

Snapchat as a Way for Libraries to Reach a Teen and Tween Audience

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Description

Snapchat was originally created in 2010 by Evan Spiegel and Bobby Murphy, based on an idea and logo design from Reggie Brown, all were fraternity brothers at Sanford University. They initially named the new social media platform Peekaboo until they found another company with a product with the same name. In 2011, when the name Snapchat was adopted, the app, at that point only for iPhones, was slow to gain attention. It wasn't until Spiegel's mother told her niece about the app that the popularity started to increase as the school she was attending didn't allow Facebook to be used on their school iPads. The kids were using Snapchat during school hours to send messages to friends and they loved that the messages would disappear quickly leaving no evidence. As kids got the newest iPhones for Christmas at the end of 2011, usage of the app increased even more (Colao, 2014). Until only a year ago, Snapchat was well-known for sexting (Chafkin & Frier, 2016) but it's increasingly becoming a one-to-many platform, reaching over 100 million users (Solomon, 2015).

Snapchat draws the attention of a much younger crowd than most other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The heaviest users are 14-24 years old but 41% of adults under the age of 35 spend time on the platform (Chafkin & Frier, 2016). Snapchat allows users to take pictures and video, share it with specific contacts as chats or with all of their followers in Stories, for a limited amount of time before the content is deleted at the end of 24 hours. The original idea was to keep in touch with people you know but not have to worry about content you're adding to the site to be out on the internet forever for anyone to find (Colao, 2014). Followers are able to take a screenshot of the images on their screens but it notifies the creator of the action (Solomon, 2015).

Though Snapchat has dubious beginnings, many older adults may still think of the app as only being used for sexting, the company is becoming more widespread and can help businesses, and even

libraries, reach a much younger audience. Since Stories, multiple pictures shared together, are only accessible for 24 hours before they disappear, it encourages followers to check back daily or even more frequently to look for new content (van den Hurk, 2015). Unfortunately, if your company doesn't post content often you may lose followers. Snapchat allows for followers to create a deeper relationship with the poster as it allows the user to go behind the scenes, and since it isn't meant to be super professional, it doesn't take a lot of time or money to create content (Schur, 2015). This platform does not allow links to external content, as it doesn't allow access to the internet within the app, which means people are actually watching your content and not being distracted by other links (Chafkin & Frier, 2016)

Analysis

Using Snapchat in libraries can help reach a younger audience, as teens are more likely to use it over other social media platforms and older users. Though there is currently no way to prove the "correct" way for libraries to use Snapchat, such as what does and doesn't work in reaching followers, it is still a new platform and getting started now may help in the long run (Schur, 2015). The company finds that when someone follows you, as long as you keep your content to 60 seconds or less, you can easily hold 100% of the viewer's attention on your content, even if it is an advertisement (van den Hurk, 2015).

When Snapchat was created they purposely made it difficult to search and find other users unless you knew their specific screen name, as it was designed to share personal moments with the people you know, without making a public display (Chafkin & Frier, 2016). It's important to promote your Snapchat name on the other social media platforms your library uses so new followers can easily find you. Also think about creating little tabletop signs to place around the library with your profile picture printed on them, all fellow Snapchatters need to do is open the app and take a picture in order to

add you to their friends. Unfortunately, it is difficult to tell how far your reach extends on this platform, as your score is based on the amount of Snaps you send and receive, but keeping track of how many times a Snap is screenshot can give you an idea of how many people want to remember information you've shared or want to pass it along (Solomon, 2015).

There are some important things to remember when using Snapchat for your library. Make sure your content is current as it disappears quickly (van den Hurk, 2015), you don't need to post every day but make sure there is new content at least weekly. Since you are able to take screenshots, keep in mind how the images you share maybe taken out of context and given a different meaning, make sure to keep it PG to keep the library in a good light (Solomon, 2015). Show behind-the-scenes content leading up to events in order to grab interest, show Snaps of live events so your followers feel like they're there and not missing anything, and show what it's like to work at the library as well as what you have to celebrate (Talbot, 2015). Keep daily videos or Stories to 60 seconds or less in order to retain the attention of your followers and if they respond, via chat or they Snap you a photo, respond as long as what they have sent is appropriate (Solomon, 2015). Also, you can promote contests for prizes by having your followers send you Snaps holding their favorite library material or using one of your services (Talbot, 2015). Some small companies start a Story with a teaser about a special offer and then reveal what the special offer is with either a coupon to screenshot at the end or with the reveal of a password to share with staff in order to receive a special prize or discount. With the notification of a screenshot you can see how many people are interested and intend to use the offer and compare it against the amount of people who actually use it (Solomon, 2015).

According to the Snapchat (2016) blog they are currently offering On-Demand Geofilters which allows you to create an image to overlay pictures taken by Snapchatters when they are at a certain location chosen by you. This is great for special events which last anywhere from an hour to 30 days. Only patrons who use Snapchat and are at your location during the event can use your specially

designed filter to share with their friends and followers. It only takes about a day to be approved for your filter and location. Most filters have an event related graphic or words, such as the name of the event, at the top or bottom of the screen leaving room in the middle for the faces of the attendees. Your library can add photos to their Story sharing the fun and excitement of the event with all of their followers.

Reflection

I think using Snapchat in libraries is a good, forward looking idea. More and more libraries are focusing on teens and tweens and trying out new ways to reach them and get them involved. Snapchat seems like an engaging way to grab the attention of younger patrons. Though the app is not especially as user friendly as many other social media platforms are, I think taking the time to learn how to utilize it is beneficial for all involved. By creating interesting and dynamic content libraries can help teens and tweens feel more connected to the library and help them be more aware of the many things libraries can do for them. Updating program information, allowing for feedback via chat, and keeping an eye on when Snaps are screenshot can help librarians develop more high interest programming.

So what type of content would I create for my library's Snapchat account? I would add pictures and videos of the automatic sorter, staff mending books, the disc cleaner in action, staff members shelving books, reference librarians with smiles interacting with patrons, staff being silly, summer reading sign-up information, summer reading rules, summer reading prizes, staff's favorite books, special or hidden architectural elements of the building, community collaborations, upcoming program information, programs happening now, new services, and teens interacting with and at the library. This app was created to have fun, so play around with it and see what it can do for your library and it's teens and tweens.

References

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