# Using social media to promote digital cultural collections: work smarter not harder

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# **Abstract**

Digital collections sites represent a large investment for cultural institutions but marketing and promotion of these collections take a significant amount of time. While many institutions excel at marketing and promotion at face-to-face events, they may find it difficult to maintain the time and energy to promote resources online. Social media is vital for cultural institutions that use web statistics to justify the expense of digital cultural collections. In this paper, the authors will discuss time-saving, practical social media approaches for promoting digital cultural collections sites, such as the Living Histories @ UON site, using a targeted approach which goes beyond traditional social media engagement. The authors will discuss their practical experiences raising awareness of the Living Histories site and enhancing community engagement by designing and executing a strategic social media plan.

The correlation between posting on social media and page hits will be demonstrated using quantitative analysis of statistical web data. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Flickr will be a few of the social media tools discussed. Strategies utilized include: a Twitter bot, targeting content to specific user groups (i.e. a Facebook group), automated social media posting, participating in global social media events (i.e. Explore Your Archive week), blogging and asking affiliated users and groups to post content on their accounts. The authors will report on which strategies and social media platforms were

the most successful in drawing users to the Living Histories site and enabling community engagement. Strategies that failed in these goals will also be discussed.

#### Introduction

Cultural institutions such as galleries, libraries, archives and museums have been using social media for years and popularity of these platforms continue to grow. Nine out of every ten Australian internet users use social media (APS, 2017, p.8). Australian adults spend an average of 2.6 hours daily on social media (APS, 2017, p.9). In light of these statistics, it is natural that many institutions utilize social media to connect with their user communities. Despite social media's wide audience and potential for promotion, in many institutions social media work is under-resourced and not prioritized.

The University of Newcastle's Cultural Collections (UONCC) has been using social media for over a decade. Despite this experience, UONCC and other similar institutions are still facing two major challenges: limited resources and building connections with social media users (Mason, 2014, p.163-165; Deodato, 2018, p. 19-21; Fleming and Damala, 2016, p.9; Xie and Stevenson, 2014, p.520). This paper will address strategies to overcome these two common challenges.

Throughout this discussion, the authors take a methodical approach to social media using 'Strategy Wheel' for strategic planning. First, UON's Cultural Collections social media accounts were audited, looking at quantitative measures such as 'hits' and 'followers' and also analyzing how each platform attracted different audiences. The next step examined goals, resources, research and objectives for an overall social media strategy. Distribution strategies, content strategies, measurement strategies, engagement strategies and monitoring strategies were developed to complement the plan utilizing research from literature and successful past experiences determined by quantitative and qualitative analysis.

#### Literature Review

Social media use for special collections has been widely adopted worldwide (Griffin and Taylor, 2013, p. 262). Why is social media popular with cultural institutions? It enables user to engage in a familiar setting. For libraries, using marketing for social media allows them to maintain relevance, raise awareness of services and create positive communication and interactions (Joe, 2015, p.670).

Academic libraries use social media to achieve a variety of goals. These traditionally include marketing (Young and Rossmann, 2015, p.23; Fleming and Damala, 2016, p.5) and to promote events (Heyliger, et al., 2013, p.390). Special collections and archives commonly use social media to promote specific collections and items (Garner, et al., 2016, p.102; Heyliger, 2013, p.390). Social media platforms are also used by libraries

as tools for education, for example giving users tips on how to use a digital library or library service (Xie and Stevenson, 2014, p.520). Another use for social media is to increase community engagement (Joe, 2015, p.671; Young and Rossmann, 2015, p.23; Fleming and Damala, 2016, p.5; Griffin and Taylor, 2013, p. 266).

Nguyen in his article "Establishing a participatory library model" has created a useful term that neatly describes engagement between clients and library. "Prosumption is a portmanteau word that is formed by merging the sounds and meanings of the two concepts, "production" and "consumption". Prosumption reflects the practice in which library users perform two main roles, one as a producer, and one as a consumer of information and services." (Nguyen, 2015, p. 479) This can apply to both the digital and physical library as can be seen from the examples in this paper.

