Social Media, Libraries, and Web 2.0: How American Libraries are Using New Tools for Public Relations and to Attract New Users – Fourth Annual Survey November 2011

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Overview

How are American libraries using Web 2.0 applications and social networking tools to promote their library programs and services?

This survey represents feedback from a wide variety of library staff members in the U.S. to determine how libraries are employing Web 2.0 and social networking tools to promote library programs and services.

This report presents the survey results from the fourth survey which ran from November 1 to November 16, 2011.

According to the recent study, *Why Americans use social media* by Aaron Smith at the Pew Research Center, "Two-thirds of online adults (66%) use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, or LinkedIn."[1] Why then would a library choose not to utilize social networking sites to get their message out? Some libraries cite security issues and others cite lack of staffing; however, libraries should be encouraged to find ways of reorganizing staff and closely analyzing workflow to determine what can be halted to make room for the integration of more online communication tools.

The study continues, "Middle-aged and older adults place a relatively high value on social media as a tool to connect with others around a hobby and interest."[2] Since many libraries offer book clubs, literary, hobbyist and craft events, social media outlets afford a free avenue of communication to reach current and new library users.
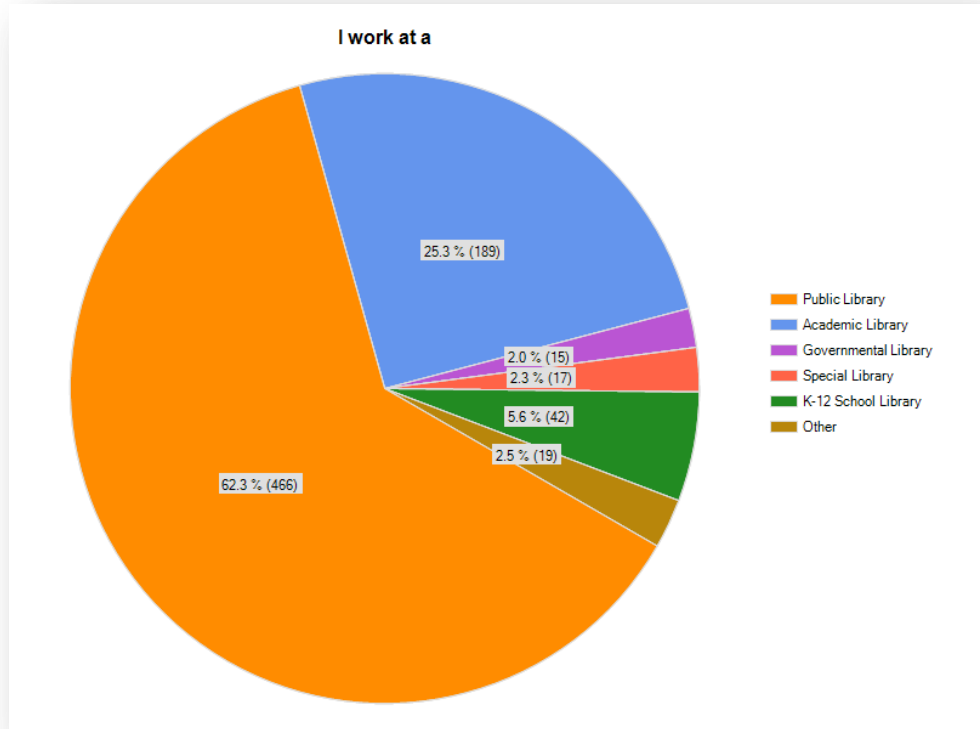
Many libraries use social media for various reasons. According to survey respondents, libraries are using social media tools to provide "technical instruction/how-to at the library/Skype with authors," and "advocacy", as well as "recruiting and managing volunteers." Some libraries are using social media as a "reminder of special resources available to academic community" and as a tool for "reference transactions, receiving/resolving complaints, building community."

Libraries have always been able to help bridge the digital divide. With web sites as popular as Facebook and Twitter, it is surprising that some libraries still do not allow use of these tools at patron access workstations. According to Facebook, "We had 845 million monthly active users at the end of December 2011. We had 483 million daily active users on average in December 2011. We had more than 425 million monthly active users who used Facebook mobile products in December 2011. Facebook is available in more than 70 languages."[3] With these kinds of statistics being reported, if libraries do not provide access to a communication tool as far reaching as Facebook, potential patrons will look elsewhere for access.

