

Blogging & Social Media for Library Marketing & Communications

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Abstract:

A case study of Stanford Libraries' use of social media in its marketing and communications campaigns is presented. The libraries rely heavily on blogging as a basic tool for allowing librarians to communicate about their work, but integrate blogs with a variety of social media platforms. Training on the blogging tool is provided, but the most critical lesson for staff is the importance of regular communication about projects. When librarians provide interesting content, a small communications staff is able to have an outsized impact, leveraging that content to gain local and national media exposure.

Keywords: social media, blogs, instagram

Marketing and communications are central library functions, and their success directly impacts the perception of libraries by stakeholders and the general public. Social media channels are central to current marketing and communications strategies, and new social media channels re always appearing. Blogs are a very traditional social media tool with a relatively long history, and because of this long history and stability that the Stanford Libraries have chosen to put blogs at the center of a media strategy that leverages a wide variety of media tools. Using blogs to collect content allows that content to be leveraged across many other media platforms, and when librarians provide interesting content, a small communications staff is able to have an outsized impact, leveraging that content to gain local and national media exposure.

Background

Stanford Libraries implemented a [blogging function](#) on its library website several years ago as part of a major site redesign. As part of that implementation, any library staff member who went through a short training program on the local style guide was eligible to create blogs, and certain staff, including subject specialists were mandated to complete the training. In doing so, the libraries made blogging, and social media posting, a key job activity for many staff, and the libraries take steps to ensure that staff throughout the organization understand their personal responsibility for communicating about their work to the public. The libraries have a minimal communications staff, so distributing the process of content creation has been necessary to develop a robust communications program.

Basic Uses

The library blog is primarily used to highlight projects, new collections, or interesting work being undertaken in the libraries, though it also serves general administrative purposes.

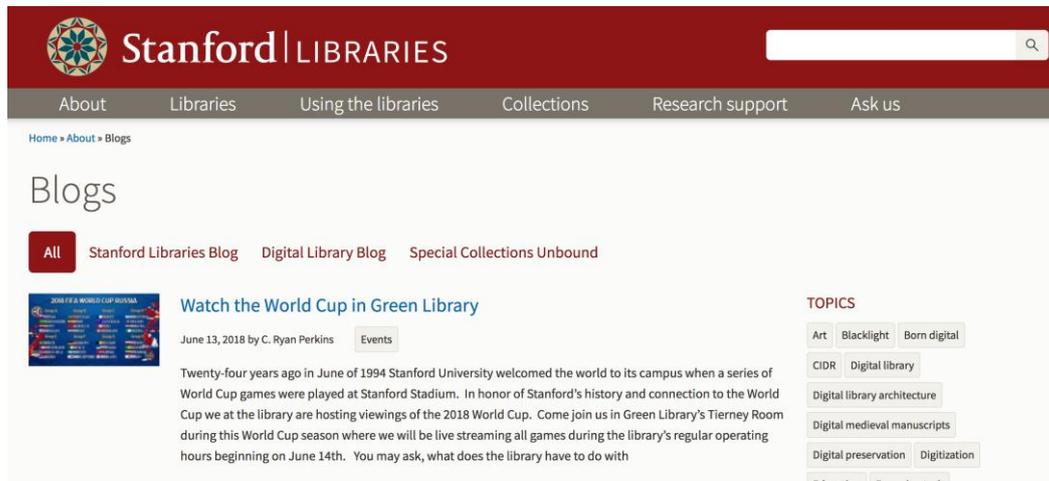


Figure 1: *Stanford Libraries blog page*

For example, Stanford's Engineering Library recently installed a new art exhibit in its entryway. The librarians there wrote a [blog post about it](#), knowing that blogging is the primary tool for getting the word out. The post then began to be spread. It first appeared in the weekly staff newsletter, so staff in other libraries were informed about the new exhibit. If deemed appropriate, the story may also be fed into an external-facing donor newsletter. More importantly, the story is fed into the libraries' other social media channels, such as Facebook (see Fig. 1), Twitter, or Instagram.