Strategies for measuring how successful one has been at achieving these goals vary from institution to institution and from platform to platform. Quantitative measures for judging social media success are common although increasingly qualitative measures are considered. For example, when using Facebook, Glazer recommends that aside from the number of "followers", likes and comments, libraries should also reflect on "anecdotes of success" where a post has sparked lively discussion and positive comments (Glazer, 2012, p. 19-20). Following this example, this paper will use both qualitative and quantitative measures to analyze the success of social media strategies.

# The Strategy Wheel

The reviewed literature agrees that strategic planning and deliberate goal setting can lead to social media success (Dole, 2015, p.668; Mason, 2014, p.166; Young and Rossmann, 2015, p.32; Fleming and Damala, 2016, p.22). Considering this, UONCC staff used a public relations tool for planning their social media strategy.

The Social Media Strategy Wheel (pictured below) is a simplified version of Breakenridge's (2012, p. 158) public relations wheel. The wheel is followed from the innermost circle to the outer. The first stage focuses on the auditing process. This is a time for an institution to reflect on current practice and why social media is or would be used. The audit process examines what is effective and what is not for an existing social media approach. In the next level broad goals and more targeted narrower objectives are formed based on the findings of the audit.

Next, research is conducted to explore issues raised in the audit and resources allocated based on the audit findings. Resources can be monetary but also include time and staff salary costs involved in maintaining social media accounts.



Figure 1 Social Media Strategy Wheel, adapted from Breakenridge, 2012, p. 157-159

The outermost level of the circle reflects on strategies that are shaped by the goals, objectives, research and resources identified. The monitoring strategy considers what is important to the audience. The distribution strategy examines which platforms and applications the audience is using and how and when posting occurs. It is important to choose the appropriate social media platform with both goal and audience in mind (Breakenridge, 2012 p. 157; Mason, 2014, p.166). The content strategy focuses on identifying content that has the greatest potential impact on the intended audience. The measurement strategy collects information that illustrates progress in achieving goals and objectives. The engagement strategy addresses the need for two-way communication. How are the users participating, what does the institution want from them and how can they be encouraged to participate more? The Social Media Strategy Wheel process, completed as a whole, can be an effective tool for institutions to guide, assess and reform social media policy.

#### The Audit

UONCC's oldest social media account is Flickr. Griffin and Taylor's research in 2013 (p.263) indicated that Flickr is a very popular platform for special collections. Since 2007, Cultural Collections has used it as an image repository and it has been very

successful. In the past year, the account has had over 800 comments and over 6 million views, making it the most popular site affiliated with the University Library. The account's success is due to the 80,000 images on diverse subjects and the longevity of being active on the site for over a decade. The site is very popular with train enthusiasts and local history groups, which contribute the majority of the comments. Despite this success, UONCC has recently been less active than usual on this account. Flickr has been sold multiple times in the past few years and has an uncertain future. In April 2018, there were 470,000 active Australian users. Compared to 780,000 in April 2014, it is clear that Flickr is slowly declining in popularity (Cowling, 2018). From the perspective of Cultural Collections, the platform's limit to images only meant that in subsequent years accounts on other social media platforms were created to share media such as video (YouTube) and sound (Soundcloud).

The second most popular platform used by UONCC is the new Living Histories @ UON digital repository, with 1.7 million views in the past annum. Living Histories is not a social media platform but a proprietary community engagement platform from the company Recollect™. For UONCC, this platform is preferable to having content spread out on multiple social media platforms as it can contain a variety of media in one place and connections between items can be easily formed. Living Histories (LH) is vital to the UONCC's social media and engagement strategy. Users can share items from it to Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest all of which generate engagement and hits independently from UONCC's official social media accounts.

Although Cultural Collections does not have an official Pinterest account, when users pin to their boards from Living Histories, the links in the 'Pins' can be followed back to the content, generating extra traffic to the site. One of the authors used her personal Pinterest account to curate collections of items and this, in turn, generated additional traffic from Pinterest to Living Histories, shown as a traffic source in Google Analytics.

