



<https://librarian.net/talks/mla24>

*follow along with links online if you wish*

Before we get started I just wanted to let you know that, like any good librarian, I've made a list of links to the things I'm talking about, image credits, and places to go for more information. You can get to it with this web address or this QR code (which goes through bit.ly which is fine and expected). There's nothing you'll need online for the workshop today but if you want to keep it handy for looking things up, that's great. I'll repeat this web address at the end as well. Please feel free to use the hand raise button or leave a note in the chat if you want to ask a question or have something to share. I welcome feedback.



While we're getting assembled why doesn't everyone let me know where they're from? I've potentially got a whiteboard set up so either you can put a dot on a map (if it works out) or drop a note in the chat. A funny thing about this Whiteboard. When I was testing out the tech before this talk--nothing like a talk about technology with broken technology--I could NOT get this collaborative whiteboard working with my tester. I poked around with search a little and found my answer... in the Zoom support community (link on links page)!



# TELLING THE LIBRARY'S STORY ONLINE

*From the Big Picture to (some of) the Nitty-Gritty*

I hope you're all doing well after this long holiday weekend. I live in Vermont. We got snow. I'm sorry I can't be with you in Michigan. I have very much enjoyed my trips to previous MLA and other library events. I even got my highest bowling score of all time in the UP!

We'll be talking today about telling our stories online, including social media and other forms of interactions. Maybe dealing a little bit with difficult interactions. I've been somewhat obsessed with this topic since libraries began having websites. Many of those websites were great, and current, and curiosity-inspiring. And some of them were static, or outdated, or would say things like "Open today!" on a President's Day weekend, or during a natural disaster, because it was just a calendar widget which didn't know about holidays. You see this with businesses on Facebook all the time too nowadays. It's a thing.

# FUTURE READY LIBRARIES

*What does that mean exactly?*



I know your loose theme this year is future-ready libraries which is both better than and also worse than last year's theme of censorship. I noticed that the first time I was in Michigan I was talking about Library 2.0 which was in... 2007? And we were doing future-ready libraries then too! Did we ever get to Library 3.0?

I think people are still arguing about Web 3.0. My personal opinion is that part of getting ready for Library 3.0 is just continuing in the same direction but being willing and able to work with network effects which include being part of larger conversations, possibly extending beyond our geographical borders; working within a world where virality and crowd effects are part of a world lived, at least in part, online.



Honestly, my experience being in online social spaces is that libraries-as-libraries aren't usually so "out there" that they get cancelled or have to worry about being the main character on Twitter/X or any other social space (this tweet is from a few years ago). But they occasionally get the laser focus of the online community on them (often in positive ways) and probably do need to understand the general narrative of the spaces they are in whether it's knowing how to recognize a troll or what the general public consensus is about various social platforms both locally and within the larger world.

I'd asked, as pre-work, just to get people's heads in this "online communication" space, about your library's social media, whether you'd had a situation or a campaign that you felt was a success. If you have, drop a note in the online chat?

Part of being a technologist, for me is understanding the strengths and weaknesses of as many platforms as I can. What might be right for me might not be right for someone else.





## HI I'M JESSAMYN. I TALK A LOT.

---

- Vermont Librarian
- Digital Communication Lead:  
Vermont Library Association
- Community Manager: Flickr  
Foundation
- Communications: Randolph (VT)  
Conservation Commission
- Extremely Online

I should take a step back for a quick note about me. I talk a lot for a JOB. Not just talking to folks like you, but talking to people about their technology at my public library (more talking than typing really) but also being a "comms person" for the Vermont Library Association within my state but also as an ALA Councilor, and on my town's Conservation Commission where I make posters, write up press releases for the newspaper, post events to facebook. My main job is at the Flickr Foundation where my actual job title is Flickr Commons Community Manager. Most of the photos in this talk are from there.

I spend a lot of time trying to gently encourage people to interact and engage who might not otherwise be doing that. A lot of library work besides maintaining the building and the collections is really community work like this, helping to connect people with things that are interesting to them but that they may not have otherwise found on their own yet. And helping connect people to other people.