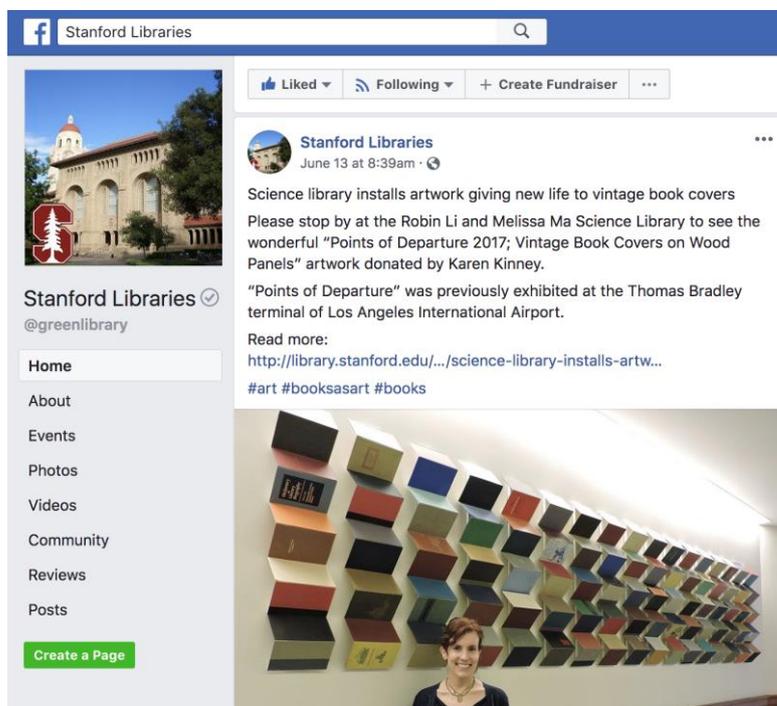


Figure 2: *Blog post on new art exhibit fed into Facebook*

Blogs are public, but are also tied to the website, and thus are useful for semi-internal (but not private) announcements, like new staff hires, training sessions, or other staff news.

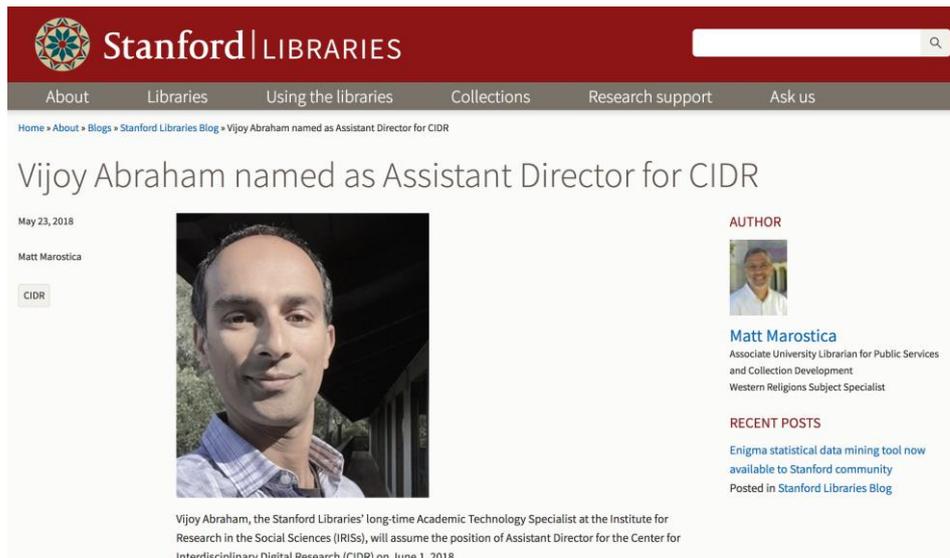


Figure 3: *New hire announcement on the library blog*

These kinds of announcements are not generally reposted to other social media sites, but are available to staff and can be referenced by e-mail link and used in other internal communications.

