

ASIS&T's Social Media Presence: Where Do We Go from Here?

by Diane Rasmussen Pennington

EDITOR'S SUMMARY

As part of ASIS&T's renewed attention to social media, the author extended her professional expertise with the communication channel to serve as the Association's social media manager, joining five contributors in examining members' practices and possible future directions. The Association maintains multiple social media outlets, including a listserv, accounts on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, and a blog, and uses third party tools for metrics and analytics. An August 2014 survey garnered responses from 76 individuals, 58% of whom were members. Respondents clearly favored Facebook, followed by LinkedIn and Twitter, and used the services for networking and sharing resources and organizational announcements. Engaging topics are most likely to motivate participation. Responses revealed clear differences of opinion about ASIS&T's online offerings, while 26% were unaware of ASIS&T social media outlets. With the overhauled ASIS&T website, social content is prominently displayed and easy to engage with. Further strategic planning by Association president Sandy Hirsh will guide future social media activity. The author offers assistance to SIGs, chapters and committees to develop their social media presence and invites members to contribute to The ASIS&T Blog and mention ASIS&T in tweets and in Facebook and LinkedIn comments.

KEYWORDS

Association for Information Science and Technology
 strategic planning
 social web
 computer mediated communications
 surveys

It is an honor to serve as the new social media manager for the Association for Information Science and Technology. I've taught courses in social media for libraries and other organizations since 2007, I do research related to social media and I edited a book called *Social Media for Academics: A Practical Guide*. Despite my experience, I never imagined I would have the opportunity to run the social media efforts for my primary professional association. I promise to continue putting forth my best efforts in this important role for our Association.

This article will outline where we are with our social media efforts as of October 2014. It will also suggest directions about where we can go next based on data and observations I've gathered since I took over this role. I wanted to write this article because I believe strongly in transparent leadership; additionally, I know that many other members are knowledgeable about social media, so I think it is appropriate to keep everyone informed.

Where Are We?

The team: Joining me in my role as social media manager position is a group of contributors who have a great deal to offer us. As a result of the Board-led "Engagement across Boundaries" initiative, we have secured five social-media savvy contributors who are working on their own ASIS&T social media initiatives and posting to our accounts as they see fit. These social media contributors are Laura Christopherson, Kate Dillon, Tamara Heck, Sara Mooney and Adam Worrall. The Board-approved Social Media Advisory Committee consists of me as chair, Naresh Agarwal and Heather

Diane Rasmussen Pennington is ASIS&T social media manager and an assistant professor at Ashford University. She can be reached by email at diane@asis.org or follow her on Twitter @infogamerist.

Pfeiffer; we worked especially closely together when we first implemented the initiative.

Listserv: For many years, ASIS&T has had a listserv called asis-l. In earlier days, it was perhaps more of a discussion forum, but it has evolved into a list for announcements. Subscribers get information about calls for papers, conferences, ASIS&T-sponsored events and so on. These announcements are useful for our professional advancement, but it doesn't really serve us well for discussions anymore.

Facebook: Our Facebook page has just over 750 "likes." Facebook page managers can collect a variety of other data about the page, including how many people are reached with each post and how many "engagements" are garnered on each post, such as the number of "likes," comments and shares.

Twitter: @asist_org has close to 4,000 Twitter followers. We gain new followers almost every day, and certain tweets get a respectable number of retweets. @asist_org gets mentions in certain contexts from other accounts, such as when a SIG or chapter is making an announcement or when a member has a question for ASIS&T.

LinkedIn: The LinkedIn group has almost 2,200 members. This group doesn't see as much interaction as our other accounts, but the diversity of the group's members is striking, including people in industry and people from many countries.

Blog: I launched The ASIS&T Blog in July 2014. As of October 2014, it has had

around 2,000 unique views since its inception. I hope to grow this blog presence substantially over the next few months because it can be a powerful but informal tool for distributing association news and discussing topics related to information science.

Third-party tools: The contributors and I are currently experimenting with Hootsuite and Buffer to see what works best for coordinating our combined efforts. Hootsuite, Buffer and ReadyGraph are all proving helpful in creating analytics for gaining insight into our social media metrics.

Social Media Survey: Results

These numbers about our followers and what they're doing with our tools are useful, but they only tell part of the story. When I first took this position, one of my primary concerns was whether ASIS&T's social media efforts were meeting the needs of its followers. I heard anecdotal concerns from Association leaders that our individual platforms don't coordinate with each other well. I also noticed that there was not much actual engagement from followers, so how could content be presented in ways that would increase two-way activity? I decided to launch a survey to see what people thought about our social media efforts and what we could do to better meet their needs.

