

Promoting a Research Impact Challenge Through Content Marketing

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Abstract: This article analyzes the process and analytics of the promotion of an asynchronous scholarly communications educational challenge in the setting of an academic health sciences library. The campaign used a content marketing strategy to create interest in and illustrate the importance of each day of the challenge. The campaign resulted in a click-through rate of approximately 8.7%, 63 sign-ups, and 546 research guide views. The reflections on this campaign unveil potential pitfalls and opportunities when marketing to researchers and others interested in scholarly communications.

Keywords: Content Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Email Marketing, Library Promotion, Library Outreach

Introduction

Library-led research impact services highlight the evolving role of libraries from traditional resource providers to active partners in the research process.

The expansion from resource access to an emphasis on research support can be

seen in the development of roles and services in scholarly communications and research data. Research impact assessment lies at the intersection of these two areas, requiring a blend of technical, analytical, and instructional expertise in scholarly communications, bibliometrics and scientometrics, and data management. In order to provide useful and relevant tools and services, libraries must account for key influences on today's scholars, including a highly competitive research funding environment, mounting publishing pressures—"publish or perish"—and a plethora of metrics and measures flooding the evaluation landscape. Libraries can address these challenges through various initiatives, such as developing research impact reporting services, providing instructional workshops, and providing access to subscription-based platforms such as Clarivate's Journal Citation Reports. In this way, many libraries have become crucial in helping researchers and institutions understand, measure, and enhance the impact of their work, continuously innovating and adapting to the ever-changing academic research landscape.

One such instructional event that has gained steam in recent years is called a "Research Impact Challenge." A Research Impact Challenge is a time limited, online event with activities designed to help participants better understand and manage their online scholarly presence and the impact and reach of their research. An early example of a Research Impact Challenge was designed by Rebecca Welzenbach at the University of Michigan Library and delivered on a

library research guide using Springshare's LibGuides platform (University of Michigan Library, 2023). This 10-day challenge covered a range of topics, including ORCID, social media, and altmetrics. Since then, many institutions have adopted Michigan's framework to deliver research impact challenges to their own patrons.

At the University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UT Health Science Center or UTHSC), we decided to adapt the traditional Research Impact Challenge format and content to meet the specific needs of health science researchers. This included shortening the challenge to five days, hopefully increasing engagement of our busy faculty and student researchers. For this reason, we also chose to design a modular, asynchronous event where participants could choose to engage with relevant content when they had the capacity and interest, and then return to the materials later if needed. Each challenge day could stand alone, removing the need to complete days that were not of interest. The topics covered in the daily challenges were decided by the Research Data and Scholarly Communications Lead and based on five years of consultations and reference work with faculty, staff, and students. The challenge days included: "Claim or Enhance Your Online Presence," "Understand and Locate your Research Impact Metrics," "Reach a Wider Audience with Open Access Publishing," "Learn How and Why to Share Your Research Data," and "Stay Informed and Build Your Network" (UT Health Science Center Health Sciences Library, 2023). The most important content

modification for a health science audience was day 4: “Learn How and Why to Share Your Research Data.” Eight months before the challenge, in January 2023, the National Institutes of Health Data Sharing and Management Policy went into effect. This policy outlined data sharing and management practices that all new grant recipients would have to follow. With the UT Health Science Center receiving several grants from this umbrella organization, this was a policy that was important to the daily workings of its patrons and thus a major topic of the challenge.

Additionally, a highly customized LibGuide was designed with user experience as the guiding principle. The LibGuide was a central location for conducting the challenge that allowed users to revisit content at any time, both during the week of the challenge and after the challenge had concluded. We created a dynamic learning environment by including Scribes, videos, quizzes, handouts, and step-by-step instructions for each of the daily challenges, providing multiple ways to engage with the materials for different types of learners.

Communication and marketing were key to increasing engagement with the impact challenge at UT Health Science Center. The library Communications Coordinator put together a communications plan that outlined the content that would go out to specific mediums during the period leading up to and during the Research Impact Challenge. The content focused on piquing interest and

explaining the importance of each of the topics covered in the challenge.

Messages were distributed on social media, personal and campus-wide emails, as well as the daily campus announcements.

This paper focuses on the communications surrounding the Research Impact Challenge with the hope that others can glean valuable insights about promoting similar services to a similar audience.

Literature Review

The campaign described in this paper focuses mainly on informing researchers about the benefits of engaging more frequently with the principles of scholarly communications. Most of the communication happened on social media and consisted of traditional selling and content marketing.