Facebook is another successful platform for Cultural Collections. In April 2018, Facebook reported 15 million active Australian users, which equates to about 60% of the population (Cowling, 2018). Engagement is highly visible here with users commenting directly on posts. About 60% of users who "follow" our page on Facebook are female and our biggest user group age on this platform is 45-54 (29%) followed by those 55-64 (20%). These users are mostly from the Newcastle and Hunter region, though there is a significant portion from Sydney. The highest level of user engagement on our Facebook page is by those 65 and older (32%) followed by those 55-64 (27%).

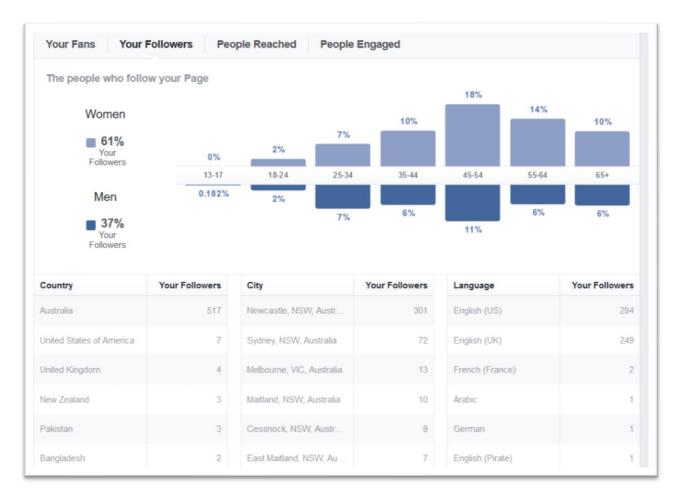


Figure 2 Facebook insights, "People", Follower statistics, accessed 29 April 2018

Cultural Collections has been on YouTube since November 2008. For UONCC, this is not a very successful platform for engagement with only 28 comments in the past year. YouTube serves well as a place for storing and disseminating of large video files with unlimited storage. YouTube videos can be easily embedded in blog posts, making this platform a useful tool when incorporated with Wordpress. Statistics from April 2017 to April 2018 indicate the most popular videos fall into two categories: Newcastle/Hunter Valley history and Greek tragedy productions. The majority of users are Male (73%) and watching from Australia (66%). It is notable that the Greek tragedy productions are popular in the United States with 16% of overall YouTube users in the past year from this region.

UONCC's Instagram account is relatively new and experimental in nature. The audience for this account is 62% women and the largest user age group is 25-34 (34%) followed by 35-44 (27%). Seventeen percent of UONCC's followers are from the Newcastle area. One advantage of using Instagram is the ability to reach a different user age group than that of Facebook. Instagram focuses entirely on images and videos and most users do

not click on links included with these images. While it allows users to see content there is limited interaction or engagement with the content or organization.

UONCC has multiple Twitter accounts utilized for different purposes and audiences. The Living Histories @ UON<sup>i</sup> account is run by a Twitter bot. The bot is set up through IFTT<sup>ii</sup> and Buffer<sup>iii</sup> to automatically tweet photos from a collection (Wright and Keily, 2018, p. 12). While the bot is unsuccessful at engagement, it is successful at producing automated posts that increase traffic to the Living Histories site. The Cultural Collections<sup>iv</sup> Twitter account has a significant number of followers that are GLAM professionals or organizations. Through this account the team engages more with the professional community than with the local community.

The quantitative data from the social media audit came from each of the individual platforms' in-built statistical analysis software. In most cases, there is a positive correlation between the number of posts or items and the number of views or hits. The full audit table is available in Appendix A.