According to *Building Digitally Inclusive Communities: A brief guide to the proposed framework for digitally inclusive communities*, published in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, digital inclusion is "the ability of individuals and groups to access and use information and communication technologies."[4] Libraries play a vital role in this effort and should work toward providing broad access to social media tools so that "students have the digital skills to fill the jobs of today and tomorrow."[5]
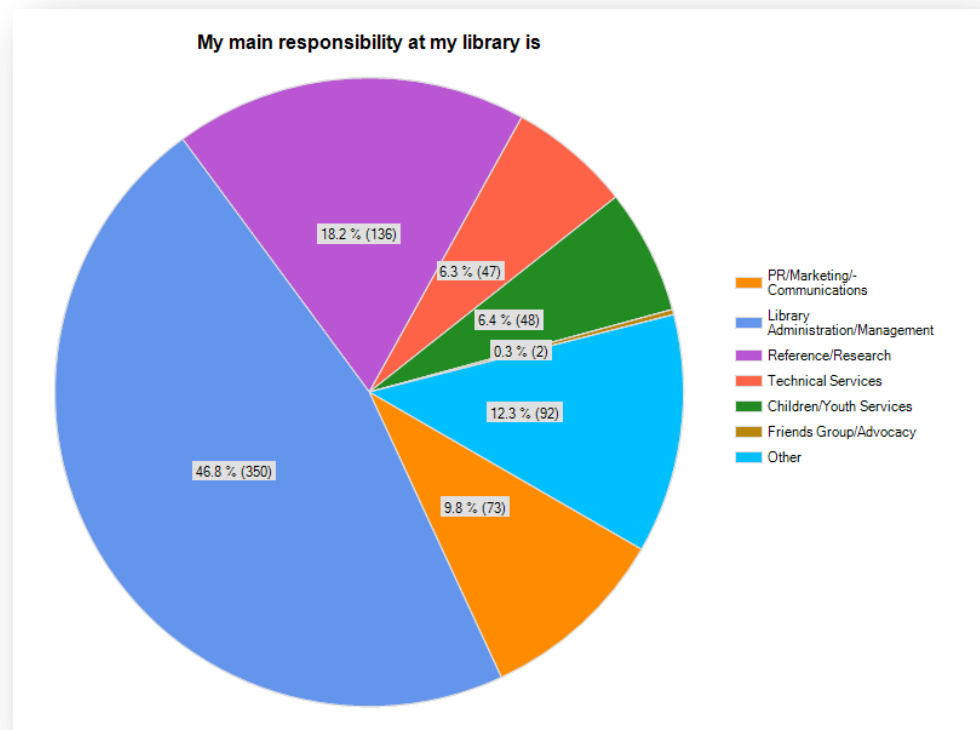
Survey Results

A total of 749 individuals began the survey with 548 (73.2%) completing it. 62.3% of respondents represented public libraries and 25.3% represented academic libraries.

I work at a

25.3 % (189)
2.0 % (15)
2.3 % (17)
5.6 % (42)
2.5 % (19)
62.3 % (466)

- Public Library
- Academic Library
- Governmental Library
- Special Library
- K-12 School Library
- Other

The majority of respondents (350 – 46.8%) reported their main responsibility at work is in the library administration/management area. 136 (18.2%) of the respondents reported their main responsibility at work was in reference and/or research area.

Other responses came from individuals who work in children/youth services (6.4%), public relations/marketing/communications (9.8%), and technical services (6.3%).

