

Numbers Don't Lie: Increasing Engagement on TLA District 8's Facebook Page

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Introduction

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok provide easily accessible, free marketing tools for many small organizations like libraries. TLA district officers use these platforms to communicate and market district events to members. However, the limited number of events means that social media communication often occurs infrequently. And if social media platforms are only used to promote the occasional district event, then members may not have good enough reasons to regularly follow these district communication platforms. This infrequent usage presents a lost opportunity for districts to build richly engaging social spaces where members may learn, inspire, and support one another regarding library initiatives, programming, and pressures.

In 2021, I was elected as District 8's web administrator and began to focus on increasing community engagement with the district's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/TLADistrict8>). The goal was to provide a more interactive experience for anyone choosing to view or follow the page by increasing the number of posts. This was achieved by regularly sharing posts from the Facebook pages of every library within the District 8 region. Represented communities in District 8 range from large urban cities to small rural towns and libraries include public, school, university/college, and specialized institutions. Since implementing this change, engagement and followers have increased. The purpose of this presentation is to share this easy to implement strategy along with supporting Facebook data demonstrating the strategy's effectiveness.

Methodology

The first step was to identify all libraries within the district's twenty-eight counties¹. A list of schools, school districts, public libraries, and colleges and universities was generated using the business and marketing database called AtoZdatabases. The list included business names, county locations, addresses, and website URLs. Facebook URLs were not available. Any special libraries associated with museums and archives that were already known to me but did not appear on the list were added. This list yielded approximately 2874 entries. The next step was to edit this list and clean it up.

¹ District 8 consists of 28 counties in the southeast Texas region: Angelina, Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Hardin, Harris, Houston, Jasper, Jefferson, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Nacogdoches, Newton, Orange, Polk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Trinity, Tyler, Walker, Waller, and Wharton.

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Editing the list was the most time-consuming part of the task and entailed visiting each school or school district's website to ensure that address information was correct and whether the school had a library and also had a Facebook presence. General school district entries and schools without libraries were removed from the list and newly built schools that included libraries were added². The same process for confirming address and Facebook presence was followed for all other libraries on the list. The final list consisted of approximately 1521 school libraries, 157 public libraries, 45 college/university libraries, and 9 special libraries (law, medical, museum/archive, prison, and theology). Of these, 18 school libraries, 68 public libraries, 11 college/university libraries, and 2 special libraries were identified as having Facebook pages.

I then logged into my personal Facebook account to find and "follow" as many library Facebook pages as the Facebook website would allow, and then "liked" the rest. It was necessary to use my personal account because district web administrators must connect to district Facebook pages through their personal accounts.

The strategy of "liking" and "following" library pages was to ensure that Facebook would populate my personal Facebook feed with new posts from these libraries. As new content appeared, I "shared" the posts on the District 8 Facebook page. There was no set routine for checking the feed for new content. Instead, I checked Facebook at times when it was convenient for me to do so throughout the week, such as during breaktimes, meetings, and sitting comfortably at home watching television. Since viewing content was considered entertaining, it was no real chore to view and share libraries' content.

The choice of shared content was arbitrary. I was most attracted to posts that contained event photos or videos and included descriptive text in the posts because these showed librarians and patrons involved in library events. My second choice of content contained well designed graphics with easy to read text about the event included in the design, plus descriptive text in the posts. All other posts were tertiary choices.

The biggest issue with the "like" and "follow" strategy is that it relies heavily on Facebook's built-in algorithms to populate my personal Facebook feed with newly published content. Also, some libraries post content more often than others, so those libraries' posts take up more virtual real estate on my

² The Windham School District (W.S.D.) was categorized as a "Special, Prisons" library and was listed as one entity even though multiple state prisons have libraries provided by W.S.D.

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personal feed. Libraries that post less frequently tend to either not show up on my personal Facebook feed, or the posts get lost among the many other more frequent posts. Due to this issue, I had to make an extra effort to find and share posts created by libraries that posted less often.

