

Using Facebook Pages to reach users: the experiences of University of Wolverhampton

The screenshot displays the Facebook interface for the 'University of Wolverhampton Learning Centres' page. At the top, the Facebook navigation bar is visible with 'Home', 'Profile', 'Friends', and 'Inbox' options. The user 'Jo Alcock' is logged in. The page header shows the university's name and a 'Browse more Places' link. Below the header is a large photo of a modern university building. To the right of the photo is a menu with options: 'Edit Page', 'Edit Admins', 'Send an Update to Fans', 'Promote Page with an Ad', 'Become a Fan', 'View Updates', and 'View Insights'. Below the menu is a 'Share +' button. The 'Quick Links' section is titled 'Learning Centre Pages:' and lists: 'Learning Centre homepage', 'Electronic Databases', 'OPAC Catalogue', 'ASSIST - online chat service', and 'Information Skills & InfoBites'. Below this is the 'Subject Resources:' section, which lists various academic subjects: 'Applied Sciences', 'Art and Design', 'Business and Management', 'Computing and IT', 'Education', 'Engineering and Construction', 'Humanities', 'Languages and Linguistics', 'Law', 'Leisure Industries', 'Maths', 'Nursing, Midwifery & Health', 'Performing Arts', 'Social Sciences', and 'Sport'. The 'Information' section includes the website URL 'http://www.wlv.ac.uk/lib' and a paragraph of general information. The 'The Wall' section shows a single post with a text input field and a 'Post' button. The 'Fans' section indicates '6 of 222 Fans' and a 'See All' link.

Introduction

Social networking websites have been steadily gaining popularity over the last few years. A recent OFCOM report (OFCOM, 2008) demonstrated that 22% of adults in the UK had registered with a social networking site (the figure is highest for 16-24 year olds and decreases with age). Facebook is, at present, the most visited social networking site and has over 130 million active users (Facebook, 2008a). This article shares the experiences of University of Wolverhampton's pilot project into the use of Facebook pages for academic libraries.

Rationale

During 2007, we noticed that many of our students using PCs in the University of Wolverhampton Learning Centres were regular visitors of Facebook. Each member of the University is given a University e-mail address as well as access to our VLE, but from talking to students, I found that some were choosing to use Facebook as the platform to communicate with their cohort and organise group work.

Academic staff had also started to use Facebook, mainly as a forum for social interaction within their classes but also as a way for students to communicate with them. Some libraries had been using Facebook to set up a profile for the library. However, Facebook regulations permitted this (profiles should be for individuals only) and many were closed. In November 2007, Facebook began Facebook Pages which is designed for businesses and organisations (including libraries) to create a presence. By creating a Facebook page rather than a profile, other Facebook members can become a "fan" and be sent updates via Facebook. This is one way of reaching users where they already are so we began to investigate creating a Facebook page for our Learning Centres.

Concerns

There were a number of concerns with creating a presence for the Learning Centres in Facebook. One common concern is that students may not want us there and feel it is an invasion of their personal or private space (Phipps, 2007). However, with Facebook pages the user themselves must actively choose to visit the page and can opt to join as a fan if they would like to. Even if they do, they can set their privacy settings so that other users of the page (such as Learning Centre staff) can either see a limited profile (set by the user) or are unable to see the profile at all. Security has been a major issue for Facebook; privacy settings are now far more robust (Facebook, 2008b).

Another concern was that the Learning Centres may get negative comments from users. We initially decided to set the page so that communication was only one way to prevent this, but have recently agreed to enable users to give feedback on our services via the Facebook page. If we do receive criticism we can hopefully act upon it, and if there are inappropriate comments it is possible to delete them.

With the addition of another web presence, concerns about the amount of staff time spent updating the page were considered, but at present this time is minimal. The page itself remains fairly static (apart from automatic updates via RSS feeds) and any updates sent to fans are fairly short and usually taken from information on the latest news, from e-mails, or from our Electronic Resources Newsletter.