In addition to its staff-managed blog roll, the libraries maintain a more formal news page, which includes links to external news coverage of the libraries, as well as both locally written stories and links to external coverage of the libraries. This page uses the same Drupal blog tool as the main library blogroll, but is managed by a more explicit group.

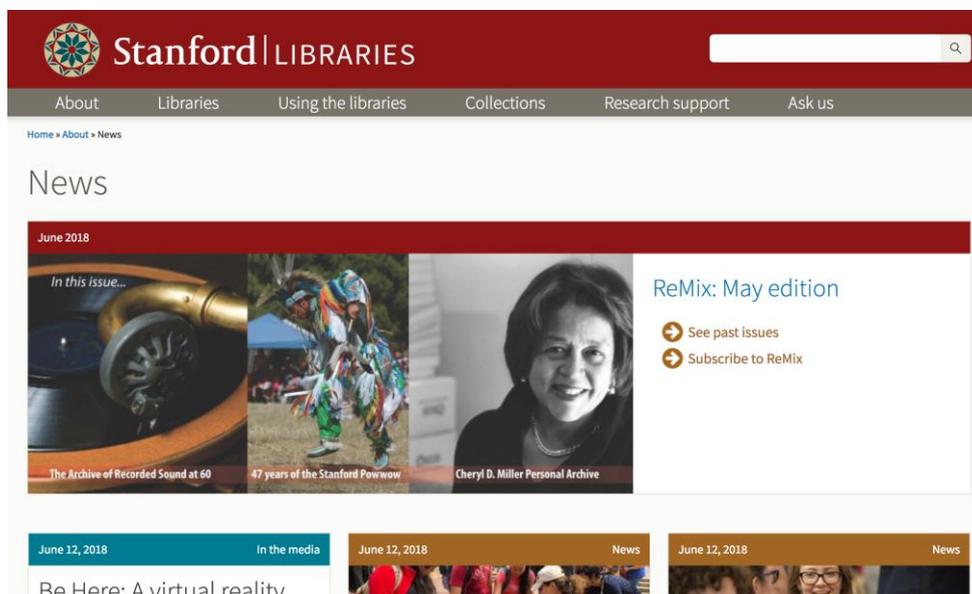


Figure 4: *Stanford Libraries news page*

Blog Posts Spreading Broadly

Because blog posts are public, they can lead to national and international news coverage. The Stanford Libraries developed an extensive blog announcing the acquisition of the archives of Cheryl D. Miller, a groundbreaking designer. The blog format offered the flexibility to provide video of the acquisition as well as text and still photographs.

That public announcement lead to news coverage in other media outlets outside of Stanford.

Larger stories may get even greater coverage. When the libraries opened their David Rumsey Map Center, we received coverage from multiple media outlets.

The libraries collaborate with Stanford News Service both to develop and to distribute content. In some cases, the libraries present potentially interesting stories to the Stanford News Service, and they develop their own coverage. A recent Stanford-centric story that was covered by the Stanford News Service involves the library's preservation team storing and maintaining old costumes from the mascot of the Stanford Band. The News Service provided a professional writer and photographer for this piece.

