

Keep Me Logged In: Electronic Resource Vendors and Facebook

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Abstract

Web 2.0, social networking in particular, has permeated the scholarly realm, allowing libraries to connect with and provides services to their users in new ways. However, are other library partners – namely electronic resource vendors and publishers – also making use of these new ways? This study examines whether or not a selected collection of databases and their publishers, drawn from the author’s library, have Facebook profiles and briefly examines those profiles where applicable. The results of the study reveal that several vendors and their products are on Facebook, which the author feels is a step in the right direction; however, the author feels that this step is still passive and suggests further study to see who is actually accessing these vendors’ profile and how this might affect the dynamic between vendors and users.

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Introduction

Facebook describes its mission on its “Info” page as giving “people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.”¹ This sounds remarkably like goals and purposes describe in library mission statements the world over, though libraries would add *information* after “power to share” and “open and connected” to. Though ostensibly a social networking site, Facebook has also become a means of reaching library users and marketing libraries. Users can become fans of libraries like the New York Public Library (which, as of July 7, 2010, has 18,282 fans).² Like-minded people can connect and interact, express opinions, concerns, suggestions, and support of such institutions in an open forum. Of course, other institutions, organizations, and businesses likewise use Facebook as a means of reaching potential customers, supporters, members, or supporters.

Libraries and businesses use Facebook as a means of advertisement and outreach. Yet this raises a question: how are businesses – namely electronic resource vendors and publishers – using Facebook to connect with libraries? Are the vendors even employing Facebook as a means to connect with users and potential customers? Are they making the best of social networking and Web 2.0, or are they overlooking a goldmine of possibilities? This article proposes to examine if any vendors or publishers are currently using Facebook and how.

Literature Review

Researchers have examined the relationship between Web 2.0, social networking sites like Facebook, and libraries.³ Though launched in 2004, Facebook was initially only open to students at Harvard (where its developers attended school); it was not until 2006 that anyone

over the age of 13 was allowed to create a profile.⁴ Furthermore, Facebook did not at the outset permit organizations or groups to create profiles.⁵ Once these restrictions lifted, however, organizations of all kinds, including libraries and institutions of higher education, began establishing virtual presences and attempting to reach users.⁶ Facebook encourages users to create groups and networks and seems to promote an openness not always found in real life.⁷

Librarians and libraries alike populate Facebook, reaching out to students at (and no doubt beyond) their institutions to answer questions, promote their resources and services, and simply to connect with other users.⁸ Facebook seems to be the preferred social networking medium of choice for librarians and libraries, as compared to other sites, like MySpace.⁹ Some researchers suggest that librarians *ought* to view social networking sites as “new online mechanisms” for “traditional library services.”^{10 11} Though cautionary with regards to time consumption and privacy issues, they recommend Facebook to librarians and libraries for outreach, marketing, professional networking, and instruction.¹²

Specific libraries have even detailed their own experiences using Facebook. Darren Chase describes how Stony Brook University’s Health Sciences Library uses “online social networks,” including Facebook, to build an “online user community and [enhance] access to library resources and services.”¹³ The New York Public Library uses Facebook in addition to its website, a Youtube channel, and iTunes pages to connect with its users; in fact, though the NYPL has about 16 million physical visitors a year, it has more digital users.¹⁴ Jason Sokoloff identifies six international libraries currently on Facebook which include academic and public libraries in the United Kingdom, South Africa, Serbia, Australia, and Canada.¹⁵

Academic disciplines and discipline-specific libraries are examining the role of Facebook in the dissemination of research as well. Howard Stanbury and Jeremy Selman list Facebook as a

means for researchers to connect with food science information and related organizations.¹⁶

Dean Hendrix et al studied how academic health sciences libraries use Facebook, distributing a survey to member libraries of the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries.¹⁷ The results of their survey determined that most academic health sciences libraries were using Facebook primarily as a marketing tool, though the authors felt that in general there were not enough libraries using Facebook to meaningfully establish the usefulness and applicability of Facebook.¹⁸

Using Facebook is not without problems, however. The main concern, as some library scholars see it, is privacy. Peter Fernandez, while admitting the usefulness social networking sites like Facebook, expresses concern for how these sites could compromise user privacy (namely toward financial ends).¹⁹ It is not necessarily within the power or purview of libraries or librarians to intervene when a user encounters privacy issues on social networking sites.