My main responsibility at my library is

18.2 % (136)
6.3 % (47)
6.4 % (48)
0.3 % (2)
12.3 % (92)
46.8 % (350)
9.8 % (73)

- PR/Marketing/-Communications
- Library Administration/Management
- Reference/Research
- Technical Services
- Children/Youth Services
- Friends Group/Advocacy
- Other

My library uses the following types of Web 2.0 applications to promote and market library services (check all that apply):
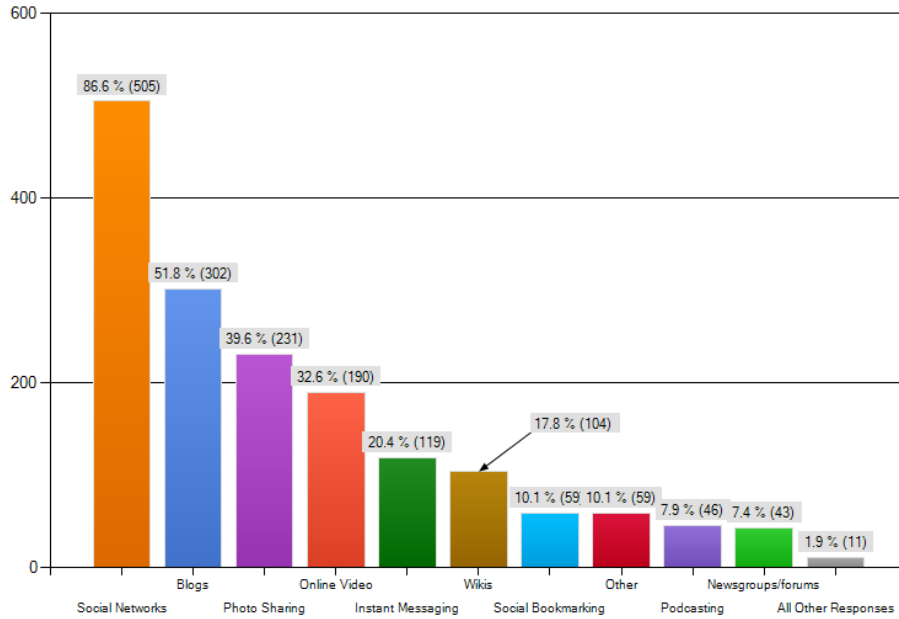
86.6% of respondents cited Social Networks as the top use of Web 2.0 applications to promote and market library services. Blogs (51.8%) remained the second highest response. Many libraries continue to use photo sharing tools (39.6%) as well as online video (32.6%). Virtual worlds (1.9%) continue to be the least used.

Please rate your perception of each tools' effectiveness toward achieving marketing campaign/promotion goals (1=not effective 5=very effective):
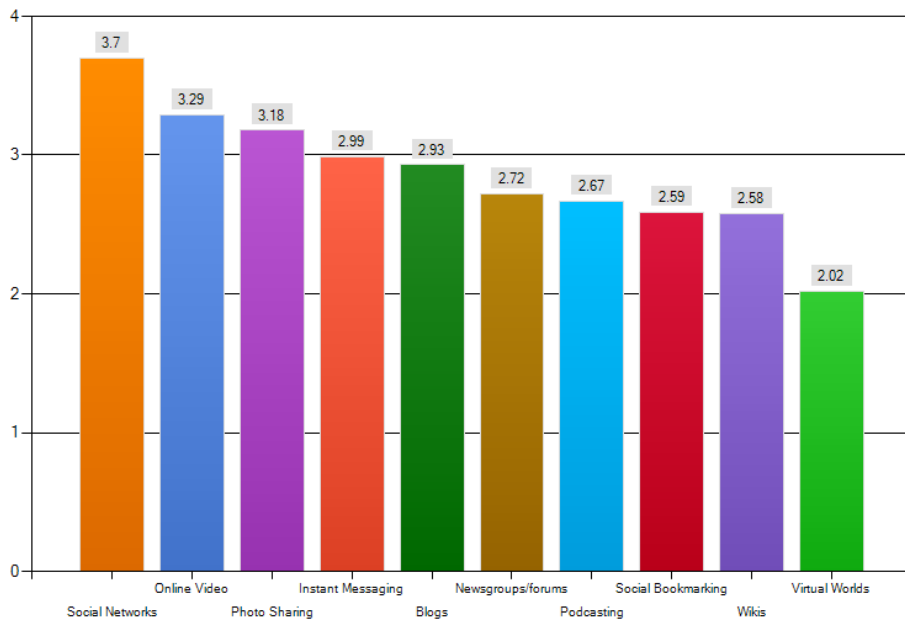
Respondents also rated their perception of each tools' effectiveness toward achieving marketing campaign and/or promotion goals. On a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being very effective and 1 being not effective, respondents continued to rank social networks as the highest with an average of 3.7 (slightly higher than last year). Coming in second was online video with an average ranking of 3.29.