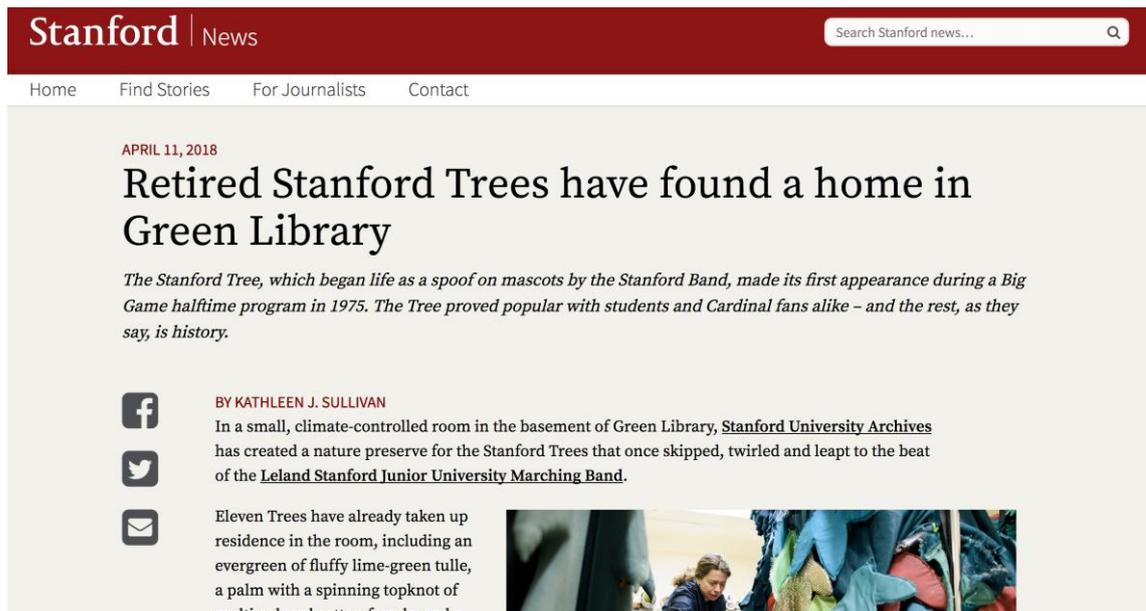


Figure 5: News story covering preservation of mascot costumes

One major advantage to working with Stanford News is their ability to release stories on major news wires, which can lead to additional coverage.

Other Social Media

Of course, not everything goes through a blog, and where staff have the skill set, they may post directly to other media. Below is an image posted to Instagram by staff in the Preservation Department who were struck by some of the manuscripts that they had been working on.

