2012 Amber Miro Memorial Award

Application Form

Title: Engage: Social Media Michaelmas

Institution Name: University of Oxford

Originating Department: IT Services & Bodleian Libraries

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Objectives

- To build awareness, skills and effective practice in the use of social media and communication technologies in academic practice;
- To develop a training model that blends online and offline events, enhanced by social media tools;
- To share lessons learned and effective practice within a Higher Education Community;
- To make available materials under Creative Commons to enable reuse and adaptation worldwide.

The demand for training and expertise in the use of social media and communication technologies for academic practice has grown over the past few years. Their use is increasingly seen as a key to supporting many public engagement and outreach activities, as well as the progression of an academic career through a powerful online presence and social networking. The University of Oxford offers a number of training courses in the use of social media and supporting digital technologies, however these have previously existed as dispersed, stand-alone events, rather than being made available in a way that encourages reflection and the longer-term development of digital literacy skills. In an effort to pull together training provision and offer a co-ordinated and visible path for
University members to develop their skills and knowledge, a team from IT Services and the Bodleian Libraries developed *Engage: Social Media Michaelmas* (http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/itlp/engage).

Running over Michaelmas Term 2012 (October-December), the *Engage* programme offered a full term of events to explore different social media tools and strategies for use in an academic setting. The approach was two-fold with both offline and online pathways that learners could follow or dip into to suit their own needs.

I think the most useful aspect was the large number of possibilities that were described, which allowed me to decide whether or not to use them in my research.

Offline, the term schedule offered over 50 courses, workshops and talks. Courses were pulled together from existing series, such as those provided by the University IT Learning Programme, and supplemented with new training workshops. Highlights included:

- Wikipedia: sharing your expertise with the public
- Twitter for Academia
- Online presence (introductory and advanced workshops)
- LinkedIn - Designing your academic profile
- Facebook Pages that work
- Security and privacy online: Social media

A lunchtime seminar series was launched by Professor Marcus Du Sautoy (Professor for the Public Understanding of Science, University of Oxford) and invited guest speakers from within the University and beyond shared their success stories and lessons. Titles included:

- Blogging the truth in health research
- Podcasting in teaching and learning
- Social media and building alumni relations
- Crowdsourcing digital image collections
- History in real time with Twitter
- Using social media to disseminate your research

The aim of the series was to inspire attendees to experiment and try new things with social media tools, and feedback from attendees was positive:

[it was] good to hear someone else's experience of working with social media and then be able to discuss issues around it in a free and open discussion.
[it was] fascinating and good that these were observations from someone who is really doing it.

Events within the *Engage* programme attracted over 740 bookings, and the lunchtime seminars were turned into a series of Creative Commons licensed podcasts that has seen 419 downloads from iTunesU and 623 visits to the University’s podcast site ([http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/engage-social-media-talks](http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/engage-social-media-talks)).¹ A number of these talks were also written up as case studies and added to the IT Service’s *Case Studies in Innovative Practice* site ([http://blogs.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg-casestudies/category/innovative-practice/](http://blogs.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg-casestudies/category/innovative-practice/)).

*Engage* was more than just talks, however, and the term’s events were scheduled to fit into the weekly themes of *23 Things for Research*, an open, online learning programme for academics and researchers ([http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/23things](http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/23things)).

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¹ Statistics gathered between 14/10/12 – 91/01/13
This self-directed course, developed for Engage2, provided a framework within which participants could explore social media and digital communications ‘things’ over a period of ten weeks, building up skills in an online community of learners while also getting specific guidance and hearing best practice by attending talks and training sessions. The course was developed in the WordPress blog platform, with each ‘thing’ being published as a blog post. This enabled comments and discussion around the course content.

23 Things for Research was targeted specifically at postgraduate researchers and academic staff members, although it was open to all and in fact attracted users from other countries and non-academic disciplines. Participants were asked to set up their own blog (covered in the first week), then register their blog with the programme and use it to post

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2 23 Things for Research is inspired by the first 23 Things Oxford and based on the original 23 Things program which ran at the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County in the USA in 2006. In the same spirit, the 23 Things for Research programme was released under Creative Commons as an Open Educational Resource, enabling global reuse.
I actually found the initial process of setting up and using a blog, although first step basics, extremely beneficial and it has led to further development and uses in my current employment as well as at home.

By the end of the course, 41 participants had registered from 15 different departments across 4 divisions, whilst the blog had had 4,152 visitors. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, in addition to those signed up for the 23 Things for Research programme, many others followed along without signing up, usually because they wished to dip in and out or participate at a slower pace.

The team made full use of social media and digital technology to support the programme, to communicate with participants and disseminate news and events. This presented a further exemplar of use to participants and encouraged them to engage with the team’s social media conversations. A strong communications campaign meant that the VLE-hosted web page saw over 17,000 impressions, whilst the dedicated Facebook page had 118 likes and between 3-10 engaged users for each post (shares and comments). Social media sites were one of the key drivers to the programme resources, with 31% traffic to the podcast series being driven by social media referrers (Twitter, Facebook, Scoopit etc.), with some individual podcasts at a level of over 60%. Regular tweets from @LTGOxford (based at IT Services) and @bodleianlibs reached a wide audience within the University and beyond. The programme’s Twitter hashtag #oxengage saw 371 tweets contributed to the conversation with 136 retweets. Thing 7 ‘Twitter’ enabled the team to make exemplary use of the tool and collaboration with Cambridge's Digital Humanities 23 Things Programme saw Oxford’s 23 Things for Research participants engaged in blog conversations and Twitter chats about social media with those outside their discipline and community.

The Twitter Thing 7 was great. I've been especially interested in learning more about how Twitter works and why, in addition questions of how communities are formed and discussion is generated through this micro blog. The Twitter chat really helped crystalize a lot of these questions for me, and I really appreciated reading from other participants about what they think makes a good tweet, how they get followers, who they follow, how they generate meaningful discussion, etc. The chat also connected me in a more personal way to the other people in the program, some of whom I now follow on Twitter myself.

The chat was summarised using the Storify to showcase yet another social media tool (http://storify.com/mccarthy_liz/23things-twitter-chat). You can read more about the chat at http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/23things/twitter-chat/ and
No additional resource was given to the programme team, rather existing resources were pooled and this was explored as an avenue to manage support more effectively in this area, at a time when demand was high. Whilst originally aimed at members of the University, the team did not anticipate that the reach of the programme would extend far beyond Oxford due to the open online course environment, social media conversations and access to talks via the podcasts. Anyone could access much of the programme content anytime, anywhere. Thus, this programme to support the University in their digital outreach activities, took on itself a public engagement dimension.

Although social media is a ‘hot topic’, it can still be difficult to get those with little digital experience to consider its relevance or think about how to use tools within an academic and professional context. A longitudinal study of impact is still in process, but from questionnaires issued to all participants who attended courses, workshops and talks, plus comments and feedback collected by the 23 Things for Research blog, anecdotal evidence suggests that those who engaged with the programme are now better informed in their use of social media:

I feel much more equipped now to talk about how to move about in the social media world. Basically before I knew and used Facebook, LinkedIn and a bit of Twitter - but now I feel like I can use and strategize with more tools, thereby expanding my network and making the information I (and others) produce more accessible and visually pleasing.

Discussion of social media’s place in the University setting is on-going, but the excellent exemplars of uptake this programme saw means that the departments involved in Engage will be hosting their own award for excellence and innovation later in the year, providing a platform for those who have run with the programme to showcase their achievements to the University.

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