LIS: INVESTIGATIONS

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Welcome to the first of a regular series of reports on recent research in library and information services, where members of ALIA's Research Committee will be highlighting findings gleaned from ALIA's online journal service for members.

Making it in the social media whirl – what does it take?

When it comes to marketing your services online, email remains a "killer app", report librarians at San Francisco State University (SFSU). Libraries have already embraced social media and other online tools in myriad ways, but to date there's not a lot of published research about these experiences.

The SFSU librarians were keen to find out if they could use social media and other online tools to market and increase use of their LibGuides. They set up a controlled experiment to evaluate six tools and techniques used for marketing the guides (links from the Library's homepage, tagging, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and email). The results? Use of LibGuides went up both within the experimental set of guides (up 63%) and within the control group (up 27%). Of the online techniques, direct emails to faculty out-performed use of the social media tools.

A key insight from the study is the researchers' observation that they were marketing a product in an environment and using tools where personal relationships and peer advocacy are the valued currency. Without that personal trusted endorsement

from a known information professional, the promotion of the guides through Facebook and Twitter was ineffective. And here's the dilemma – as professional librarians, many of us are uncomfortable publicly promoting ourselves as knowledge gurus.

Fascinating then to read Hazel Hall's insights drawn from several research projects she's been involved with in the UK. Hall observes that librarians are often sophisticated users of social media in our own professional milieus but somehow this sophistication is not apparent in the ways we set up new services. Hall considers a number of the barriers we encounter, such as the overwhelming choice and the challenge of understanding users as "collaborative clients" rather than "consuming customers". She also offers suggestions for overcoming these barriers.

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Halls' takeaway is that, rather than starting with the social media tool and applying it in our current practices, we need to flip the coin and think about the service we're developing or enhancing. Once we have the service design mapped out, then it's time to seek out appropriate

social media tools through which to deliver it.

You can read both articles and make your own assessments of the challenges ahead for the profession as we embrace the social media world – both are available via the ALIA online journals at **www.alia. org.au/onlineLISresources.**

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From our collection

Foster, Mira et al. (2010) "Marketing Research Guides: An Online Experiment with LibGuides". *Journal of Library Administration* 50 (2010): 602–16.

Hall, H (2011) "Relationship and role transformations in social media environments". *The Electronic Library* 29(4) (2011): 421–28.

ALIA online journals: www. alia.org.au/onlineLISresources