I'm going to start off with my own story, or conundrum really.

Flickr, if you don't know it, is a large digital photography archive. Flickr Commons is a part of that archive run by the Flickr Foundation. This is where cultural heritage organizations--ones you may have heard of like the Library of Congress and NASA, and also smaller ones like the Armenian Studies Program at Fresno State and the Alberta Provincial Archives (where this photo is from)--can upload images, add tags, categorize and sort their images, and interact with people online. Get comments, make comments, add metadata, get community-generated metadata, that sort of thing. I like to go looking through these images when I make public posts about the Foundation, whether it's on social media or our own blog and website. All their images have no copyright restrictions which makes it a bit simpler.

# African American Portraits – Girl & Ice Cream | Missouri State Dessert – Ice Cream Cone

*Missouri State Archives*



February is Black History Month as I'm sure you know. Flickr Commons has a lot of archival images featuring non-famous Black people (fewer from Black photographers, but some) and I wanted to highlight some of those images and tell their stories. But the more I used my librarian skills to track down these pictures, including this one which is one of a set of rotating "hero images" on the Flickr Foundation's home page, the more I found that there was a lot of contextual information that was lacking.

This is the title of this photograph from the Missouri State Archives. It's a great photograph, a studio photograph! We know the photographer but not who this girl is. And, I think, we should.



# [Guadeloupean Woman.]

*New York Public Library*



In fact many of the diverse images which cycle through the hero image section of the Flickr Foundation home page have similar lack of context. Here is another one. Titled as found from New York Public, an Ellis Island photograph. We know the photographer and not the subject.

Other people have already noticed this image, and written more about it (there's a good essay about this image online as well as one other image, in the list of links if you're curious).

# Scott's Run, West Virginia. Miner's Child – Miller Hill Camp., 03/19/1937

*The U.S. National Archives*



The last image I selected was from the US National Archives. We know this girl relative to the work her father did. We know when and where the photo was taken. We know who took it (the very famous photographer Lewis Hine) we just don't know her name.

There's only so much that I, as an extremely online public librarian, can track down on my own. But it meant I had to make some decisions on how to talk about these images for Black History Month given what information I had, and what I didn't.

## WHICH WAY TO GO?

---

- ▶ Celebrate Black History Month on Flickr.com with these historic images!
- ▶ Which of these images is your fave?
- ▶ We know the names of the men who took these photographs but not the women who were in them. Why?
- ▶ Surfacing hidden stories during Black History Month.
- ▶ How to find the story behind the story of Flickr Commons photos.
- ▶ The tensions between highlighting diverse collections and centering Western institutions.

People talk about "spin" when they discuss how to frame a particular issue but I think it's more about knowing your audience, knowing who YOU are (this can be you the library or you the person), and understanding the context of that interaction, potentially that conversation.

I also think it's about understanding relative power and privilege. If you're speaking for the library, or if you're just someone who has a big platform online (I do in some places, not in others), you have a different power position relative to the people you are speaking to. Mostly. It's complicated. So as the person who does "comms" and also engages the community on Flickr Commons, and for the Foundation, what did I want to say? There are a few options.

- standard promo
- "poll the audience"
- feminist approach
- what I call the "this one weird trick" posting
- skillshare
- antiracist/speaking out about the history of white supremacy

Ultimately I went for a combination of the last three and am waiting for post-approval before posting. But I thought about it a lot. And all that time thinking doesn't always "scale."

“

It is not possible to cut these cords, or to exit the grid of interconnection. It is only possible to pretend they don't exist.

*-The Great Offline by Lauren Collee*

Sometimes I can shut down when I try to think about these complex things, and I know it takes me longer to try to figure some of this out than it might if I had been steeped in this culture my whole life.

There's a link on my links page to this excellent essay, *The Great Offline*, which describes our networked world and how we find our place in it and how we don't get to choose to just not be in it because we find parts of it distasteful, how even getting to make that choice is a position of privilege. I live in a community with a small but vocal group who decry "screen time" and can be somewhat boastful about their offline status. I think we ignore this interconnectedness at our peril

*Exercise:*

## SPIN THIS TWO WAYS

---



Jumping back, I don't think the politicized idea of "spin" is fair to the complicated idea of thinking about your audience, your relative position to it, and the context in which you're having a conversation. All online communication is some sort of a conversation even if it's uni-directional. But spin is a good shorthand. We're going to do a short group exercise about... context and different ways to talk about the same idea....