However, as more and more libraries are promoting social networking sites – either by way of simply providing access to the sites or by actively using those sites to promote the library and its services – librarians are likely to find themselves ethically conflicted.²⁰ Likewise, Kristina DeVoe suggests that trust and privacy are issues libraries have to consider, if social networking is to be a “meaningful” experience for libraries and librarians.²¹ Claudine Jenda and Martin Kesselman also express concern with regard to privacy and social networking, including Facebook.²²

Just as privacy is a source of concern for librarians, so is access to resources. Access is provided practically by libraries, but the vendors and publishers provide the products. However, the vendors and publishers have not always made access easy. Traditionally, libraries and publishers, particularly database vendors, have not always seen eye-to-eye.²³ Kenneth Marks

suggests that this is due to the vastly different environments in which each party works.²⁴ The library literature stresses the importance of maintaining good relations and open communication with vendors, namely as a means of improving services²⁵ but also to “foster understanding” and “identify areas of mutual concern and benefit.”²⁶ Librarians, libraries, and vendors must put aside their differences in a variety of contexts – namely in creating, testing, and marketing new services.²⁷

This dynamic is particularly important since the libraries and librarians are not the end-users of the vendors’ products; the libraries’ users are.²⁸ But the libraries and librarians are the necessary middleman in this dynamic, as they are responsible for providing access, training, and assistance. It behooves both library and vendor to collaborate and communicate. And though standard venues of communication between libraries and vendors are in place, “improving on this infrastructure is a constant undertaking.”²⁹

Miscommunication between libraries and vendors often leads to “mistrust, broken relationships, and failed initiatives.”³⁰ Everybody loses in these scenarios, not just the libraries and the vendors – the library patrons lose, too.

It is worth mentioning as well that the relationship between libraries and vendors emerged as a result of technology and its applications in libraries.³¹ The libraries are users of the resources vendors offer; the libraries are “both customer and developer,”³² and in order for the libraries to receive quality products from the vendors, the libraries must communicate with and be willing to interact with the vendors. Likewise, the vendors must communicate with and be willing to interact with the libraries.

Not much research has been conducted on vendors’ use of social networking as a means of interacting with libraries, Facebook or otherwise. Unanimously, however, amongst the

literature perused for this article is that vendors and libraries need open lines of communication in order to develop the best possible product for end users, libraries and library patrons alike.

Methodology

In order to examine if and how some library resource vendors employ Facebook as a means to reach out to users, the author searched Facebook for profiles corresponding to databases available through her university library. The searches took place over the course of March and April of 2010.

Most of the databases available via the library are part of a consortium package; consequently, many of the universities that are a part of the consortium also provide access to these databases. See Figure 1 for a “Quick List” of the databases available; a full list is available on the library’s website.³³ Titles associated with the College of Pharmacy were also included. These titles are only accessible to students, faculty, and staff associated with the Pharmacy program at the author’s university and require separate logins, and are not accessible to the author. These titles and publishers were searched as well - see Figure 2.

Figure 1. Database Quick List

Databases by Name Quick List		
AccessPharmacy	EBSCOhost	OCLC WorldCat
ACM *	Gale Virtual Reference Library	Oxford English Dictionary
African American Newspapers	H.W. Wilson Art Suite (trial)	RIA Tax Services User Registration *
America's Historical Newspapers	IEEE Digital Library *	RIA Tax Services Checkpoint (Search) †
Annual Reviews *	ISI Web of Knowledge *	Sanborn Maps
ARTSTOR †	JSTOR	SciFinder Scholar (ask Reference Dept.)
Bayou State Periodical Index	LearningExpress Library †	Scribner Writers Series
Biography Resource Center	LexisNexis Academic	Statewide Database List, descriptive
BioOne *	Literature Resource Center	Twayne Author Series
Classical Music Library	Louisiana Digital Library	ULM Electronic Journals (Ebsco A to Z)
College Source (catalogs) *	MathSci Net	ULM College of Pharmacy Resources
CQ Researcher	Mergent Online	WebFeat
Dissertations & Theses	NetLibrary †	World Book Advanced
	Nursing & Allied Health Source™	

* Denotes resources not available off-campus
† Denotes resources requiring account creation on-campus; contact us if you need help

