

ADVANCING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA SKILLS

CBA President, Mark Lefebvre, of Titles Bookstore at McMaster University, schooled attendees in *Social Media 201* at the Association's National Conference.

The lesson began with an overview. Lefebvre explained, "It is important to understand that your social media is about people and connecting." Booksellers should assemble a combination of simple and accessible publishing technologies—such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, etc.—that will work for their businesses. These platforms allow individuals and groups to generate and exchange online content. The basic strategy that booksellers are adopting when they commit to social media is "engagement." It is key to socialize and communicate with the whole network of people who connect to your store through your social media, from customers to publishers. "Relationships are the most important component," stresses Lefebvre.

Social media provides effective and inexpensive tools, especially for booksellers on limited budgets. Typically, a bookstore owner can market to potential clients in four ways: 1) Paid advertising; 2) Garnering press about store events; 3) Via store-owned media, such as the bookshop newsletter; and 4) Through online community interaction, that is, by utilizing free social media. Clearly social media is an exciting option.

Lefebvre recommends tinkering with online software, "experiment and play with the many toys available until you find the right combination for your store." Just a few of Lefebvre's favourite, simple-to-use tools include:

1. Google

Lefebvre recommends visiting www.google.ca/intl/en/options/ to try out the applications, which include:

Google maps: Go to www.google.ca/places to register your storefront location. You can include the bookshop address, hours of operation and even photos. As well, an exciting feature allows you to attach a store coupon. All this information you post will pop up for users in their google searches.

Google dashboard: To access valuable marketing information about the google searches that found your website, visit <https://www.google.com/dashboard/>. Dashboard tallies account details, such as how many times web surfers have come ashore on your website, and what keywords steered them there.

Google Alerts: Go to <http://www.google.com/alerts> to set up an alert to notify you whenever your store name is posted on the Internet.

2. Store & Event Listings

The Internet offers opportunities to get your store name and events out to the online community. Consider websites that will post your event information, as well as sites that might be beneficial links. For example, www.OpenBookToronto.com "serves as a hub for all things local and literary year round," so post your events! Much like the CBA's bookstore finder at www.cbabook.org, the American Booksellers Association hosts a website, www.IndieBound.org, with bookstore listings, and invites Canadian independent booksellers to register—and be mapped—on their site.

Tech-smart bookseller Mark Lefebvre teaches you how to take your store's web presence to the next level, engaging a growing network of book-lovers on-line

By Joy Ferguson

3. Foursquare

Foursquare (<http://Foursquare.com>) is a playful application for the phone or Blackberry® that uses the GPS built into smartphones to allow the user to explore his surroundings—and you can include your bookshop on its user maps. Bookstores may not only list their locations, but can attach a geo-tag. For instance, this pop-up could announce an upcoming author reading or a book sale. Lefebvre is inspired by Dundurn Press's creativity: The publisher pinpointed their book settings around Hamilton, then tagged the sites with book excerpts that pop up whenever a Foursquare user is nearby.

4. Websites

Lefebvre reminds us that social media should complement rather than replace the store website. Linking the website to platforms, such as Facebook, is key. Social media combined with your website provides an excellent opportunity to showcase your bricks-and-mortar store to the world. But you must create a dynamic website—and update it at least every two days to ensure that you build traffic. You can do this either by using a content management system (CMS) like Joomla (www.joomla.org) or by enhancing the site yourself with photos, podcasts, etc. This is essential for today's cyber-savvy users. Look for info and instructions about social media and online tools at sites like <http://commoncraft.com>.

5. Video & Podcasts

Booksellers can access video and podcasts from a multitude of sources as varied as YouTube and publisher websites, or make

their own with a mini-camcorder, like The Flip Video (www.theflip.com). The Flip (Cdn\$160) simply plugs into your computer to upload to your website or Facebook pages. Lefebvre is impressed by sites such as www.dragonpage.com and www.skylight-books.com that use podcasts and other applications to enhance their websites.

6. Facebook

Facebook has over 400 million active users, and about half of those log in daily. This free social media platform is an invaluable tool for booksellers to create an interactive presence on the Internet. Entice your community through your cyberdoors to give them a glimpse of your bricks-and-mortar store and the events scheduled there.