# Goals

#### **Promotion**

Like most libraries today, UONCC uses social media "as a marketing tool, which helps them seek legitimacy, resources, stability and enhanced survival prospects." (Harrison et al, 2017, p. 254). UONCC has made available to the world tens of thousands of items from its archives and special collections through digital platforms such as Flickr and Living Histories and has created a niche for itself within the University Library, UON and the local community. Tools such as Facebook and Twitter are used to promote its services and events and to invite participation in its endeavours by contributing to its digital platforms, or by attending events and workshops. The use of social media has raised the profile of UONCC within the local, national and international communities, and greatly increased community engagement as discussed below.

The extent to which attempts at promotion have succeeded is measured by the gathering of statistics. There is a clear correlation between posts on social media and visits to the UONCC digital platform. Figure 1 shows the top ten nodes on Living Histories @ UON. Each of these was the subject of a post or posts on social media.

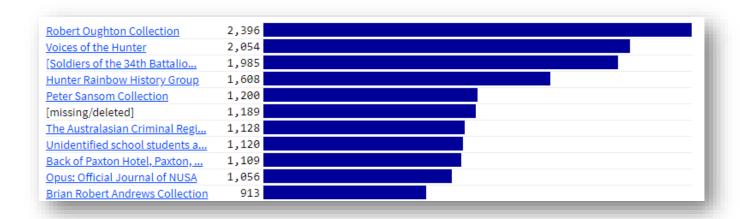


Figure 3 Top 10 nodes on Living Histories @ UON - 29 April 2018

# **Community engagement**

There has always been a close relationship between town and gown in Newcastle, the Hunter Region and Lake Macquarie. "Novocastrians wanted continued growth and prosperity, but finally began to challenge the negative aspects of being an industrial city. A key goal was the establishment of a university. Parents and Citizens Associations along with unions, heavy industry, local professionals and churches began this call in 1942. "(Wright, 1992) in Cushing et al, 2014, 102-103. These groups have continued to have close connections to the University, providing funding and other support over the years. For example, the building of the Great Hall was funded through donations from the community and industries such as BHP. UONCC draws on the Vera Deacon Regional History Fund, founded and funded by local historian, Vera Deacon. The LH site encourages tax-deductible donations to this fund which are then used to employ volunteers on specific projects. Other sources of funding include grants from local industry partners. Thus, the connections with the community continue.

UONCC has a strong local history collection and houses many archives from individuals, families, industries and organisations in the community. The digitisation program makes archival material such as photos, letters, and publications (out of copyright, of course) available to the communities who have supported the University since the beginning. Once digitised, the material is published on LH and the public is notified by posts to social media. When individuals develop awareness of this wealth of information on the site, they become return visitors, some signing up as members, so they can add their own stories or photos to the site.

One recent contribution to the site was from a member of the public who saw a post on UONCC's Facebook page that requested the readers to "Send us your ANZAC photos, stories and memories" (<a href="https://www.facebook.com/UoNArchives/">https://www.facebook.com/UoNArchives/</a> - 12 April 2018) and gave links to instructions. The individual signed up as a member of the LH site and

uploaded a short note and a dozen images relating to their great grandfather. The same post also prompted a well-known local military historian to visit UONCC in-person to examine the original documents of the featured collection. These relationships to the community are invaluable to Cultural Collections and demonstrate how powerful the reach of social media can be.

Another example of community engagement directly related to posts to social media is that of a gentleman who scanned and donated 2000 images from his collection of BHP-related photos which were then uploaded by UONCC. He noted there were some errors after he saw a post advertising the collection, contacted UONCC, then signed up as a member, was given editor's rights and went through the entire collection amending the errors. These examples demonstrate how social media is used to gather information and knowledge from the community, which adds value to the collection and engages the community in our collections, relating back to the concept of user 'prosumption'.

"Social media operates through a targeted channel that allows the themes of community connections, inviting environment, and fun content help define their brand and increase awareness" (Harrison et al, 2017, p. 254). Social media can be used both to curate content and to share it with a wider audience. As mentioned earlier, Pinterest is one site that is great for curation. Wordpress blogging is another example of how content is curated and disseminated.