Databases by Name Expanded

Academic Search™ Complete

AccessPharmacy

ACM: Association for Computing Machinery *

Figure 2. Databases for Pharmacy

Databases for Pharmaceutical Sciences
AccessPharmacy
Annual Reviews - a nonprofit scientific publisher *
Cochrane Library † (off-campus access for pharmacy only)
Current Protocols † (off-campus access for pharmacy only)
EBSCOhost
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Academic Search™ Complete▪ Alt HealthWatch™▪ CINAHL® Plus with Full Text▪ Health Source®: Nursing/Academic Edition▪ Lexi-PALS Drug Guide▪ MedicLatina™▪ Medline®▪ Medline® with Full Text *
LexisNexis Academic
NetLibrary
ProQuest
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Dissertations & Theses▪ Nursing & Allied Health Source™
ScienceDirect
SciFinder Scholar (ask Reference Dept.)
ULM Electronic Journals List & Database (Ebsco A to Z)
College of Pharmacy log-in required
Embase
Facts and Comparisons
Iowa Drug Information Service (IDIS)
OVID
Micromedex
Lexicomp
MDConsult
STAT!Ref (Click LOG OFF when finished)
STAT!Ref for Off Campus

The author searched for both the titles of the databases (e.g., ISI Web of Knowledge) and the publisher/vendors (e.g., H.W. Wilson). Pages stating that they were not created by the company itself or community (or fan) pages were disregarded. Only official profiles - profiles obviously created by the vendors themselves that indicate direct affiliation - were reviewed.

The aim of this study is not to assess the quality of the profile pages. This article seeks to determine whether or not the selected vendors have profiles at all and to briefly assess what kind of information the profiles contain.

Results

Approximately 98 individual database titles were searched for in Facebook, representing 31 publishers/vendors. Of the 98 databases, 15 databases had an official presence on Facebook – 15% of databases searched. Twenty-five publishers/vendors had some kind of presence on Facebook, meaning approximately 80% of vendors searched were represented. Figures 3 and 4 show which databases and vendors have profiles.

Figure 3. Databases with Profiles

Annual Reviews	ISI Web of Knowledge	MLA Int'l Bibliography
ARTstor	JSTOR	Micromedex
CQ Researcher	Lexicomp	Oxford English Dictionary
Current Protocols	Louisiana Digital Library	STAT!Ref
IDIS	MD Consult	WorldCat

Figure 4. Vendors with Profiles

Alexander Stress Press	LexiComp
American Mathematical Society	LexisNexis
Annual Reviews	Louisiana Digital Library
ARTstor	McGraw-Hill
CQ Press	Mergent
Current Protocols	Modern Language Association
Elsevier	OCLC
Gale-Gengage	Oxford University Press
H.W. Wilson	ProQuest
IEEE	Thomson Reuters
John Wiley & Sons	University of Iowa (IDIS)
JSTOR	Wolters-Kluwer
LearningExpress Library	

Discussion

Databases and publishers/vendors that have profile pages all had, at the very least, a link to their official website. Most include other basic contact information such as phone numbers,

mailing addresses, and customer service phone numbers and email addresses. Some provide picture albums that featured employees, conference demonstrations, or screencaps of products. All permit Facebook users to write on their Walls, where users can leave comments, make suggestions, and otherwise interact with the profile and each other. Users can “like” the profiles and follow posts made by the profile, which can include plain text, pictures, links, and video. Profiles can also post notes as well. See Figure 5 for a screencap of JSTOR’s Facebook profile page as an example (names and pictures have been obscured to protect privacy) – it is typical of the profiles examined during this study.

Figure 5. JSTOR’s Facebook Profile



Some publishers/vendors have discussion boards and Events sections where upcoming events, such as conference attendance, can be listed. The Discussion section appears to be default for profiles associated with organizations or businesses. Some profiles include a section for polls

as well, though this function did not occur frequently. Some profiles allow users to follow the profiles via RSS and read blog entries or newsletters through the Facebook interface. Some direct users to Twitter feeds or Flickr accounts. Some profiles provide a Links section. Users can also write reviews about the organizations, businesses, or products associated with profiles.

All databases and publishers/vendors that had profiles had fans, or users, some numbering in the thousands. No profile was without fans.