Lefebvre recommends setting up personal and store Facebook pages. There can be many reasons to create more than one page, for example, a children's store can benefit from pages designed for different age groups.

Facebook's need for a steady stream of content can be time-consuming, but it is worth the effort. Lefebvre offers suggestions: a) Utilize links such as those to author or publisher websites for author podcasts, etc.; b) Offer a passionate customer a free ARC in return for a book review; c) Approach the local community college to retain an unpaid intern; d) Contact a neighbourhood highschool to ask if there is a talented student that might like to earn her community hours by adding content; e) Remember, you can link your blog, twitter and Facebook so that once content has been typed once, it is delivered to all three social media platforms.

7. Blogging

A blog is an online journal that is updated daily and intended for the general public. "A blog is a discussion, not a monologue," cautions Lefebvre. "Blog about what you are passionate about; it's not about selling." You can blog on your website or Facebook pages or use a site like www.blogger.com.

An extension of this might be to set up a computer in the store, where customers and staff can blog, just for fun and interest, without that material being posted to the Internet. It is an entertaining way to communicate with your local customers and to hear what they like—and don't like—about your store. And this may help you to discover customers that would like to

add content to your online social media.


8. Twitter

Twitter is a real-time information network and micro-blogging opportunity. Visit *Twitter 101 for Businesses* (<http://business.twitter.com/twitter101/>) for guidance in how to use tweets—text messages of up to 140 characters—to connect with your community and potential customers. With Twitter you can share information, collect real-time market intelligence, and build relationships with customers and partners. And it is interactive. Your community can use Twitter to tell you—and everyone else—about a great (or frustrating) experience with your business, offer event ideas, and encourage others to meet at your bookshop.

Lefebvre is particularly interested in RT (retweets). That is, when he sends out a tweet about his store, his tweet followers not only receive his message, but forward it (RT), often adding to it. It is the quality of the RT, and the value that followers add before they pass it on that can build buzz for your shop.

"Hashtags embedded in tweets and RT," explains Lefebvre, "are a way to generate focused interest about a topic." Hashtags are a community-driven convention for adding additional context to your tweets. To create a hashtag simply choose "# plus a name", such as #cbalibris. Inserting this in your tweets on this topic allows you and others to tie together these threads of conversation. You can learn more and track these tweets at sites including <http://Hashtags.org>, <http://TwitGroups.com>, <http://TweetChat.com>, <http://TweetGrid.com>, and www.twitterfall.com.

Use your social media to grow your community, build relationships and inform the world about the uniqueness of your bookshop. Community interaction combined with technology translates into worth for your store. It will add quality and value to your brand.

And in Lefebvre's last lesson, he teaches that your bookshop's Internet impression "is a digital extension of your store." Experiment until you "find a social media medley that works for you," then, "take your online presence to the next level." 

Contact freelance writer Joy Ferguson at maggielf@rogers.com.

NETWORKING SPECIALISTS

Recommended reading for those in search of social media savvy.

Crush it!
(HarperCollins Canada)
By Gary Vaynerchuk

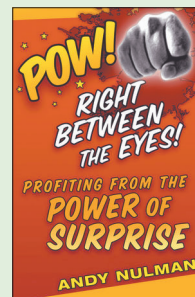


Grown Up Digital
(McGraw-Hill)
by Don Tapscott

Permission Marketing
(Simon & Schuster)
by Seth Godin

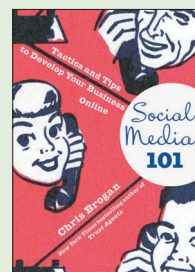
Podcasting for Dummies
(John Wiley & Sons)
by Tee Morris

Pow! Right Between the Eyes
(John Wiley & Sons)
by Andy Nulman



Six Pixels of Separation
(Grand Central Publishing)
by Mitch Joel

Social Media 101
(John Wiley & Sons)
by Chris Brogan



Trust Agents
(John Wiley & Sons)
by Chris Brogan