# **Objectives**

After examining goals and motivations, an organization can form SMART (Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant Time-related) objectives to guide their social media strategy. One example of a UONCC-specific social media objective is to increase the traffic coming from social media to Living Histories by 10% by December 2018. Another objective is to increase the number of comments on Facebook by 25% from the 2017 statistics. The goal of receiving comments on Facebook is not only engagement but to increase knowledge of the collections through community expertise.

#### Resources

Like many cultural institutions, UONCC has limited resources. There is only a tiny budget for social media accounts which includes costs for premium accounts in Flickr and Wordpress. The team that supervises social media accounts consists of two full-time and two part-time staff members, all of whom maintain these accounts in addition to their regular work duties. Additionally, work placement students, work integrated learning students and volunteers are asked to help curate content for the various UONCC social media accounts. A full list of these accounts can be viewed in Appendix A. By using time-saving strategies, the UONCC team is able to manage a large array of accounts in a small amount of time.

# **Strategies**

## **Measuring Strategies**

As previously stated, one main goal of Cultural Collections' participation in social media is promoting our Living Histories @ UON site. The success of this goal can be measured quantitatively by looking at traffic statistics from Google Analytics. This tool shows what percentage of traffic comes directly from social media sources. Furthermore, this can be broken down by website to view which platform is performing best for referrals. The data from the previous year indicates that Facebook is the most successful platform for driving traffic to the site. The effectiveness of specific content strategies can be determined by studying individual statistics embedded in the social media platforms that show the number of link clicks that a post has attracted.

The goal of community engagement can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively the number of comments on a platform or post and the number of users engaged in the discussion provides a strong indicator of success. The number of "likes" can also be referred to but it takes little involvement in a post to "like" it. Qualitatively the tone of the comments and the value of these comments to the institution and to the users provide an excellent indicator of engagement (Glazer, 2012, p. 19-20). Anecdotal information, such as the example of the local military historian coming to visit because of a Facebook post, is very powerful when justifying social media involvement and for seeking funding for projects.

It is important to note that the number of "followers" one has on an account is not in itself an indicative measure of engagement or of website promotion. The number of followers is often looked at in reference to the success of an account, however, there may be social media users who see the posts, like and comment yet do not "follow". It is the authors' opinion that looking at the comments, impressions or reach of posts is more significant than looking at the number of followers.

#### **Content Strategies**

The UONCC's social media audit indicated a clear correlation between content/posts and engagement. Statistically, posts generated by a bot or cross-platform automation are not as popular as well-considered 'hand-crafted' posts. However, the bot generated post still was effective in increasing site traffic and exposure with little effort. Cultural Collections uses both of these methods to increase reach, as well as specific strategies for target content, including:

- 1. **Catch the eye with photos** statistically a post with a photo or video is more successful (Al-Daihani and Abrahams, 2018, p. 223; Houk and Thornhill,2013).
- Be interesting find out what is interesting to your users and use it (see the Monitoring Strategy for more about this). Research indicates that library users enjoy seeing content related to animals, collections (including special collections, rare books and historical items) and contests (Al-Daihani and Abrahams, 2018, p. 224).

3. **Call to action** – ask your users to do something, tell them you need their help or that you want to hear their stories. This makes users personally invested in your organization.

The post below successfully hits all three targets. The mugshot of the smirking woman catches the eye, the 'criminal' element is interesting and the call to action specifically targets those who are interested in their own family history. This post utilized a targeted approach to entice users to visit the Living Histories site and resulted in 379 link clinks.

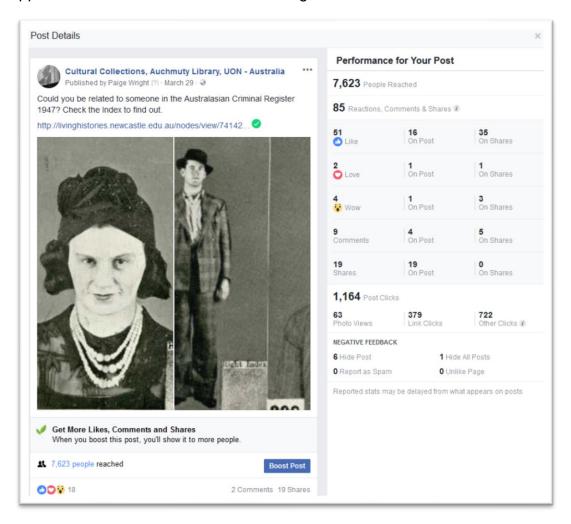


Figure 4 Facebook post from 29 March 2018.