Social media is often defined as internet-based applications that rely on the technology and spirit of Web 2.0 that allow users to create and exchange messages in a variety of formats (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Research impact describes the number of ways that quantitative and qualitative data is used to describe the effect that a piece of research has had on society (Gasparyan et al., 2018).

According to the Pew Research Center, 72% of Americans use social media (Pew Research Center, 2021). With such proliferation of social media, academic libraries can't, and haven't, turned a blind eye to the communication power of the medium.

Content marketing is the practice of using pieces of content (e.g. graphics, videos, images, texts, blog posts) that are valuable to the recipient of these messages as well as relevant to the organization that is conveying them (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Content marketing has been found to be effective by creating more favorable brand attitudes, providing more brand value, and increasing electronic word of mouth and brand loyalty (Bowden & Mirzaei, 2021; du Plessis, 2022; Lou et al., 2019). These effects in turn increase the likelihood of someone performing the actions the organization is aiming for with their marketing efforts.

Content marketing can also refer to creating opportunities for customers to interact with each other regarding the product or service that the organization offers. Studies have found that creating these opportunities can encourage people to use the product or service more often through renewed interest in the topic and the relationships built in these online communities (Baldus, 2018). In addition to all the benefits online communities provide for brand attitudes and loyalty, some studies have even found that consumers involved in these brand communities find the pricing of the products to be more reasonable (Nguyen et al., 2016). Content marketing can also be used to influence decisions about future products and services (Daj & Chirca, 2009).

Koob (2021) asserts that well-defined, well-communicated content strategy is key to effective content marketing. This means that the content is

aligned with the recipient's needs and interests on the platforms used by the target audience.

There has been some evidence that social media can be useful as a supplement to traditional education in medical education (Fouasson-Chailloux et al., 2022). While the jury is still out on how to best use social media in an academic environment, medical students have largely expressed satisfaction with using platforms for learning purposes (Avci et al., 2015; Fouasson-Chailloux et al., 2022).

One study analyzed the information seeking behaviors of physiology students on social media and discovered that an overwhelming majority of respondents (97.3%) reported using at least one social media platform for physiology information (O'Malley et al., 2019). YouTube was the primary source of social media learning for students with 76% of the respondents saying that they had used social media for their studies. Other groups have found success using Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. (Carman et al., 2021; Fouasson-Chailloux et al., 2022; O'Malley et al., 2019).

Target Audience

The primary target audience for this campaign was faculty and early career researchers at the UT Health Science Center. The secondary audience for this campaign were health science students that are interested in perusing a career in research.

A study of early career researchers found that 69% of American researchers said they used social media for scholarly purposes (Collins et al., 2016). However, some research suggests that it's not just the incoming generation of scientists that are using it (Rowlands et al., 2011). This implies that social media use by researchers will rise even faster as a newer generation joins the workplace.

Among researchers, Twitter has been the most popular platform despite many people distrusting information they find on the platform (Boothby et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2016). Facebook and LinkedIn also seem to be popular social media platforms for scholarly researchers (Collins et al., 2016). However, since these publications Twitter has a new owner and a new name—X—that have damaged the brand and have left many speculating how much longer the platform will be around (Ocampo, 2023).

Medical students, a portion of the target audience for this campaign, are generally aged from mid to late 20s. According to more data from the Pew Research Center (2021), the second most used social media platform for this age group is Instagram. The most used social media platform for this age group, and many others, is YouTube. This is in part because YouTube is known as the second most used search engine and is widely used to search for information (Hill et al., 2022).

Problem Background

With the Research Impact Challenge's activities planned and corresponding research guides made, the problem would then be creating interest in and driving traffic to the challenge since historically library workshops have been poorly attended. An event was created online so people could sign up for daily email reminders about the challenge. This meant that all the communications before the first day would focus on increasing sign-ups while those during the week of the challenge would focus on driving traffic to the related research guides.

The UT Health Science Center, based in Memphis, TN, contains Colleges of Dentistry, Graduate Health Sciences, Health Professions, Medicine, Nursing, and Pharmacy. The UT Health Science Center employs approximately 1,800 regular and temporary faculty, most of which are in the College of Medicine (UTHSC, 2023). UTHSC is classified as a Special Focus Research Institute due to its high research output in a specialized area (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2020).

The Plan

To convince researchers of its value and importance, we primarily used content marketing to pique their interest about each day's topic, and thus the Research Impact Challenge as a whole. To do this the campaign used social media, email marketing, personal selling techniques, as well as the campus

electronic message board—the Daily Digest—to get the word out about the challenge.

