURLS is a small set of PHP scripts that allow you to run your own URL shortening service. This tool became important for us when we started sharing our blog posts among multiple platforms. Short URLs look cleaner in tweets and Facebook shares, are branded to our library name and are easier to remember. YOURLS also has a basic statistics package that allows us to easily track how widely a link is being used.

"List it!" (<http://github.com/slknigh/listit.git>)

For use with the Voyager integrated library systems (ILS), this PHP script produces a book list with cover images from a list of scanned library barcodes. The script is written for use in the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) environment, but can be customized for use outside the consortium.

Hootsuite social media manager
(<http://hootsuite.com>)

A social media management tool that we use to schedule tweets and Facebook posts of new blog posts for optimal exposure.

Results

Since its launch in September 2014, Ref News has received a total of 6,180 views and 3,835 unique views for 88 posts. On average, users are spending 2 minutes and 44 seconds on a page or group of pages!

Less measurable benefits include greatly expanded website content, booklists that can be reused and repurposed and a sense of ownership and increased morale for those who help curate book displays and write blog posts.

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