# **Engagement Strategies**

Targeting the right audience for the subject of a social media post is essential. This is particularly effective when seeking information to add value to a record. The two most popular social networks in Australia as of April 2018 were Facebook and YouTube (Cowling, 2018). UONCC uses both tools, but Facebook, which allows a high level of engagement, is the tool of choice when requesting information about local history or geography. UONCC collaborates with users in special interest groups on Facebook by

querying the groups directly. These include *Lost Newcastle, You know you're from Cessnock when...* (also *YKYF Kurri* and *YKYF Maitland*). These groups are rich sources of knowledge (and opinion) on topics of specific interest to them. The post below demonstrates how targeting these specific user groups by sharing to their pages boost the 'performance' of the post. Cultural Collections is using this strategy successfully to increase reach and engagement statistics on Facebook.

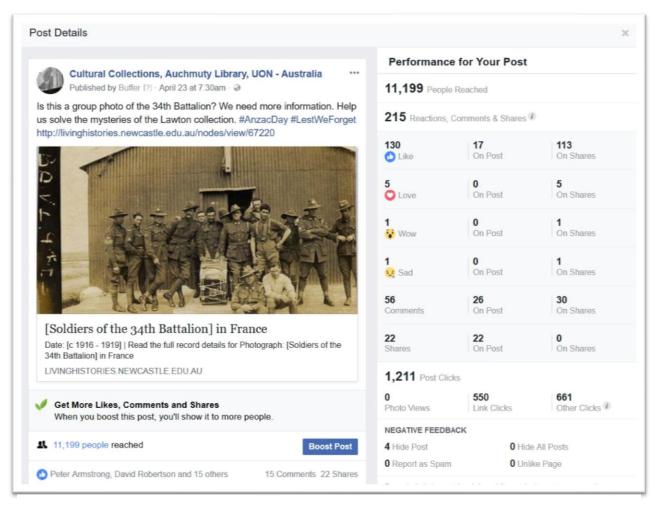


Figure 5 ANZAC Day post with high engagement from 23 April 2018.

Another engagement strategy the UONCC team has used with success is participating in global social media events such as #ColourOurCollections, #MuseumWeek and #ExploreArchives. The #ColorOurCollections project originally had 211 institutions cooperating in a scheme where the organizations would post colouring sheets on social media with a shared hashtag (Garner, et al., 2016, p.107). Institutions that participate in these "campaigns" often report increased followers and impressions on social media. Hashtags are best utilized on Twitter and Instagram but these campaigns can also be implemented across other social media platforms. In the past year, Cultural Collections

has participated in both #MuseumWeek and #ExploreArchives with successful posts that reach new audiences and receive an increased number of comments and retweets.

# **Distribution Strategies**

It is important to choose the appropriate social media tool for your goal and content (Augustyniak and Orzechowski, 2017, p. 13; Mason, 2014, p.166). Distribution strategies examine what channels or platforms your media is communicated through as well as how the posts are distributed among channels. Cultural Collections has decided to maintain current channels of communication because the combination of platforms is working well to reach diverse audiences.