## SPIN THIS TWO WAYS – 15 MINUTES

---

- ▶ [Get] split into groups
- ▶ Pick a recorder/note taker for your group
- ▶ Write two brief announcements about this topic which matches your group, no more than 100 words
  - One intended for an entirely supportive audience
  - One intended for a not-entirely-supportive audience
- ▶ We'll get back together, share these examples, look at commonalities and trends

We're going to break up into groups and each group is going to get a topic. I'd like you to get together with your group and write two separate brief announcements about this same topic: one of which is enthusiastic, "we anticipate no issues with this" (sort of the way the topic is written) and one in which you anticipate maybe a not-fully-supportive response. This can be anything from "We disagree with your choice" to "We have some other general complaint about this topic."

Example: Super Bowl Sunday



Because in our dream world, we could maybe tell other people "Hey it's okay to not reply if this is not for you" but in real life, managing people and their responses to things, whatever their real feelings are, is part of communicating online (there is an entirely lovely page full of these and they are tongue-in-cheek but also useful for thinking about how people might react to things).

Sometimes this can just be letting people sit with their feelings and not feel that they need responding to. We're not always great at this at the library.



Listen  
Respond  
Group Responses



ADVICE SECTION. I asked some other people who communicate a lot in online spaces what advice they'd have for libraries who are taking the next step, whether that's putting together policies, changing some of their engagement strategies, or just looking for other tips. Here are a few I pulled out which resonated with me.

## BE AWARE OF HIDDEN MESSAGES. POSTING ABOUT INCLUSION...

---

- ...while not including alt text
- ...with video content which doesn't include captions or a transcript
- ...with content about specific holidays and not others
- ...while not #CamelCasing hashtags
- ...without showing all the members of the library community

...can send a message other than the one you've written.



This is my first piece of advice, one that I am constantly working with myself on. Diversity, equity and belonging are essential parts of being any sort of community organization. And yet some sorts of inclusion seem to be easier than others. Despite the current political climate, ensuring your collection has diverse books is less complicated than making sure all your online communication is fully accessible.

As you examine and think about your own libraries' communication strategies and plans, make sure you're aware of messages you may be inadvertently sending. [go down list]





If someone (staff member, customer, whoever) sees something and thinks 'that's cool', chances are other people will too

"Hey we're just sharing this with you because we thought it was cool and you might too" can be reason enough.

Back to tips: here is one from a friend from a govdocs library. I think sometimes we can be afraid to be nerdy but one nice thing about online communications is that even the nerdiest of communications can find their receptive audience. You're not going to fill up the internet if once in a while you just post some left field "Hey this is cool" thing.



You can't be everywhere, which platform(s) is your focus?

Nope, too many, put some platforms back.

It's okay to have some messages which just blanket the online spaces but people have grown to expect different content in different places. Images and short videos on Instagram, longer text on blogs, shorter texts on Threads or Twitter or Bluesky or Mastodon, reposted content on Tumblr or TikTok, stitched content on TikTok. These are meshing but slowly.

It's okay to specialize and do what might be called "Flag posting" in some spaces just to people know where to find you. At the Flickr Foundation we have an Instagram page that basically tells people to find us in other places.