In most cases, if the publisher/vendor was not represented, then none of its databases were represented. One exception to this rule is the MLA International Bibliography, which does have an official page. However, the rest of the databases in the Ebscohost family do not have pages, and Ebsco itself does not have a profile page. Admittedly, the Bibliography can stand alone and is available via several other vendors such as CSA, ProQuest, and Gale-Cengage.³⁴

It's worth mentioning that Facebook has established a type of profile called a Community Page. A Community Page is intended to be "the best collection of shared knowledge on this topic"³⁵ – whatever that topic might be, from books to concepts to bands and beyond – and often contains a description taken from Wikipedia. Several of the vendors/publishers that did not have official profiles did have community pages, including Ebsco Publishing, several of Ebscohost's individual products (Funk & Wagnalls Encyclopedia, MAS Ultra, Medline Plus with Full Text, Primary Search, and PsychINFO), African American Newspapers (a Readex/Newsbank product), the American Mathematical Society (which produces MathSciNet), and World Book. These community pages include – in addition to the description – a "Related Posts" section that functions like a Wall and a Wikipedia section. These pages appear to function like wikis within Facebook.

While establishing a presence on Facebook – where many end users, like students, spend time – is a laudable, it is just a step beyond establishing a website. Most of the profiles seem more like elaborate “Contact Us” pages. There is a certain amount of passivity inherent in this activity – the users must seek out the pages themselves, rather than the vendors seeking out contacts. Admittedly, it would be difficult for a vendor profile to “friend” individuals. However, it would not be difficult for vendors to reach out to currently subscribing libraries.

Moreover, it would be worth the exposure for vendors to invest in advertising on Facebook. Facebook ads are displayed on the right side of the profile and are often geared towards a user’s listed interests and likes. If a librarian, student, or scholar lists one database as an interest, other database ads would no doubt appear, with minimal effort on the part of the vendors themselves.

While it appears that vendors and publishers are using social media to connect with users, it is debatable that they are using it to the fullest.

Limitations and Conclusion

When reviewing the data and discussion, one must of course take into account the limitations inherent in such an undertaking. Vendor selection was limited to publishers responsible for products to which the author has access and with which the author is consequently more familiar. Subsidiaries of publishers are not always obviously connected to their parent company, and whereas the subsidiary may be proactive in their approach – i.e. using social networking as a means of interacting with clients – the parent company might not see things the same way.

The search function of Facebook itself is rather limited as well and not always as accurate as could perhaps be hoped. It is difficult to tell why some profiles were hard to find. The official profiles for Elsevier, ProQuest, and Mergent were only located once a search was conducted in Google using the vendor's name and Facebook as keywords.

Moreover, though Facebook is endeavoring to combine fan pages and establish presumably standardized Community Pages, this endeavor only began in the last few months. Consequently, there are sometimes multiple or duplicate fan pages for vendors or databases. Some of these earlier fan pages were also remarkably complete and thorough as to appear official and, until the establishment of the Community Pages, were easy to confuse with official profiles.

Yet another issue is the sheer enormity of such the task. This study examined only vendors and databases licensed to the author's library, so the list is by no means exhaustive, a limitation in and of itself. Should another researcher undertake a more thorough examination of this issue and include more publishers and products – such as Project Muse or Ovid, for example – this author would recommend making the endeavor a group effort, especially when it comes to more closely examining profiles. It would also be worth it to see what kinds of users have “liked” these profiles – e.g., students, librarians, faculty, and/or individuals who work for the vendors – to explore the audience(s) the profiles *are* reaching.

It is obvious, however, that vendors *are* using Facebook – they have profiles, and some of their products have profiles. Vendors are reaching out through at least one medium of social networking. The efficiency of this method in reaching their users, however, is unclear, and the identities of their “fans” are also unclear; are they actually reaching the people using their products, like students, faculty, or librarians? Moreover, perhaps it would more effective if

vendors created profiles for their products, since it is entirely possible that users are more familiar with the product and less with the producer.

This issue definitely warrants further study; this is merely a preliminary step in exploring a still developing phenomenon and its ramifications for libraries. Ideally this step will prompt more steps which will carry the study of vendors and publishers and how they interact with users farther than the scholarship has thus far carried it. Social networking, while a contentious topic, is not likely to go away any time soon, and the more we as library scholars study it and understand it, the better able we will be to take advantage of its applications and help other users do the same. Furthermore, the more we demonstrate our willingness to use Facebook to funnel users toward reputable resources, the better the feedback vendors will receive from the end users, which will ideally result in even better products in the future and, of course, more traffic, digital or otherwise, for the library. It's a situation for everyone to "like."