The UTHSC Health Sciences Library had just started a LinkedIn account, making this content ideal for the platform known as the “business” social media platform. To have content more appropriate for LinkedIn, short blog posts—approximately 300-500 words each—were created. They were then transformed from relatively text-heavy posts to a series of more visual carousel posts for Instagram. Finally, these were stripped down further to be a Twitter post. Since Facebook is the library’s least used platform, the Instagram posts were also used on Facebook. Countdown posts, overview posts, and a simple graphic that would work as an online flyer for the event were also used. Lastly, a video for an ongoing short-form video series called the UTHSC Library News, was recorded where Jess Newman appeared to give an interview about challenge.

During the week of the actual challenge, each morning started with a social media post briefly explaining what the day’s challenge was and linking back to the research guide. At the end of the day, a follow up was posted asking if anyone had done the day’s challenge and if they had any reflections about the activities.

Final Execution

In total, 38 social media posts—10 on Facebook, 11 on Instagram, three on LinkedIn, eight on Twitter, and six on YouTube—were sent out. Additionally, 16 messages were posted to the Daily Digest and one campus-wide email was sent.

Results

During the week of the challenge, 62 people signed up for the daily email reminders and the research guides gained 370 views. The social media posts gained 3725 impressions and 122 engagements during this time.

To get a clearer picture of the patron journey throughout the promotion and execution period of the challenge, link tracking software was used. Links provided in a variety of mediums led to 383 total clicks: 144 from a campus wide email, 49 from emails sent out on each day of the challenge, 162 from social media, 11 from the campus calendar, 11 from personal emails, and six from digital signage on campus (see Table 1). This data emphasizes the value of social media as a driver of interest in library activities, but also the importance of a well-crafted email.

Of these trackable clicks, 105 went to a page of the LibGuide, 264 went to the LibCal listing for the event, nine went to our LinkedIn page, and five went to the campus-wide calendar listing for the event.

Table 1

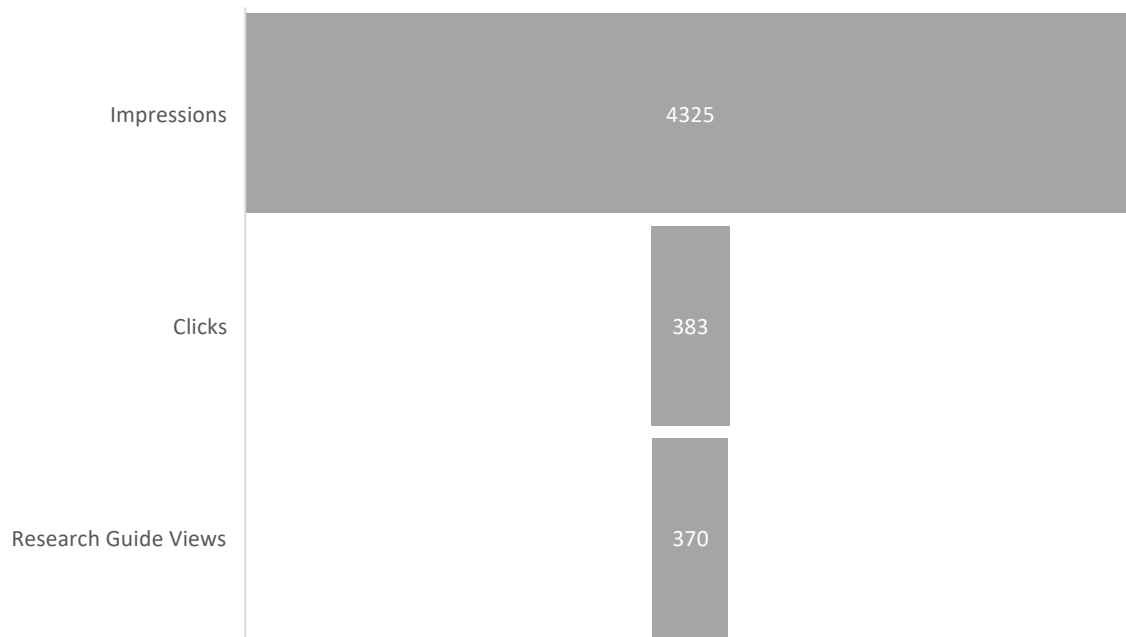
Click Traffic for Research Impact Challenge

| Channel | Number of Clicks |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Campus-wide Email | 144 |
| Emails from Daily Challenge Reminders | 49 |
| Social Media | 162 |
| Campus Calendar | 11 |
| Personal Emails | 11 |

This data uncovered a click-through rate of approximately 8.8% and that approximately 8.5% of people who knew about the challenged view its content in some form. See Figure 1 for total impressions, clicks, and research guide views throughout the promotion and execution of the challenge.

