



## Social Media Strategy

**askus**  
**now!**  
**info experts 24/7**  
**[www.askusnow.info](http://www.askusnow.info)**

A cooperative service of Maryland Libraries

Write-Up by Dennis Nangle  
AskUsNow! Administrative Intern  
11/23/2010

## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

---

AskUsNow! Needed an established social media strategy for several reasons: to reduce ambiguity of purpose when using various social media tools, to establish clear guidelines for reaching out to the AskUsNow! Community based on their preferences, and to ensure a consistent and clear voice from AskUsNow!'s social media accounts when multiple administrative users are managing the accounts. As with all aspects of AskUsNow!, the ultimate goal is always to determine how best to inform them of the services AskUsNow! provides.

## SURVEY RESULTS

---

To gauge their social media behaviors and needs, our users were given the opportunity to participate in a brief four-question survey. The survey was deliberately simple, and aimed to give AskUsNow! some perspective on how our users approach social media, and how they envision interacting with AskUsNow! in that capacity. The four questions were:

1. Which of the following types of social media sites do you use, and how often?
2. How would you interact with AskUsNow!?
3. What would you like to see AskUsNow! provide via social media?
4. How often do you want to hear from us on various social media outlets?

The users were then able to respond to the above questions with a matrix of options related to a certain web tool, social media site, etc. A total of 46 users responded to the survey.

Overall, the [results of the survey](#) were conclusive; it revealed a great deal about the comfort level of the AskUsNow! patron in regards to social media tools. Of the users surveyed, the kind of social media sites they log onto the most often (on a daily basis), were social networking sites like Facebook. Closely behind social networking on the list of frequently visited sites were information aggregators (like iGoogle), Video Sharing and Microblogging, in that order. View the table below for more results.

1. Which of the following types of social media sites do you use, and how often?

	Everyday	Several times a week	Once a week	Several times a month	Once a month	Less than once a month	I have an account but do not use it	I am not a member
Microblogging (Twitter, Tumblr, LinkedIn)	15.6% (7)	6.7% (3)	2.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	15.6% (7)	57.8% (26)
Social Networking (Facebook, MySpace, Ning, LinkedIn)	37.8% (17)	8.9% (4)	6.7% (3)	6.7% (3)	4.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	2.2% (1)	35.6% (16)
Location Based networks (Foursquare, Gollwalla)	6.7% (3)	2.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	4.4% (2)	2.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.2% (1)	84.4% (38)
Social bookmarking/tagging (Delicious, StumbleUpon)	13.3% (6)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	6.7% (3)	2.2% (1)	4.4% (2)	4.4% (2)	68.9% (31)
Photo sharing (Flickr, Picasa)	11.4% (5)	4.5% (2)	4.5% (2)	4.5% (2)	6.8% (3)	2.3% (1)	6.8% (3)	59.1% (26)
Video sharing (YouTube, Vimeo)	17.8% (8)	15.6% (7)	6.7% (3)	8.9% (4)	6.7% (3)	2.2% (1)	11.1% (5)	33.3% (15)
Music sharing (last.fm)	13.6% (6)	6.8% (3)	6.8% (3)	9.1% (4)	0.0% (0)	2.3% (1)	2.3% (1)	59.1% (26)
Livecasting (livestream, Ustream)	2.3% (1)	4.5% (2)	4.5% (2)	9.1% (4)	2.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.3% (1)	75.0% (33)
Social News (Digg, Reddit)	4.5% (2)	4.5% (2)	0.0% (0)	4.5% (2)	4.5% (2)	2.3% (1)	2.3% (1)	79.5% (35)
Blogs (Wordpress, LiveJournal, TypePad, Blogger)	9.3% (4)	4.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	4.7% (2)	2.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	9.3% (4)	69.8% (30)
Information aggregators (iGoogle, Netvibes)	29.5% (13)	15.9% (7)	2.3% (1)	2.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.3% (1)	2.3% (1)	47.7% (21)

The results continued to illustrate that the AskUsNow! patron isn't necessarily on the bleeding edge of technology; they use the most popular sites and would prefer that AskUsNow! remain involved on a rather unobtrusive level. However, this isn't to say that AskUsNow! shouldn't get involved in social media. A healthy majority of respondents said that they would like to receive communications from AskUsNow! on various topics, like operating hours, information about technology, and quick reference questions. However, one of the lowest-scoring choices on the list was the "Casual Conversation" option.