¹ Facebook, "Info," Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?ref=profile&id=787695281#!/facebook?v=info&ref=pf>.

² The New York Public Library, "Information," Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/newyorkpubliclibrary>.

³ Laurie Charnigo and Paula Barnett-Ellis, "Checking Out Facebook.com: The Impact of a Digital Trend on Academic Libraries," *Information Technology & Libraries* (2007): 23-34.

⁴ Susan Jennings and Jamie Price, "'Be My Friend': Using Facebook in Libraries," *Tennessee Libraries* 58, no. 1 (2008).

⁵ Charlie Rapple, "Social Networking," *Serials* 20, no. 3 (2007): 240-241.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Social Networking Services," *Library Technology Reports* 43, no. 5 (2007): 45-51.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Nicole A. Cooke, "Social Networking in Libraries: New Tricks of the Trade, Part 1," *Public Services Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (2008): 233-246.

¹¹ Sara Houghton-Jan, "Twenty Steps to Marketing Your Library Online," *Journal of Web Librarianship* 1, no. 4 (2007): 81-90.

¹² Nicole A. Cooke, "Social Networking in Libraries: New Tricks of the Trade, Part 1," *Public Services Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (2008): 233-246.

¹³ Darren Chase, "Using Online Social Networks, Podcasting, and a Blog to Enhance Access to Stony Brook University Health Sciences Library Resources and Services," *Journal of Electronic Resources in Medical Libraries* 5, no. 2 (2008): 123-132.

¹⁴ Anne Godlasky, "N.Y. Public Library Puts Its 'Treasures' Online," *USA Today*, November 12, 2008, sec. D, p. 7.

¹⁵ Jason Sokoloff, "International Libraries on Facebook," *Journal of Web Librarianship* 3 (2009): 75-80.

¹⁶ Howard Stanbury and Jeremy Selman, "Database Publishing and Increasing Access to Food Science Information," *Journal of Agricultural and Food Information* 9, no. 1 (2008): 21-40.

¹⁷ Dean Hendrix, Deborah Chiarella, Linda Hasman, Sharon Murphy, and Michelle Zafron, "Use of Facebook in Academic Health Sciences Libraries," *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 97, no. 1 (2009): 43-46.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Peter Fernandez, "Online Social Networking Sites and Privacy: Revisiting Ethical Considerations for a New Generation of Technology," *Library Philosophy and Practice* 11, no. 1 (2009): 1-9.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Kristina M. DeVoe, "Choices Galore: Confirm, Deny, or Ignore," *The Reference Librarian* 49, no. 2 (2008): 179-181.

²² Claudine Arnold Jenda and Martin Kesselman, "Innovative Library 2.0 Information Technology Applications in Agricultural Libraries," *Agricultural Information Worldwide* 1, no. 2 (2008): 52-60.

²³ Kenneth E. Marks, "Vendor/Library Collaboration – An Opportunity for Sharing," *Resource Sharing and Information Networks* 18, no. 1/2 (2005/2006): 203-214.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Keith Courtney, "Library/Vendor Relations: An Academic Publisher's Perspective," *Journal of Library Administration* 44, no. 3/4 (2006): 57-68.

²⁶ Ronald A. Gagnon, "Library/Vendor Relations from a Public Library Perspective," *Journal of Library Administration* 44, no. 3/4 (2006): 95-111.

²⁷ Kenneth E. Marks, "Vendor/Library Collaboration – An Opportunity for Sharing," *Resource Sharing and Information Networks* 18, no. 1/2 (2005/2006): 203-214.

²⁸ Sam Brooks, "Introduction: The Importance of Open Communication Between Libraries and Vendors," *Journal of Library Administration* 44, no. 3/4 (2006): 1-4.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ David H. Carlson, "Introduction: Forging Lasting Symbiotic Relationships Between Libraries and Vendors," *Journal of Library Administration* 44, no. 3/4 (2006): 5-10.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ <http://www.ulm.edu/library/dbname.html>

³⁴ Modern Language Association, "Vendors' Guides for Users," Modern Language Association, http://www.mla.org/publications/bibliography/howtouse_mlabiblio/bibliovendors_guidesperiod.

³⁵ Taken from the Facebook entry associated with Ebsco Publishing, accessed July 13, 2010.