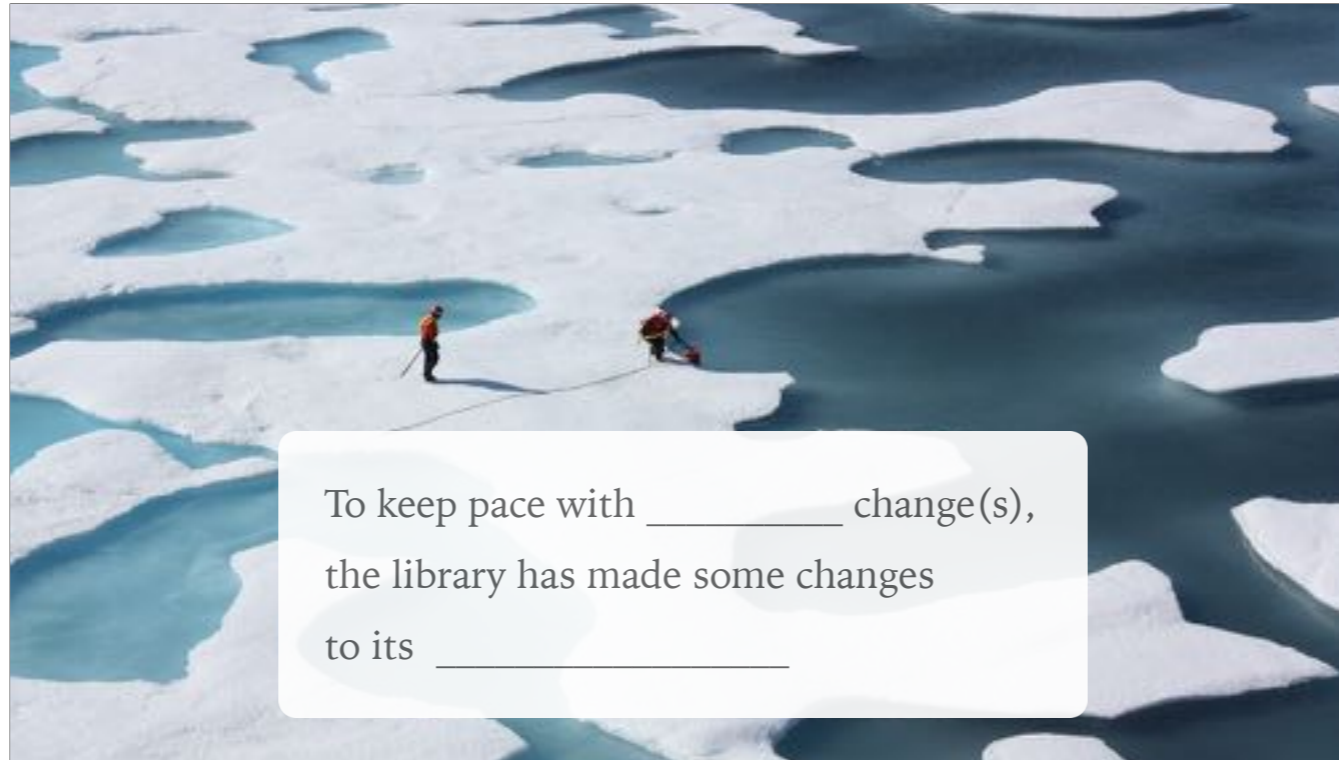


Marketers should not be allowed to control the social platforms

The best social platforms are the ones where the people in the institution get to use them (and have to own up if they mess up), rather than a single voice.

I don't have strong feelings on this tip because obviously especially in larger institutions you absolutely need to have marketing at the table for library communications. But think about whether that's ALL you need, and whether there are opportunities for genuine interactions and engagement from all around the library?

When I ask people what libraries they've heard of on social media, it tends to be Mychal Threets and his positive messages from the Fairfield Civic Center Library, Milwaukee Public Library's goofy videos (they have 68 staffers helping out!!) and the Mount Pleasant Library (DC)'s "What's more punk than the public library?" t-shirts.



To keep pace with \_\_\_\_\_ change(s),  
the library has made some changes  
to its \_\_\_\_\_

Here's a lightning round called "Change is coming whether you want it or not" The library is, and has always been, a growing organism. And I think it's worth keeping track of those changes in an intentional way.

My library's been working on a sustainability project, going for our Sustainable Library Certificate. But there's a sense in which the work we are doing to become a sustainable library has a multiplier effect when we can share that progress, those goals, the ideas that we're implementing, with our larger community.

