

**A Few Social Networking Tools Not to Miss for Business Information:
Social Networking for Business Librarians**

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"a very brief overview of some of the social networking resources with specific application for business reference, using delicious for example, to find high quality resources."

INTRO: Some questions stump even the savviest business reference librarians. Here are a few free social networking resources to help answer those questions. The key distinction between online social networks and traditional reference tools is that people are your resource. Each of the following recommended sites organizes online social networks in different ways, but they all rely on connecting people and creating pools of information. Most online social network sites require you to create a user profile before participating, though not before searching. Searching keywords, tags (user-generated metadata), and categories created from controlled vocabularies allows you to generate lists and locate others with shared interests. Many (but not all) sites also include a "feed" and user update function. The feed allows you to read the user updates. Twitter users know these brief posts as tweets, while Facebook users know them as status updates. These brief posts range from banal updates to valuable links and helpful resources. Feeds are also a way to ask questions of many people at once, and to scan your network to see who has a question you can answer. Other sites make broadcasting to many people at once a little more difficult, but still provide powerful search and list-making functions. Not all of these tools work for everyone, but there are a few here that will make you a better reference librarian.

1. Delicious (<http://delicious.com>) - Delicious is a social bookmarking site that allows people to share, organize, search, and manage their bookmarks. It also includes a strong search feature. The Firefox and Internet Explorer web browsers have Delicious add-ons which simplifies adding bookmarks, and searching tags and keywords. Delicious allows users to add unique metadata to saved links, so you can group links according to your needs. But, don't forget to add descriptive links to help other people searching for similar information. Librarian Marcy Carrel at the University of South Florida - St Petersburg keeps a well-done Delicious page for business reference bookmarks under the name marcylibrarian <http://delicious.com/marcylibrarian>.

2. Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) - The strength of Twitter comes from finding or creating a group with shared interests and exchanging links, questions, and answers. Twitter is a rapidly evolving tool and may take some time to learn how it best works for you. Once you have assembled your community use them as a resource to ask questions. Twitter only allows posts of 140 characters, which is why it is sometimes called a micro-blogging service. A whole constellation of services have popped up to help you mine Twitter for information. To become a Twitter power-user teach yourself about services like TweetDeck, Twhirl, and Monitter. Search keywords "business" and "librarian," or "business" and "reference" at the Twitter site to see what types of information you can find.

3. Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) - To use effectively it takes some times to learn the strengths and weaknesses of Facebook. The casual user might be confronted with the dilemma of having co-workers, professional peers, friends, and family all as Facebook friends. Messages you want to send to your friends you don't want to send to your boss, and messages you want to send to your peers you don't want to send to your family. With a thoughtful strategy in place Facebook can be a valuable resource for a library and for a reference librarian. The easiest way to use Facebook is to have one identity and allow your friends, family, and business to all blend together without worry. If this concerns you, create a professional page where you can be friend only other professionals. This group will be a pool of people to whom you can ask questions. You can also start a fan page for you library or reference desk. Whichever you choose be sure to do regular status updates. It may seem silly or banal at first, but status updates are a great way of keeping yourself in the ambient awareness of those who follow along. Facebook is more valuable when you participate.

4. Google Applications (<http://www.google.com/intl/en/options/>) - The suite of Google applications are less valuable as a resource for answering questions (except perhaps Google Groups), but of tremendous value for collaborative projects. This may be a useful tool for your own collaboration, and it might also be a useful tool to recommend to teams searching for ways to increase their productivity when they are not in the same room. Familiarity is important for reference librarians to know when to recommend. Other portal platforms like Yahoo! offer services like Google applications, and the realm of cloud computing (using online applications to create documents, and corporate servers to hold your saved files) are rapidly expanding. Google is already hard at work on the next generation of collaborative tools for group projects, Google Wave. Google Wave will integrate chat, email, documents, video, audio, and wiki functionality into one easy to access, and easy to use page. The authors of this article used Google documents as a way to share a document that any one of the authors could add to or edit at their convenience. We stored notes and conversations on the same page that held the rough draft.

5. LibraryThing (<http://www.librarything.com>) & Worldcat (<http://www.worldcat.org>) - Worldcat has taken a page from the popular social cataloging site LibraryThing and increased their online social networking abilities. With LibraryThing you can search other people's libraries and swap information about books. There is also a "LibraryThing for Libraries" which is worth investigating, especially for smaller libraries. WorldCat's social capabilities lag a little behind LibraryThing, but considering the number of users Worldcat has, there is a possibility it might become a key hub for online social networks for librarians. Searching the tags "business" and "reference" can give you an idea of popular business reference works. You can also search out other librarians to network with. Here, for example, is the group Librarians who LibraryThing <http://www.librarything.com/groups/librarianswholibrar>.

6. FriendFeed (<http://friendfeed.com/>) - If you have too many social media and social networking sites a tool like FriendFeed is a way to aggregate them into one online space. Or if you just want to keep Facebook or MySpace just for personal use, FriendFeed can also be used as a networking and collaboration tool. Like Facebook and MySpace, FriendFeed has an iPhone/iPod Touch application available, as well as email notifications. There is a Bookmarklet tool, and many other widgets to customize your pages and resources.

7. Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page) - Still think Wikipedia isn't reliable? Then assume the responsibility of improving Wikipedia's reliability. Start a Wikipedia day (or afternoon, or week) with your colleagues to help make Wikipedia an authoritative source. Creating a scheduled time to work on this open access reference tool ultimately makes everyone better at their job. Wikipedia already has some great foundational pages for many business reference topics, but it can always use better and more authoritative citations. And who better than a reference librarian to make sure Wikipedia articles are referencing trustworthy sources? This may not be an online social network, or social media in the same way as Twitter or Facebook, but it takes a community to create and sustain Wikipedia. Wikipedia also hosts a "reference desk" page where anyone can post a question at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_help_desk.

8. Ning (<http://www.ning.com>) - There's already a Ning site for business librarians at <http://businesslibrarians.ning.com/>. Ning is a way to create your own Facebook-like application, which is convenient for creating groups focused on a single topic. Ning groups work best if you already have a sizeable group you want to bring together. Since there are so many different Ning sites devoted to specialized topics, it is easy to neglect Ning for the more popular sites like Facebook and Twitter, but when looking for information on that specialized topic don't forget to search Ning.

9. iGoogle, (<http://www.google.com/ig?hl=en&source=mpes>), NetVibes (<http://www.netvibes.com/#General>), Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com>) - These sites are a less social than the ones above (though, they all have the ability to share information with others), but any one is invaluable when trying to find a way to wrangle all of your social networking accounts. Engaging with multiple social networks is probably the biggest hurdle for most effective use of these tools for reference work.

10. LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com/>) - Many of your patrons already use LinkedIn as their business-oriented social network of choice, and it should be a tool with which you are familiar. Not only is this a useful site for networking for answers and sharing resources, it is valuable when looking for job or research opportunities in your field. Added bonus: An Amazon.com application gives book recommendations on your chosen industry, what your peers are reading, and what other LinkedIn users have listed. Staying on top of reading trends is important to every type of librarian.

11. Email Lists - Just because email lists are from the last century does not mean they are no longer valuable. Email lists like ListServ are still a tremendous source for information and a great place to start research on a topic. Most email clients nowadays also have strong search features which makes locating questions and answers from years gone past easier than ever. To make an email list really work for you, keep your emails relevant, purposeful, and at a reasonable length. For business librarians, limiting each email to one topic or creating an easy-to-read template makes them more user-friendly and less likely to get overlooked in a messy inbox.

12. Niche sites like CouchSurfing (for world travelers on a budget --<http://www.couchsurfing.org/>), Flixster (for movie fans -- <http://www.flixster.com/>), Geni.com (for genealogists --<http://www.geni.com/>) or DeviantART (for artists -- <http://www.deviantart.com/#>) - While joining a niche site might not be what you need right now, and may make for too many networks to follow, it is important to remember they exist. Who knows? That obscure community (obscure to you, anyway) you need information about might have a special online congregating place of its own. Cast your net broadly and don't forget to search for forums, email lists, and Wikipedia's list of social networking sites (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites). Different parts of the world also have

different online social network favorites. While pioneering social network Friendster has lost much of its popularity in the United States, it remains popular in Southeast Asia. Hi5 is popular almost everywhere except North America. If you are looking for international business reference, be sure to look at the regionally popular sites.

13. StumbleUpon (<http://www.stumbleupon.com/>) - StumbleUpon allows the user to give a "thumbs-up" or "thumbs-down" to a recommended site, and to get recommendations from like-minded "Stumblers." StumbleUpon suggests sites recommended by the Stumblers with your interests, which opens the door for less well-known sites that do not appear on the first page of a typical search. For business librarians wanting to tap into obscure but useful sites, this is a fun and interesting way to discover and share unique resources.

14. YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>) - Great for posting instructional videos and podcasts on using databases, describing search strategies, or maybe just a general update on events going on in your library. For example, check out the business category on the YouTube EDU channel <http://www.youtube.com/education?lg=EN&b=1&s=pop>. You can allow for your videos to be private or public. If you would like your videos to be accessed by the general public, be sure to create a title and tags to make finding your video as easy as possible. You can also "favorite" videos you want to share with patrons.

CONCLUSION: Perhaps the most important thing to remember about social media is the social aspect. The online social network platform you use is less important than the people you find. All of the tools listed above will change and mutate over the next few years. New networks will blossom, and old networks will fade. This is a new genre in reference and works best when everyone contributes. While these are wonderful resources to tap into, don't forget to pick a few of your favorites and participate. These resources work because people share information. With this in mind do not be bashful when it comes to using an image of yourself. People want to connect with people, not with your dog, cat, childhood photo (no matter how cute), or a picture of the building where you work. Use a consistent user name across different sites, and use a site like Namechk (<http://namechk.com/>) to verify your chosen user name is available across networks. To keep track of new developments in social media you might want to follow sites like Mashable: The Social Media Guide <http://mashable.com/>. Social media are not just reference tools you read, they are also reference tools you write.

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