Adam Worrall, ASIS&T social media contributor, played a substantial role in developing the survey. I invited people to participate using our existing social media channels, and the survey was available for

approximately the last two weeks of August 2014. I received 76 completed responses. A summary of the results follows.

Which social media services do you use? 88% use Facebook and approximately 70% use LinkedIn and Twitter. Less than half use listservs; around 30% chose Google+, ResearchGate and academia.edu. Write-in responses included last.fm, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, Mendeley, Path, Flickr and xing.de.

How often do you use specific social media services? Around 70% of Facebook users check it multiple times a day, and about 40% of Twitter users check it just as often. Activity frequency drops significantly for the other services listed.

Which social media service do you use most frequently? 57% said Facebook, 24% selected Twitter, 11% chose listservs and 6% said LinkedIn. When asked why that service is used most frequently, participants provided a range of open-ended responses:

- Facebook: more of their connections are there than on any other service; to keep up with friends and family as well as (to a lesser extent) colleagues
- Twitter: brevity of posts makes it easy to keep up; greater control over what is presented in the news feed; useful for news gathering
- Listservs: convenience, content, habit, human-human interaction rather than human-machine interaction
- A smaller number of participants discussed preferences for ResearchGate, LinkedIn and Xing due to their professional advantages.

Others chose Tumblr for its variety of content, Google+ for file sharing and Instagram because it is less personal than other choices.

- One senior participant provided a detailed response: “Facebook is more versatile and friendly. It even duplicates some of what the other services offer. Twitter is too confining and requires too many infantile iconic representations. The others mentioned are of less interest to me now that I’m retired. My consulting activities can be satisfied by other means.”

Why do you use social media in your personal life? Most often, participants use it in their personal lives to keep in touch with friends and family as well as share links, photos and videos. Discussions were less commonly chosen.

Why do you use social media in your professional life? The most popular responses included networking, sharing resources and sharing organizational announcements. Discussions, photo and video sharing, and life update sharing were not as popular.

What is your primary motivation for using social media? By far, the most popular open-ended response related to keeping in touch with family, friends and/or colleagues. Slightly less common motivations included consuming information and sharing information; these two were distinct and popular categories. Less frequently noted motivations included enjoying the speed and convenience of communication,

accomplishing collaborative work and participating in discussion.

What motivates you to engage in back-and-forth interaction or discussion via social media? Overwhelmingly, participants said that the topic encourages them to participate more than anything else. Other common reasons included the enjoyment of participating in high-quality discussion (respectful, high-level, etc.), connecting with others and for completing professional tasks. One participant responded, “No alternative since many folks today don’t know how to use paper, pen, envelope and stamp.”

Do you belong to ASIS&T SIGs, chapters or committees? 87% belong to one or more SIGs, 26% belong to a student chapter, 26% belong to a regional chapter and 20% participate in one or more committees. Of these, 37% follow ASIS&T-wide social media venues and at least one SIG, chapter or committee.

Which ASIS&T social media venues do you visit, and how often do you visit them?

- 21% only follow ASIS&T-wide channels, and 26% don’t follow any of our social media outlets.
- About half of those who follow both ASIS&T-wide presences and SIG/chapter/committee sites visit them once a week, while others in this category read them either once a month or rarely. From most popular to least popular, they selected listservs, Facebook, Twitter, The ASIS&T Blog and LinkedIn.
- Of those who follow only the ASIS&T-

wide presences, 31% read them multiple times a day, 31% read them once per week and 31% visit them rarely. From most popular to least popular, they selected Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, The ASIS&T Blog and listservs.

- Some participants indicated that they do not follow our social media accounts. The most frequent reason was because they didn’t know they existed. Less frequently, they don’t feel the content is relevant to their field or their interests. One person noted, “I’m not a social media person. I don’t go on Facebook or Twitter. I hate the permanent exhibition of one’s life. It’s just another gadget that distracts our attention from the more important things. Emails and mailing lists work fine for me.”

Do you feel that ASIS&T social media presence is coherent? Please explain why or why not. We received a wide range of answers to this question. Some felt it was coherent; others said it was not. Some people like the type and amount of content that is provided, but other participants want more variety and more information. Respondents raised questions around the meaning of the term coherent; some saw it as visual identity, others interpreted it as providing the same material on all sites, and so on.