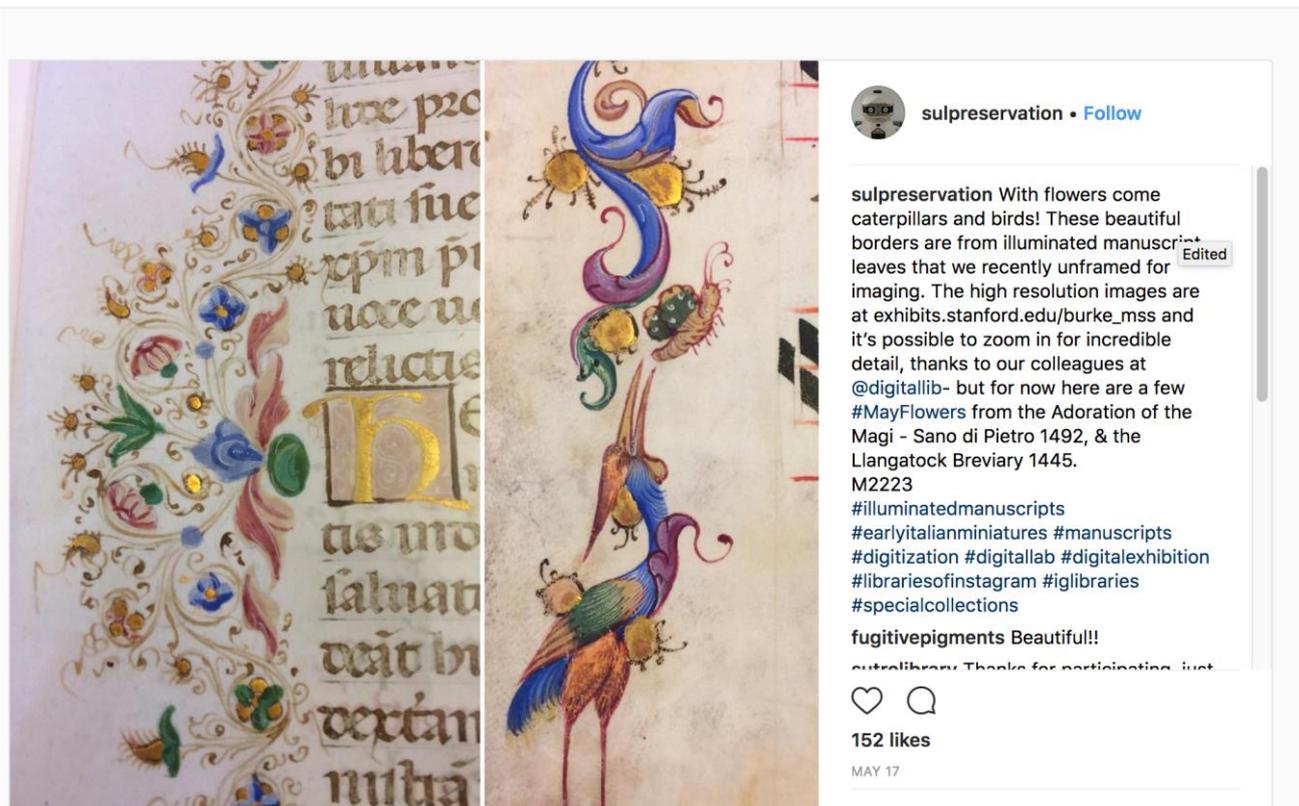


Figure 6: Manuscripts from the Burke Collection posted on Instagram

Some units also take a much more aggressive approach to the use of Social Media. The Stanford University Archives, for example, manages its own Twitter account.

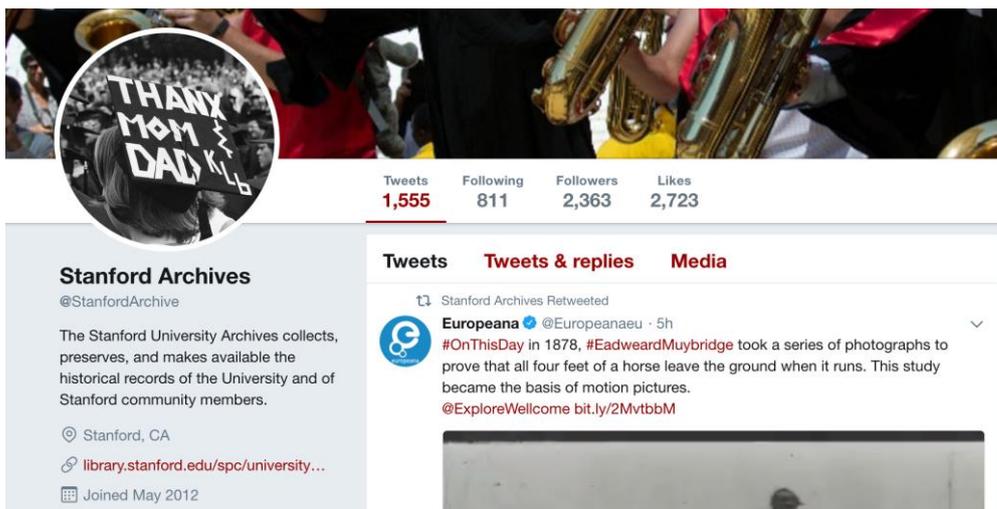


Figure 7: Stanford University Archives Twitter homepage

Results

The use of social media tools has also provided a new venue for feedback from our patrons, particularly students. We've been able to leverage tweets received from students in other marketing pieces, and have started running small contests or discussions designed to bring in those comments. More importantly, we have demonstrated how active and curated blogging program can serve as a central feed to a multi-platform library communications strategy. Blogs provide a convenient and accessible format for librarians to talk about programs, events, and activities using a variety of different media, that then allows content to be repurposed in many other media formats. The cross-media effort raises the profile of the libraries, and attracts us to funders and other key stakeholders.