Another issue is the stability and popularity of Facebook. As is always the case with external software, there is an inherent risk which must be taken into consideration. Facebook may cease to exist altogether or Facebook Pages may be stopped. Facebook's popularity with our users may deteriorate in which case we would question investing time in our presence.

Establishing and developing the page

After analysing the pros and cons of a Learning Centre Facebook page, it was decided to run a pilot project. The page itself was created during December 2007; our Marketing and Communications

department have a corporate account within Facebook so helped set up the page. It includes a photograph, some general information (opening times, locations, website etc.), and links through to different sections of our website, such as subject resources and the OPAC catalogue. A number of libraries have since been in touch about the Quick Links box on their page; it was created using the FBML application and writing HTML to create the links.

We have a number of subject blogs written by subject librarians. To incorporate the RSS feeds from these on the page, the Blog RSS Feed Reader application was used. In order to reduce the amount of space used and only display the most recent posts, I used Yahoo! Pipes to combine the RSS feeds from each of the blogs; this creates a new RSS feed which you can then use in Blog RSS Feed Reader.

The page is also used to help promote our drop-in information skills sessions. We use Google Calendar to enable us to embed the calendar into our website which immediately reflects any changes made, so we added the Google Calendar application to our page. Unfortunately, the application opens the calendar on a different page, which is not totally intuitive. Because of this, each event has also been added to Facebook Events which are displayed on the page, although this was a fairly time-consuming process and duplicates the work.

A number of search applications have been developed for use within Facebook; JSTOR and COPAC search boxes have been added to our page. In the future it is possible that we may use our proxy server to enable University of Wolverhampton users to authenticate and search databases from Facebook. Some Universities such as Loughborough have developed library search applications (searching OPACs, institutional repositories and federated search engines) within Facebook; this is also something we may look at in the future.

The page now has over 200 fans, and the number is increasing. This has been achieved with limited marketing; we have a link from the Contact Us section of our website and a screensaver on the PCs in our central Learning Centre. There are a number of other marketing methods in both print and on the web which we may utilise in future but have not yet done so due to the nature of the pilot project.

Updates are sent to fans as and when necessary, at an average of one update per month. We recognise that users do not wish to receive messages too often, and therefore only send updates when they will be relevant to a wide range of users. Updates include letting users know our opening times over vacation periods, notifying them of new resources, and promoting events held in Learning Centres.

Conclusion

Our Facebook pilot project is now coming to an end; a progress report including future recommendations will be presented in the next couple of months when we will decide if and how to further develop our presence within Facebook or other social networking sites. Although no formal feedback has been collated, informal feedback from fans of the page has been positive. We appreciate that not all our users on Facebook will want to use it for academic purposes, but for those who do they seem to appreciate our presence. According to the statistics on Facebook Insights, we currently average around 15 daily page views.

For anyone considering setting up a Facebook page for their library service, as the page itself is minimal effort and can be both an effective marketing method and a tool for gathering user feedback, I would recommend it; however only if your users are already using Facebook.

References

Facebook (2008a) *Statistics* [online]. California: Facebook [accessed 12 December 2008]. Available from: <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>.

Facebook (2008b) *Privacy Policy* [online]. California: Facebook. Updated 26 November 2008 [accessed 12 December 2008]. Available from: <http://www.facebook.com/policy.php?ref=pf>.

Phipps, L. (2007) *Web 2.0 and social software: an introduction* [online]. JISC. Updated September 2007 [accessed 5 December 2008]. Available from: <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/publications/web2socialsoftwarev1.aspx>

OFCOM (2008) *Social networking: a quantitative and qualitative research report into attitudes, behaviours and use* [online]. OFCOM. Updated 2 April 2008 [accessed 12 December 2008]. Available from: http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/socialnetworking/.

Useful links

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com>

University of Wolverhampton Learning Centre's Facebook page: <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/lib/facebook>

Loughborough's search applications: <http://apps.facebook.com/lborolibrary/?ref=ts>