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Reasons to Engage or Re-Engage with Social Media

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There is no better tool than social media for advertising programs, seeking new members and volunteers, and, most importantly, getting more people excited about history! Yet many local history organizations resist social media out of fears of ineffective use and time commitment or fail to regularly post content. As the Ohio History Service Corps - AmeriCorps Member at the Oberlin Heritage Center and as the Outreach Chair for the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network (YNPN) Cleveland, I have done considerable work with improving organizational presences on social media. From that experience, here are 5 reasons your local history organization should work to engage or re-engage with social media.

1) It helps you get to know your collections.

Social media is a land of hashtags and repeated features, like #TBT (Throwback Thursday), #photoFriday, or, if you're feeling silly, #MCM (Man Crush Monday). Use these as excuses to reengage with your collections. Do you have a great old photo of a town founder with a giant mustache? Post it on a Monday, tag it #MCM, and include text that explains his achievements or perhaps historic trends in facial hair. By doing this, you accomplish useful slices of research and present your valued local history in digestible bits. If you can't think of anything that fits these categories, go through your photo files. There, you'll find fodder for future exhibits and events, and you'll probably also add some useful notes to your collection files.

2) It grabs the attention of supporters near and far.

Every local history organization needs active members and volunteers, but never underestimate the goodwill of people watching your organization from afar. Many people leave their hometowns to settle in other places and don't enjoy local history until later in life. Then they wonder about, for example, the popcorn shop that operated on Main Street in the 1950s. Social media allows anyone to follow your organization's mission and activities, and when they're

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looking for a picture of that popcorn shop, they'll call your organization. When you provide people with information, they understand your organization's value in a personal way, and they may return the favor when they see calls for support.

3) It encourages you to think in detail about who's already coming to your museum and who you'd like to see in the future.

Posting on social media is about satisfying your followers and your *potential new followers*—not how great your organization is. In crafting posts, focus on information these people would like to know and want to share with their friends. For example, look at the statistics for your posts that outperformed everything else. What makes them different? Are your posts about recent history more successful than your posts about the nineteenth century? Do people love seeing your event photos but ignore your posts about upcoming meetings? Figure out what works, and try to repeat it. Good content, measured in followers and likes, begets visitors, members, and donations.

4) It provides free advertising on a level that remains unmatched.

Recently, I helped to promote Medina County History Day, an event in its first year, by creating an event page

and writing content on the Historical Societies of Medina County Facebook page that enabled me to share the event link over and over again. By the day of the event, 4,600 people had been shown the event page. When you add that to the number of people who likely saw it in print media, in mailings, or through other means, it's no wonder the event was a success! The caveat with promoting events is that the number of RSVPs does not always indicate how many people will actually show up, especially if you have a separate registration page. Don't be discouraged! Keep posting your events because you're creating an archive that demonstrates the extent of your interests, and you never know who is just waiting for the right event.

5) It can help your organization maintain an approachable, active, and professional face.

On social media, where everyone presents their ideal selves, your organization can actively discard the constraints of limited resources. Attention to grammar, language, and fine details pays off. On Facebook, especially, use the feature that allows you to schedule your posts, and write and schedule them in batches on certain days and times—this helps promote a consistent tone across posts. Use pictures from past events to market future events; they provide a visual guarantee that your organization welcomes all visitors and that you'll provide a great time. ■