As previously discussed, in the experience of UONCC, hand-crafted posts are more effective. Curating well-considered social media posts can be time-consuming but can be mitigated with a few resource saving distribution strategies:

- Share the load have multiple people accountable for social media platforms to aid in composing posts. Posts could be written by a work placement student or volunteer first and passed on to the staff member managing the account for editing approval. Different viewpoints support connecting with a wider audience (Augustyniak and Orzechowski, 2017, p. 13).
- 2. **Plan ahead and post when your users are online** there are many tools that allow you to plan posts ahead of time, such as HootSuite<sup>v</sup> or Buffer<sup>vi</sup>. If you have an idea for multiple posts, write them all in at the same time and schedule them for distributed release. Facebook has a built-in feature that allows you to schedule posts and gives an indication of when users are most active. Knowing when to post is vital to this method. Cultural Collections' least successful posts have been made 'at the wrong time'.
- 3. **Use a post more than once** for large-volume platforms such as Twitter, posting popular content more than once allows for better exposure. This strategy is especially effective if it has been a few months or even a year between repostings. Use the same post across different platforms, editing to suit each platform. Tools such as HootSuite<sup>vii</sup> or Buffer<sup>viii</sup> can make this easier, allowing you to post across multiple platforms simultaneously.
- 4. **Give your organization achievable posting targets –** write down an achievable goal on how often to post and which platforms to focus on. This could be once a day for Twitter and once a week for Facebook.

## **Monitoring Strategies**

Content is more engaging if it relates directly to what users are interested in. How can user's interests be monitored? One approach is to examine what is being communicated in media. How does a collection relate directly to news stories in the community? One monitoring strategy used by the Cultural Collections team is to scan local news items in the *Newcastle Herald*\*. Stories that directly relate to the collection

can be easily shared and items or collections directly relating to a story can be highlighted. Different social media platforms have different ways of sharing "news". One technique is examining what is being discussed in special interest groups, for example, Cultural Collections follows Facebook's Lost Newcastle<sup>x</sup> group for topics of interest. Knowing which hashtags are trending can also give a more targeted approach to posts. By making a list of sources to monitor and checking them on a regular basis, an organisation can improve knowledge of their users' interests.

#### Conclusion

Every institution will use social media differently. By creating a strategic plan, cultural institutions can align social media policies with their organisation's goals. The proposed Strategy Wheel is a tool that can help build successful approaches based on the needs and goals of the institution. Measuring results and allowing for trial, error, review and revision of social media practices will improve social media success over time. As social media changes over time, so policies should change over time to reflect the current trends.

UON's Cultural Collections' social media strategy has evolved over time. The team continually experiments with new platforms and ways of improving social media success and widening their audience. Successful strategies include participating in social media events and targeting specific communities of users (such as *Lost Newcastle*) with content they will find interesting. Reposting content and posting the same content across multiple platforms saves time. Ultimately, small changes can lead to more efficient posting and improved engagement and interaction on social media.

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Appendix A : Account Statistics for Cultural Collections 2018 Social Media Audit

Account	Since	All Time Views	Views Past Year	Followers or Users	Comments Past Year	Likes Past Year	Shares Past Year	Number of items
www.flickr.com/photos/uon/	2007	49,206,116	6,388,741	1,200	828	N/A	N/A	84,127
www.youtube.com/user/UoNCC	2008	195,957	N/A	208	28	200	767	343
facebook.com/UoNArchives/	2010	N/A	N/A	531	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
twitter.com/uonarchives	2011	N/A	N/A	402	N/A	N/A	N/A	742
soundcloud.com/uoncc/	2015	48,724	15,600	73	4	76	742	1258
facebook.com/hunterlivinghistories/	2016	N/A	N/A	925	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
twitter.com/livinghistuon (bot)	2017	11, 600	N/A	45	N/A	N/A	N/A	2,115
Livinghistories.newcastle.edu.au	2017	1,869,579	1,762,919	168	N/A	N/A	N/A	73,350

Data collected from April 2017 to April 2018. Blog data not collected. N/A = information not available

# **Endnotes**

i https://twitter.com/livinghistuon

ii http://ifttt.com/

iii https://buff.ly/

iv https://twitter.com/uonarchives

v https://hootsuite.com/

vi https://buffer.com/

vii https://hootsuite.com/

viii https://buffer.com/

ix https://www.theherald.com.au/

<sup>\*</sup> https://www.facebook.com/groups/LostNewcastle/