3. What would you like to see AskUsNow! provide via social media? (check all that apply)

	Percent	Count
News about AskUsNow! (usage stats, etc)	33.30%	12
Information about technology and libraries	58.30%	21
General information about AskUsNow! (open hours, holidays)	61.10%	22
General information about Maryland Libraries (programs, holidays)	52.80%	19
Casual Conversation	33.30%	12
Quick answers to reference questions	83.30%	30
Questions we've been asked on the service	58.30%	21
Answers to the questions we've been asked on the service	55.60%	20
Comments from customers	33.30%	12

## FORMULATING THE ASKUSNOW! APPROACH

---

The results above play a significant part to how AskUsNow! develops their voice and distinct personality over social media. As of right now, our users do not want AskUsNow! to behave on social media sites in a too overtly “social” fashion, as contradictory as that sounds. They don’t shun our presence entirely, but they don’t want to feel intruded upon. However, they still want the AskUsNow! social media presence to be active by posting information on Facebook and offering brief tidbits on Twitter.

Regardless of the amount of back-and-forth social “connections” that AskUsNow! will or will not be making with patrons, it is still essential for anyone working in the AskUsNow! social media accounts to take into consideration the unique “personality” of AskUsNow!. Even patrons with the lowest skillsets can tell if a corporate/organizational account is lifeless and a “robot.” To avoid this issue from surfacing, we discussed and decided on a Myers-Briggs Personality that embodies the spirit of AskUsNow!: the ENFJ personality. The main traits of this personality include:

- Being attuned to needs and feelings
- Helping others fulfill their potential
- Serving as catalysts
- Being facilitators
- Warm
- Empathetic
- Responsive
- Responsible

Those working as social media representatives of AskUsNow! should review these traits and attempt to integrate them into what would otherwise be innocuous tweets and Facebook messages.

### Updating Twitter: Posting Methods

Twitter updates are just 140 characters long. The trick with Twitter is to be succinct, but keep a friendly, interesting tone. Friendly and informal is key.

Use the bit.ly URL shorteners attached to the AUN! account to ensure we're able to track metrics. These all allow you to enter long URL strings and shorten them to a brief, Twitter-friendly format.

### Types of Tweets

**Share a great resource or provide helpful suggestions on popular topics (frequency: twice a week, both on Twitter and Facebook):**

- Did you know that Answers.com provides encyclopedia and wikipedia entries, definitions and fast facts on your topic? <http://is.gd/4hLjc>
- Learning about the Ancient Romans? Here's a great site with tons of info: <http://is.gd/4hLtD>
- Library Research Skills for Biologists: <http://is.gd/askd>
- List of niche search engines for college students - many individual items would make great Tweets: <http://www.onlineuniversities.com/blog/2010/02/100-niche-search-engines-every-college-student-needs/>

**Provide service updates (frequency: ASAP):**

- AskUsNow! will be closed this Thursday, November 25th; we re-open as normal on Friday. Happy Thanksgiving!
- AskUsNow! is currently experiencing technical difficulties. We're sorry for any inconvenience.
- AskUsNow!'s software is currently receiving an upgrade. Please be patient with us as we work out the kinks!

**Share interesting questions (frequency: 2-3 times daily):**

- Q: "I'm looking for articles on Walmart, anything to do with greenwashing or their green labels but am having trouble..."
- Q: "Is it safe to eat raw eggs? I want an official resource."
- When possible, follow up by providing the answer, along with the librarian (and their twitter handle, when possible) who answered it

***Promote the advantages of AskUsNow! (frequency: once daily):***

- Did you know that AskUsNow! may be open later than your public library? <http://bit.ly/fFg586>
- AskUsNow! has answered more than 305,000 chat questions and responded to more than 77,000 e-mails!
- AskUsNow! staff can push useful web pages directly to your computer, and guide you to the best info.
- Comment: What a great service [AskUsNow!] is. I used it at 8:50 p.m. on a Sunday night which is one of the only times during the week i have free time."