An overwhelming number of responses (96.2%) to the question, **"Do you think Web 2.0 tools are important for marketing and promoting library services?"** continued to respond positively with only 3.8% stating they did not think Web 2.0 tools were important. 110 respondents provided qualitative information in the form of detailed comments. Below are selected comments:

At larger libraries these tools might be more effective than at our small campus. Our staff are too stretched to take this on and do and effective job, and we deal with a large percentage of students on the "have-not" side of the digital divide.

I don't have an opinion. We'd like to do more, but our city, because of records management, has a moratorium on using social media.

It's critical that we promote WHERE our public is, and right now, that's online.

Our users are on Facebook, Twitter, or wherever. If we're not there too, they probably aren't hearing about us.

Libraries can stretch limited marketing and outreach budgets with these tools.

But we need to acknowledge that these duties will take workers away from other duties, how much unpaid overtime do libraries expect from their workers?

I think any efforts that make promotion easy for libraries is great especially if we reach different people. If marketing tools take up too much time to be valuable, then they might not be worth it.

I think the traditional ways of newspaper articles and newspaper advertising is not the only way to communicate. The younger generation wants the social media angle.

Absolutely. We live in such a "connected" world that I think Web 2.0 tools are going to become essential in marketing and promoting library services.

I wish we were doing more - I intend to push for greater use of Web 2.0 tools. We have to be ready to hop on new things quickly and abandon things that aren't working.

I do think there is a necessary qualifier - simply using the tools isn't enough, they must be used well and used to reach out to people. Having a Facebook/Twitter/etc. account doesn't do you any good if people don't know that it's there.

I think they can be used clumsily and are frequently overdone, but I think when they're managed appropriately they can be very useful.

Our world is moving online; there are now whole groups of constituents that largely interact with the broader world through these tools. It opens possibilities to reach whole new constituencies and to go "viral".

Our website visits are larger than our footfall visit so it is critical to make this a full experience for them. Also, our social media has more up-to-date information than our printed material. It can update even before all of our front line staff are aware of changes to programs and such.

They're important, but individually, they reach ever smaller communities. Though most are free (only 'costing' staff time) eventually we'll need to decide which remain worthwhile and which need to be dropped.

Patrons are getting their information from a diversity of sources and libraries need to reach them where they are.

Respondents from libraries that have already implemented Web 2.0 tools predominantly use them for promoting general library services 87.6% (82.5% in 2010). Other highly ranked uses for Web 2.0 tools show an overall increase in use from last year's survey:

- Marketing specific adult programs and/or services 72.1% (70% in 2010)
- Providing quick updates to users 75.3% (65.6% in 2010)
- Reaching a new audience of potential users 54.4% (50.6% in 2010)
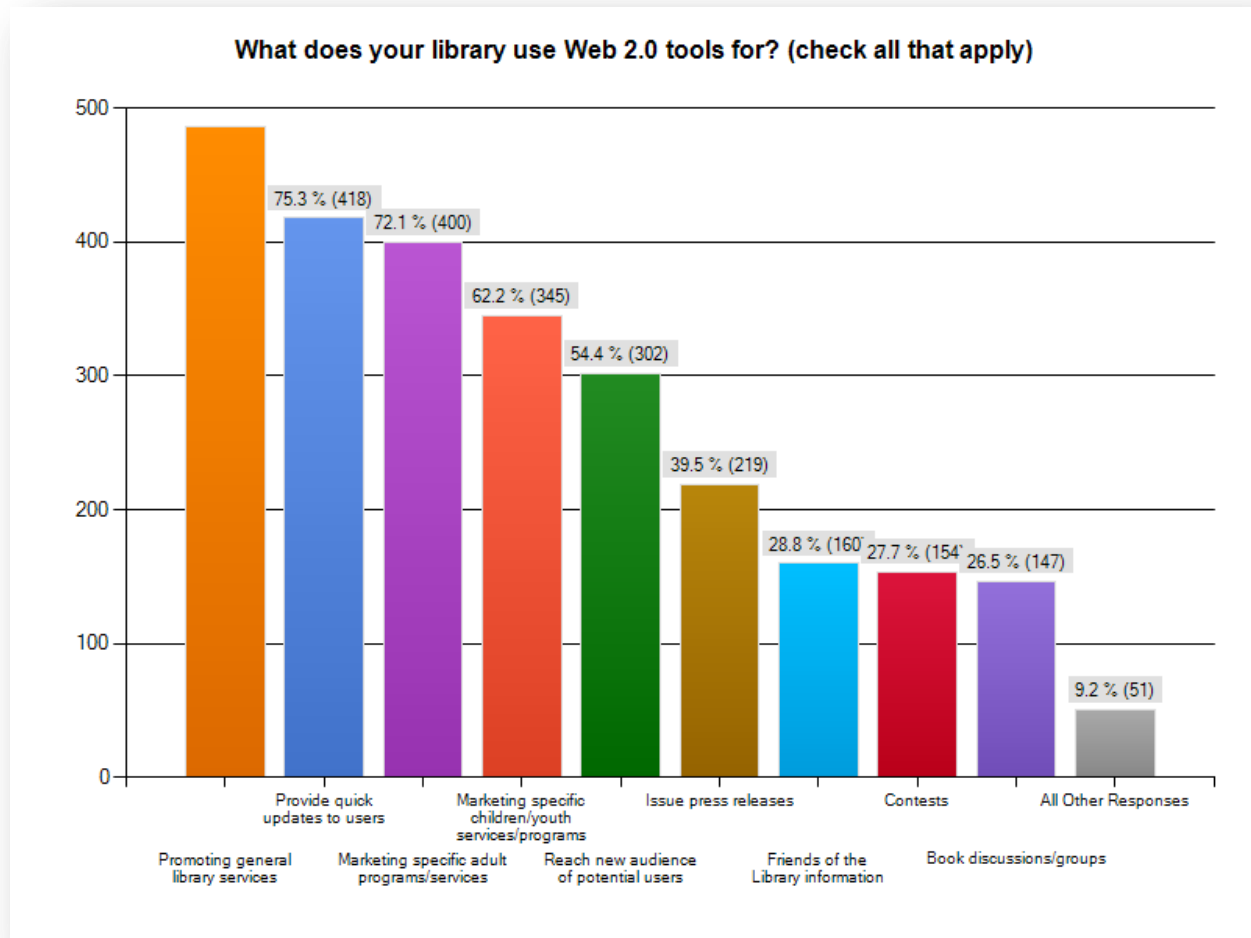
The following are selected comments (from a total of 61) regarding how respondents' libraries are using Web 2.0 tools:

- *Collaborate with other college departments*
- *Introduce new and showcase existing resources*
- *have conversations with users and learn more about/from them*
- *Sharing reading suggestions.*

- *as one of Virginia's burned record counties, we try to share items relating to local history via contests and providing links to helpful resources.*
- *Share "good to know" information like upcoming emergency exercises in the community, disaster preparedness materials, other City goings-on.*
- *Promoting university archives*
- *Announce new releases, hot picks on the shelf, day's activities @ library, answer questions*
- *Circulation notifications by text messaging*
- *Promoting hidden collections*

Respondents were asked, "How likely do you believe the people in the following age brackets are influenced by the library's use of Web 2.0 tools?" The majority responded they perceived individuals 18-25 were the most likely to be influenced with 26-35 and 36-45 ranking second and third. The under 18 category dropped to ranking fourth from the previous survey.