So, just in the chat, let's do some fill in the blank sharing of some changes that the library has made in response to other changes. At my library, for example, to keep pace with technological changes, we now offer email-printing. You can email an address at our library and we'll print your documents and put them for you on the hold shelf (we're a small rural library)

“

Does this change help forward the mission, values and goals of the library? Have we communicated it effectively?

*-You, hopefully*

We're constantly told we need to be change agents and all the rest and this isn't always simple for enduring institutions with a lot of history (and patrons with long memories) but we're very good at being mission, values, and goals driven. The question is whether we're communicating what we're doing as well as we can be?



**RESPONSIVE  
PERSONAL  
FLEXIBLE  
INTERACTIVE**

---

*the future is...*



Back, briefly, to to topic of the day. Being future-ready in the library is oddly less about tech and more about attitude.

**INCLUSIVE  
ACCESSIBLE  
CONTEXTUALLY  
AWARE**

---

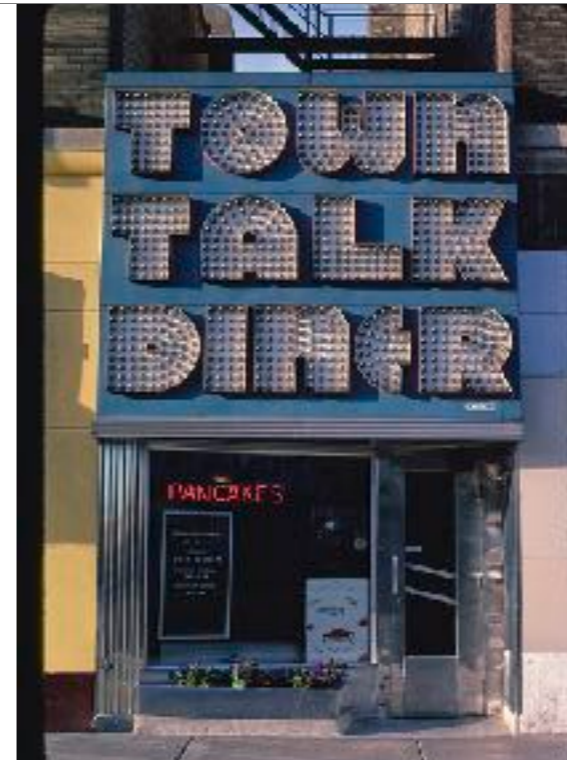
*the future is ALSO...*



It's also more about everyone.

# HAVE GOOD CONVERSATIONS

*That's it. That's the goal.*



One of my new years resolutions for 2024 was not necessarily to make every day a good day, though I do try. Obviously you know that winter is real, short days (getting longer!) are real and you can't just wish every day into being a good day just by hoping.

Rather, for me, it was more about trying to make sure the interactions I had with people were genuine and, loosely speaking didn't make things worse. I can't always make things better, but I can most of the time, not make them worse. At the end of the day I want to look back and think "Did I have some good conversations today?"

“

Social media isn't online community,  
but sometimes it can be.

A lot of people confuse social media platforms with online community and yes, they are different things. The things we've talked about today could apply to blogs, Instagram, Tumblr, Discord, or even press releases. But the more we focus on the community aspects, the less the online part of it, the specific "What website is this box I am typing into on?" matters. Knowing how to communicate is more important than where you communicate.



The library's always had a lock on community, this is just one more part of moving outside of our buildings. As another friend of mine who works with technology, who was pleasantly surprised at how quickly her older parents took to their ipads, finding uses for them that she never would have considered for them

"Do you know how many people who are anticipated will show up?"

We're that online welcoming committee, and even though we might not have gotten into online spaces first, we can be there to show them how it's done.

<https://glamr.us/@jessamyn>

<https://librarian.net/talks/mla24>



# Thank you. Questions?

*Stay in touch!*

I'm always happy to chat more about any of this, its one of my favorite topics. My main social media outlet for now is Mastodon where you can see me here on an instance that is just for GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) folks. I'm also [jessamyn@gmail.com](mailto:jessamyn@gmail.com). All my other contact avenues are on this list of links. I hope you all have a GREAT time in Mackinac Island in May. I'm here to answer any questions.