On a final note, I chose to include occasional Facebook posts from organizations outside of District 8 and the Texas Library Association. These were State of Texas and federal organizations that I felt contained some content that was relevant to issues and topics for librarians in District 8. These organizations included the Library of Congress, The Portal to Texas History, Texas Historical Commission, Texas State Historical Association, National Historical Publications and Records Commission, and US National Archives. The occasional re-posts from these organizations typically related to either historical events in the District 8 area or to national events that many District 8 libraries were also promoting. The reason I chose to include these organizations' posts was to both support district interests and to promote valuable information resources created by state and federal agencies.

Results

This re-post strategy has resulted in a significant overall increase in Facebook page reach, visits, and likes during the two terms that I have served as District 8 Web Administrator from 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. Data during the District 8 committee term between April 2020 to March 2021 before this new strategy was implemented shows that there were no District 8 Facebook page visits and no new "likes" for the page. By the end of the following committee year between April 2021 to March 2022 there were a total of 805 Facebook page visits and 73 new "likes." These numbers have reduced slightly this past year, showing 710 page visits and 68 new "likes" between April 2022 to March 2023. Despite the decrease, though, the numbers show a continued interest in viewing District 8 libraries' content and a positive response to the re-post strategy. Please see the Appendix for monthly usage data.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Improvement

Now that the 2022-2023 term is ending, I hope succeeding web administrators will maintain this proven communication strategy and even improve upon it. Not only does it help maintain community engagement with the district's social media page, but it also serves as a place where anyone can seek ideas and inspiration regarding library programming and the marketing of those programs. It also serves as a place where siloed librarians can find and connect with one another. I also hope that other TLA members will be inspired to implement this strategy within their own districts. It would be incredible to

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visit other TLA district social media platforms and see programming and events that are unique for their respective regions and populations.

The re-posting strategy has been a success for two years now and, like all programs, it can always be improved. One weak point in the current strategy is that the intention behind the re-posting may not be clear to viewers. This was actually mentioned in feedback from a recent informal survey that I took regarding the District 8 Facebook page. This indicates a clear failure on my part to communicate the intention of the re-posting strategy and I recommend that the next web administrator take steps to correct it. This could be done by adding text to the page's description and by creating a post or posts that inform viewers of the site's intention.

A second improvement would be to create an independent Facebook account for the district rather than a page that is shared through TLA. This would enable web administrators to "like" and "follow" district libraries only once in the app, rather than forcing all new administrators to "like" and "follow" the libraries in their personal accounts. It can be a time-consuming process and may be daunting for newly elected members, plus some people may not want extraneous content populating their personal feeds. This idea, though, is more difficult to implement because it requires a commitment on behalf of TLA administrators to create these pages and maintain password security. However, I submit it as a possible improvement that would help incentivize districts to follow the proposed re-posting strategy outlined in this document.

In closing, it has been my pleasure to serve as District 8's web administrator for two successive terms. I hope that I have made a positive contribution while in this role and I look forward to finding more ways to promote collegiate practices within the library profession. Thank you.

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Appendix

Facebook Page visits³

	April 2020 to March 2021	April 2021 to March 2022	April 2022 to March 2023
	no re-posted content	first year re-posted content	second year re-posted content
April	0	38	47
May	0	20	20
June	0	12	85
July	0	11	60
August	0	226	61
September	0	175	92
October	0	74	81
November	0	67	94
December	0	48	39
January	0	41	33
February	0	63	44
March	0	30	54
TOTAL	0	805	710
Average per month	0	67	59
Average per day	0	2	2

³ The number of times your Facebook Page was visited.

https://www.facebook.com/business/help/276102860429282?ref=search_new_0

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Facebook Page new likes⁴

	April 2020 to March 2021	April 2021 to March 2022	April 2022 to March 2023
	no re-posted content	first year re- posted content	second year re-posted content
April	0	9	2
May	0	3	2
June	0	2	8
July	0	3	9
August	0	21	6
September	0	12	3
October	0	6	6
November	0	6	7
December	0	2	3
January	0	1	3
February	0	4	5
March	0	4	14
TOTAL	0	73	68
Average per month	0	6	6
Average per day	0.00	0.20	0.19

⁴ The number of new likes of your Facebook Page.

https://www.facebook.com/business/help/938263903442467?ref=search_new_1#