How likely do you believe the people in the following age brackets are influenced by the library's use of Web 2.0 tools? (1=not at all likely; 5=very likely)
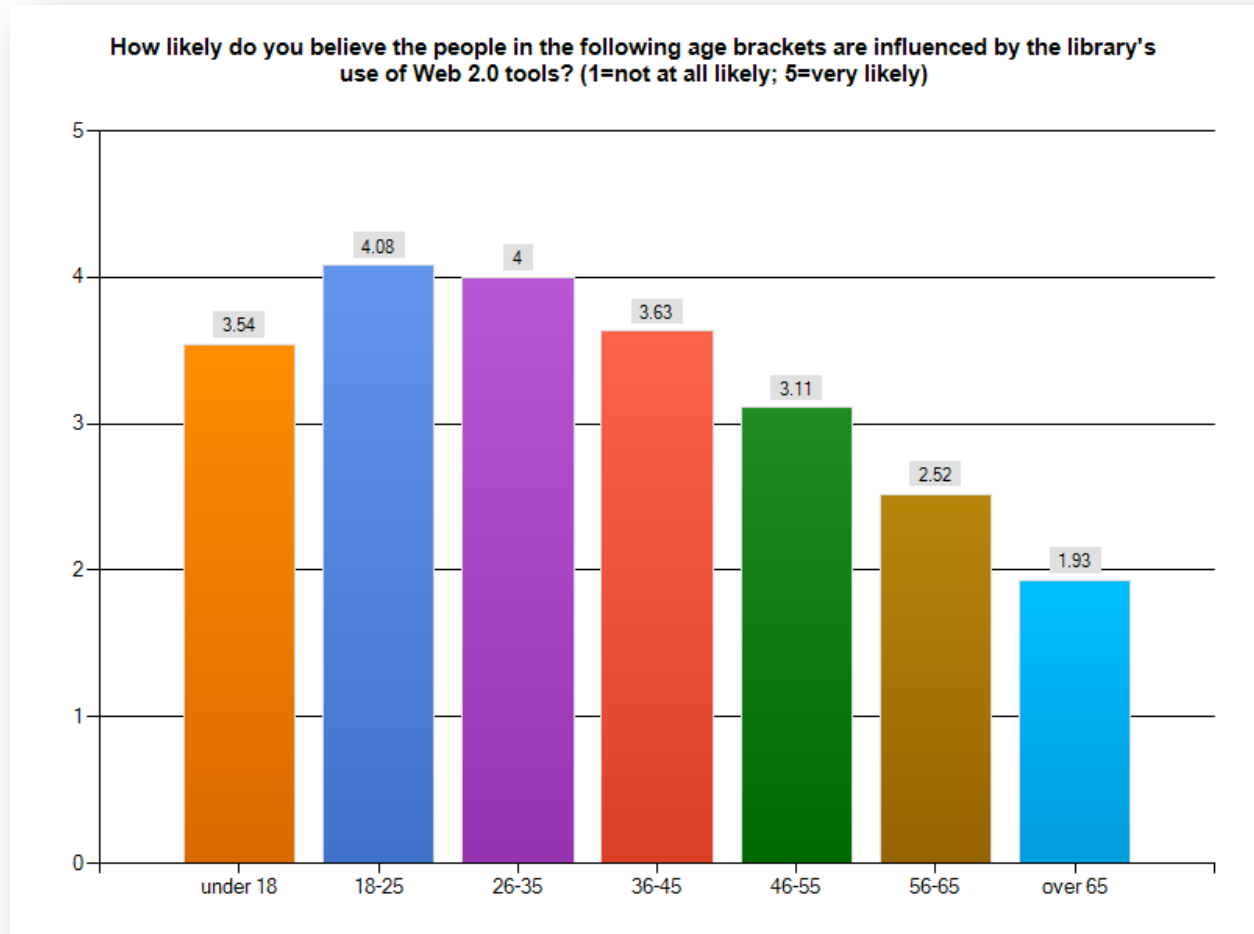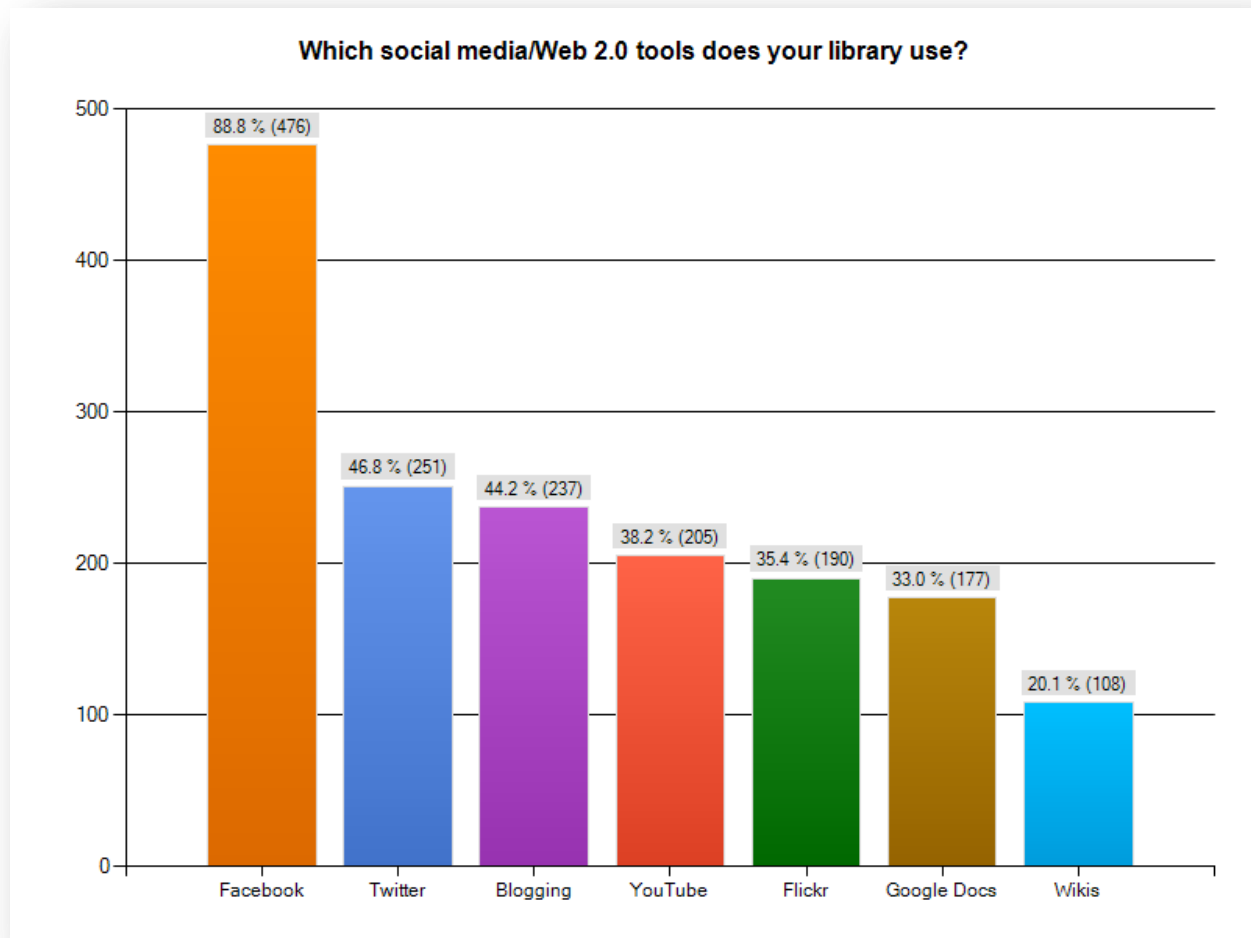
Respondents provided success stories with their library's use of social media or Web 2.0 tools for promoting the library's services and events. Below are selected responses from the 97 comments:

- *Our best success is simply the ongoing, title-specific traffic at the library driven by our posting our "new at the library this week" lists on our website & Facebook.*
- *Wow, our Adult Summer Reading program brought us 100+ new likes to our Friends Facebook page and a ton of activity in a virtual book club forum using GoodReads.*
- *An event posted on Facebook and our blog for an authors' discussion, people from outside of our small town came because of what they had seen on the internet.*
- *We held a very popular program and it really launched our Facebook presence; especially when we added patron pictures and photo albums.*
- *The direct conversation with customers via Facebook has been useful to alleviate an occasional issue a customer is having. Better than just marketing, it's a conversation.*
- *We did a $5 Facebook Challenge Fundraiser which raised over $3,500.*
- *We have put table tents advertising our Twitter acct, and since then patrons have been tagging us in their comments about being in the library. Recently that has led to resolving problems with eBooks, noisy patrons, research questions, etc.*
- *Facebook has had a huge impact on attracting people into our library. Many of our patrons have Facebook on their mobile devices and receive our updates on the go. Being able to reach patrons in a less obtrusive way at their will is a very successful method to market our events. We are also in the process of making Xtranormal videos that talk about library services, and have thought about making behind the scenes YouTube videos to show how inter library loan delivery is processed.*
- *We have had success with Twitter; a patron saw the tweet about a Friends' bake sale and signed up to bake; troubleshooted a problem with Overdrive and iPads; after a hurricane Twitter and Facebook were our only means of communicating as the library had no power.*
- *Having Facebook and twitter connected allows a 2 for 1 deal in relation to posting information. Also, tagging people in photos in the library has helped increase activity.*
- *We've invited students to appear as 'guest bloggers' and have generated some interest in students who want to post short stories & book reviews, or 'curate the internet' for our blog readers.*
- *Came upon a question from an individual on LinkedIn related to our area of focus and responded via Twitter. We were able to connect the individual to resources from our organization that they wouldn't normally have found.*
- *We shared a link on our Facebook page to an article discussing eBooks and print. A gorgeous essay was written as a comment on the power of the book no matter what the format, and the value of libraries. We used it in our next newsletter as a promotion of the library.*
- *We used Facebook for a digital photo contest for teens. You could only enter electronically and one had to like us on Facebook in order to "like" the photo of their choice. We went from 150 users to over 400 by the end of the contest, and that number continued to grow. We have lost a lot of our teen audience, but we're trying.*

