



OPINION

Each month, OPINION features contributions from invited guest writers. The opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Library and Information Association.



Twitter for the new grad

I have worked in public libraries for nearly nine years, and have been a qualified librarian and active user of Twitter for nearly four years. I initially signed up to Twitter so I could 'follow' a handful of librarians that I admired from around Australia. I now follow local, national, and international colleagues and converse regularly on a wide variety of both professional and personal topics. Twitter has allowed me to have a voice and speak up on issues that are of interest to me. I enjoy the speed at which Twitter operates, and I love asking a work-related question and receiving a wide variety of responses from around the world, effectively expanding and broadening my understanding of the original question in ways I did not consider.

Twitter is one of the tools that enhances my professional learning network. I make Twitter work for me, and use it to filter information from a variety of sources including news sites, library and school library journals, educational institutions, information and technology experts, and library professionals. Many of the tweets contain links to new ideas, new trends in technology and education, and new ways of thinking about libraries. I have used Twitter to attend conferences from afar via a #hashtag, and can participate or follow the conversation at a convenient time.

I also use Twitter to collaborate with other professionals who have similar interests, most often from around the country, but sometimes from around the world. I have participated in conversations that sparked initial flames, encouraged deeper thinking and reflection, and developed into on- and offline collaborations.

I find it hard to believe that, in 2012, many institutions still see Twitter solely as a social networking tool, and not as part of accepted professional practice. A smart phone or device becomes the perfect accessory, allowing me to connect, learn, and collaborate from my corner of the lunch room.

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Twitter for the established professional. Twiteratti – librarians wanted?

Where are there 500 million registered users? According to Twitter's publicity they reached this point in February this year. Take up suggests the ease of use and desire to connect to others as diverse as the Prime Minister, movie stars, and sporting champions is irresistible. Even that august institution the ABC offers a weekly Radio National Twiteratti update in Friday drive time with experts identified from Twitter from diverse fields including climate change, sport, academia, and parliamentary issues. Geoff Bilder of Crossref calls it a "juggernaut", part of the social media invasion.

So what does this mean for you and me? It is really possible to use 140 characters to communicate?

Research indicates that while Facebook is used for social connections, games, and to chat, Twitter is much more even-based covering issues and thoughts, rather than just what you had for breakfast. I find the coverage of Question time in the federal parliament by journalists is brilliant – short, sharp, witty, and well written.

So as a relatively long term user of Twitter here are some tips:

- Post as often as you can – consider using RSS or some automated process to send messages to Twitter, Facebook, Yammer, and as many social media tools as possible with a single step
- Understand that users will use flipboard, tweetdeck, and lots of other interfaces to access tweets
- Short entries can have a link – you can publicise books, seminars, events easily
- Write clearly, check spelling – have a look at how journalists tweets: they are the best users of this new medium
- Try it out professionally – we set up a hash tag for the Value of Libraries Symposium and the conversation online was very stimulating. Next time you go to an ALIA event, try to tweet once!

And there's nothing wrong with lurking – that's what I mostly do!

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