What one thing would you like to see ASIS&T do more of in its use of social media? Some participants were happy with the current type and frequency of activity. Others had various suggestions: it should be more engaging, create more

community, appear less formal, include more content in type and frequency, post jobs and event announcements, highlight things in the field and share activities of its various groups.

What one thing would you like to see ASIS&T do less of in its use of social media? Many people did not provide substantial responses to this question. The very few that did answer provided a wide range of ideas: be less formal, reduce repetition and appear less scattered.

Where do you live? 79% of participants live in North America, 16% are in Europe, 3% live in Asia and 1.5% live in Oceania/Australia.

Are you an ASIS&T member? 58% of respondents are members, 28% have never been a member, 9% used to be a member and 4% are unsure.

Do you serve as an officer with an ASIS&T SIG, chapter or committee? 57% were not current officers. The others indicated a range of officer positions; the most popularly chosen positions were membership and past chair.

Social Media Survey: Discussion

Not surprisingly, the most common reasons that participants use social media include connections with other people. Sharing and receiving information on topics of interest are important motivators to this group as well.

The results also reveal differences in opinion, especially as things relate to ASIS&T’s online offerings. Some people are happy with relatively more traditional

We can see from these informally presented results that while many people use social media for similar reasons, they also express a diverse group of desires. This finding brings up interesting questions for our social media practices in the future.

email and listserv communications, while other participants want more social media posts and increased engagement.

We can see from these informally presented results that while many people use social media for similar reasons, they also express a diverse group of desires. This finding brings up interesting questions for our social media practices in the future. Not very many people indicated that they participate in discussions online, but interesting topics do motivate some people to participate; therefore, is it practical to spend too much time providing items for discussion? Should we focus more on facilitating personal and professional connections among members? These questions have yet to be answered, but we do have some firm plans moving forward.

Where Do We Go From Here?

It stands to reason that a specialized non-profit organization without a full-time social media staff member will not grow as quickly or be as active as a large corporation. For example, Target’s

Facebook page has gained over 23,000,000 “likes,” and Walmart has over 591,000 Twitter followers. That said, the contributors and I are dedicated to developing ASIS&T’s online presences as fully as possible within our relatively limited time and resource constraints. Also as with any organization, we do not work in isolation. Fortunately, we have a number of things working in our favor as we move forward.

From a technological perspective, the new ASIS&T website integrates social content much better than the old one. At any time, an individual can visit the home page and see our most recent tweet. Links to the ASIS&T-wide social media venues are displayed prominently at the top of the page. The ASIS&T Blog is more closely integrated with the new site, since everything is all based on the same WordPress installation. SIGs and chapters will have an easier time updating their blogs as well due to the provided templates.

President Sandy Hirsh’s strategic planning initiative will also help inform future social media practices. The direction will become clearer over the next year.

Every one of our venues continues to gain followers almost daily, so that tells me we are doing at least some things right. While it’s clear from the survey results that not all of our members care about our social media presences, the best thing we can do is focus on those who do want to read and engage with our content. ASIS&T has so much to offer as an organization; our publications, our conferences and our members provide

endless inspiration for younger members and intellectual outlets for long-standing members. In practice, it's my job to lead efforts toward offering that content in ways that make it accessible to anyone who is interested in the places where they already live online.

The social media contributors and I are available to support you and your organizational needs. If your SIG, chapter or committee would like some assistance starting or revitalizing its social media

presence, please contact me. If you have ideas about how to make our virtual communities more vibrant, let me know about that as well. At the same time, the potential for social media success resides with every member. If you would like to write a post for The ASIS&T Blog, please email me, and I will create an account for anyone who is interested. If you tweet interesting news items or ideas related to information science, mention @asist_org in your post. Feel free to share stories or

ideas on our Facebook page or LinkedIn group as well.

See you online!

Please join us on our social media channels

Twitter: @asist_org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/asist.org

LinkedIn:

www.linkedin.com/groups/Association-Information-Science-Technology-44332

Blog: www.asist.org/SocialMedia ■

For further information

Rasmussen Pennington, D. (August 28, 2014). *ASIS&T's social media presence: Channels, communications and challenges* [Video file]. Retrieved from www.asis.org/Conferences/webinars/Webinar-8-28-2014_Social_Media_Presence.html

Rasmussen Neal, D. (Ed.) (2012). *Social media for academics: A practical guide*. Oxford: Chandos.