Yes, when the book and movie, Twilight, came out, I started a blog between students from various districts in Ohio, which went over very well. In fact, School Library Journal even wrote an article about what we we're doing!

Respondents were also asked to choose from a list of 35 Web 2.0/social media tools their library uses. The tool most widely used was Facebook at 88.8% (84.3% in 2010 and 74.7% in 2009). Twitter ranked second (46.8%) and blogging tools ranked third (44.2%).

Which social media/Web 2.0 tools does your library use?

Tool	Percentage (Count)
Facebook	88.8 % (476)
Twitter	46.8 % (251)
Blogging	44.2 % (237)
YouTube	38.2 % (205)
Flickr	35.4 % (190)
Google Docs	33.0 % (177)
Wikis	20.1 % (108)

A last open-ended comment option was provided for respondents. Below are selected comments:

- *Many school libraries do not permit the use of Web2.0 tools because of their content filters. This is the case at my school for most tools. It is unfortunate because these tools could really help promote our library and learning.*
- *I think social networking has been way over sold. I don't know of a single library that relies on these gimmicks to achieve their core mission. Mostly a waste of time that would be better spent providing direct service to customers.*
- *Non-library administrators are too afraid of 'bad press' to even let us try to use social media of any type! It is extremely frustrating to be stuck in basically a pre-internet age. We only have online video tutorials accessible from our webpage. <sigh>*

- *I don't believe the average public library patron is acutely aware of web 2.0 technologies and what they can do for/with them. It would be great to see more PSA's about libraries and library services.*
- *There are always surprises about the ages of web 2.0 users. As more time goes by there are fewer distinct lines to be drawn about users--they are all over the place as far as age goes.*

Summary

Social media and Web 2.0 applications and tools are increasingly being used by U.S. libraries of all types. The majority of open-ended responses illustrate the growing need for libraries to stay ahead of the curve when it comes to using these popular tools to effectively communicate with their current and potential users.

While some respondents stated their local government or library administration restricts usage of social media tools, the majority of respondents appear to be using a more wide variety of applications to connect with customers.

We must remember that social media and Web 2.0 tools are freely available communication tools, yet take time and continued use to make them effective.

We hope this survey report assists libraries that are using social media and Web 2.0 tools to make better decisions about their continued use. It also is our hope this report assists libraries that are still not using these tools make the case for exploring the unlimited communication possibilities these tools can afford.

Resources

1-2   Pew Internet & American Life Project. *Why Americans use social media.* By Aaron Smith, Senior Research Specialist. 11/14/2011.

3   Facebook Newsroom. http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22

4-5   *Building Digitally Inclusive Communities: A brief guide to the proposed framework for digitally inclusive communities*. Technology & Social Change Group, University of Washington Information School, Institute of Museum and Library Services, International City/County Management Association.
        http://www.imls.gov/about/digitally_inclusive_communities.aspx