***Share "behind-the-scenes" info (frequency: once daily):***

- Did you know...there are usually at least ten librarians working on AskUsNow!?
- Tonight your questions are being answered by staff from Anne Arundel, Prince George and Howard County Public Libraries
- Possible ways to further integrate: when including tweets like the one above, include the twitter names of the libraries and (possibly) librarians that users might want to connect with
- AskUsNow! has answered more than 308,255 questions in total!
- AskUsNow!'s busiest months are April and September. We're quietest in the summer.

***Give shoutouts to other libraries (frequency: only on Follow Fridays- hashtag #ff):***

- Baltimore-area residents, stay informed @prattlibrary, the latest MD library to join Twitter!
- Happy #ff, everyone! Check out these great @askusnow libraries/librarians:

***Searching for patrons' needs***

- Use Twitter's [search](#) feature to search for local twitter users who may have a research/info need that you can help with info. Once the search has been entered, use Twitter's "[tweets near you](#)" option to narrow responses to MD-area users. Possible search terms include:
  - Library
  - Book
  - Find
  - Homework
  - Project
  - Report
  - Question
  - Help

## Updating Facebook: Posting Methods

Status updates. These can be similar to the Twitter posts above, but you have a slightly longer character limit and can be a little more informational. Fortunately, Facebook's new user tagging feature allows us to refer to specific librarians and provider libraries in the same way we would over Twitter.

### *Wall discourse*

- Unfortunately, the move from “Fan site” to “Page” has affected an institution's ability to privately message any customers. So, while AskUsNow! users are wanting reference services from us, we can't do it as privately as before.
- **Providers/Liaisons:** it may be necessary to show patrons that it's okay to use AskUsNow! Facebook wall by asking a few “dummy” questions for the AskUsNow! Facebook account to answer.
- **Cathay** will monitor any wall activity and respond within 24 hours.

### *Photo Tagging/Sharing*

- Taking photos of providers and liaisons would be a great way for local patrons to see who they may be talking to at a given moment. If a provider's library is also on Facebook, that institution should be tagged as well.

### *Sharing a screen capture/video*

- When applicable, take a brief screen recording of potentially common research/search needs and upload them to Youtube, which could then easily be shared on Facebook and Twitter.
- For Cathay and Julie: when the videos are finished, it may be advantageous to create a YouTube channel and share the videos on Facebook that way.
- Users indicated that they use YouTube often, and this is most likely for recreation reasons (funny videos, music, etc.). AskUsNow! should recommend videos that are useful for research and information, but should still be fun/engaging.
- A valuable video sharing collaborative is the AnTS (Animated Tutorial Sharing) Project, which freely offers their collaboratively-created video tutorials to librarians across the country. Any relevant videos can be shared via Facebook to AskUsNow!'s users. View their D-Space of video tutorials [here](#).

## Using Delicious

Delicious bookmark tags must be formalized and distributed to all providers and liaisons. If a provider or liaison stumbles across a valuable information source, send the link to Cathay and she will add it to Delicious using the appropriate tag/tag bundle names. **Providers, Liaisons, etc.** can feel free to include links from Delicious in Tweets and Facebook correspondence at any time. Also, if any individual librarian/library has a Delicious account, they should be “connected” to the AskUsNow! account. This will not only allow curious users to discover everyone’s accounts, but it can also ensure that AskUsNow! has access to several valuable links that they can aggregate.

*AskUsNow!’s Publicity Campaign and Delicious (taken from the [larger campaign write-up](#))*

Currently, there are several tags already established on AUN!’s Delicious site. To correspond with the marketing campaign, there should be four tag bundles (Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer) with the other relevant tag bundles nested within. For example, the current Halloween tag would be bundled within the Fall tag. By doing this, the QR codes on the marketing material would contain links to the Delicious site with the coordinating tag bundle. What’s effective about this approach is that when providers and liaisons forward helpful links to Cathay and Julie, they can add them appropriately in Delicious, and patrons who scan the QR codes on already-printed material will still be receiving the most up-to-date resources.