Figure 1

Marketing Funnel for Research Impact Challenge



The best performing platform for the social media communications was Instagram with 1,562 impressions and 68 engagements (see Table 2). This was expected since most of the library's patrons are in the age range to prefer Instagram and, historically, it has seen the most success with this platform.

LinkedIn was the poorest performing platform, but since the library's presence here was just launched, that was also expected.

Across our social media accounts in 2023, we had an engagement rate of 4.36%. On Instagram that year-long engagement rate was 7%, 3.8% on Facebook, and 2.3% on Twitter. These numbers will be used to benchmark the content from the campaign against other content our audience has been exposed to from our accounts.

Table 2

Social Media Platform Performance Overview

| Platform | Impressions | Engagements | Engagement rate | Best Post | Worst Post |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
| Instagram | 1562 | 68 | 4.3% | Research Guide | Day 3 Listing |
| Facebook | 1013 | 12 | 1.1% | Day 5 | Blog Content |
| Twitter | 923 | 35 | 3.7% | Research Guide | Blog Content |
| YouTube | 209 | 2 | .9% | Intro | Day 4 |
| LinkedIn | 18 | 5 | 27% | Academic Profile | Open Access |

Table 3 shows and compares the engagement of the outreach efforts that focused on a specific day of the challenge compared with views of the challenge material during the challenge period. On first glance, it would seem that days one

and two resonated the most with the audience, but there is also a decline in views as the challenge progresses. Day five content seems to be an outlier in terms of reach, but our audience didn't engage with that content as they had the previous days. Days three and four seem to have been high points when considering the general decline of interest over time, with day three having the largest engagement rate and day four having a slight bump in LibGuide views.

Table 3

Overview Of Performance of Social Media Content by Day

| Day | 1 – Online Presence | 2 – Research Impact Metrics | 3 – Open Access Publishing | 4 – Data Sharing | 5 – Building Your Network |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Total reach | 339 | 426 | 379 | 549 | 1056 |
| Total engagements | 16 | 20 | 19 | 19 | 7 |
| Engagement Rate | 4.7% | 4.6% | 5% | 3.4% | .6% |
| LibGuide Views | 118 | 62 | 46 | 48 | 34 |

Lessons Learned

On Instagram, the campaign's most successful platform, the content consisted primarily of carousel posts (see Figure 2). These posts consist of multiple graphics that display in a slide show. There are several benefits to these kinds of posts. First, they allow users to put more information into a single post without overwhelming their audience. Second, when one posts a carousel, Instagram will serve the posts to viewers a few more times by showing the audience different slides of the post. This increases the post's reach and its odds of a viewer acting on the information in the post.

Figure 2

Carousel Post from the Campaign



While these were effective single posts, the most effective kinds of posts on Instagram at the time of this writing are reels. Reels are short-form vertical videos that users scroll through much like a post feed. Due to this being their

newest feature and the current trend in social media content, the algorithm at the time of this writing rewards posts in this format by showing them on more feeds.

Despite these benefits, getting in front of a camera can be an intimidating prospect for many people. This anxiety is as pervasive in a library setting as it is in the general population, which is why it wasn't used as heavily for this campaign. Based on the Instagram algorithm's valuation of content at the time of this writing, it is believed more vertical video content could have improved the results.

The second interesting piece of the data is that the posts that simply support a link to the research guide were some of the most effective. It indicated that the audience is used to having to navigate away from social media to get meaningful information. This could be a quirk of this library's specific audience or could be an indicator that the demographic the posts are resonating with may be older than we estimated.

The blog-style content marketing that was the cornerstone of this campaign ended up not being a high point in the data. Previous research done through the UT Health Science Center Library indicated that one of the obstacles to the adoption of data sharing and research impact was a lack of knowledge about the process. Based on the data the campaign generated, driving traffic from social platforms to a website may be a better approach for the educational component.

Conclusion and Next Steps

In conclusion, this campaign focused on supporting a Research Impact Challenge by incorporating content marketing techniques as well as multiple communication channels. Channels included social media, a campus-wide email, a campus-wide message board, as well as a handful of personal emails. The campaign could be called a success due to the high click-through rates that we experienced in our communication efforts. This campaign contributes to the data about the interests of, and attitudes about, scholarly communications by researchers as well as their behaviors on social media. In future campaigns, it is suggested that libraries experiment more with vertical video as well as using a greater mix of simple and complex posts as a part of their communications efforts.

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