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Chapter 5

Adding Value with Advertising: Using Paid Promotions to Build Your Online Community

Christopher Chan and Joanna Hare

Overview

Paid advertising is an unfamiliar concept to many librarians, especially to those working in schools, colleges, and universities. Traditional advertising on television, radio, newspapers, etc., generally only makes sense for libraries serving a large population, such as public library systems. Early forms of online advertising were similarly unsuited to smaller libraries, because of the large and loosely-defined audiences. Social media advertising is a very different proposition, as these platforms allow advertisers to specify with precision the audience they want to reach, in some cases to the institutional level.

Although social network services (SNS) make paid advertising a possibility for libraries that do not usually engage in the practice, you may still question whether it is worth the money and effort. It is certainly true that libraries can get a lot of value out of social media without paying, but unpaid social media strategies may only be able to take you so far. Social media advertising can also be surprisingly cost-effective even with a relatively small budget, and you will receive concrete feedback on how your advertising campaign performs. Some may be uncomfortable with spending even a modest amount of money on something as ephemeral and intangible as online adverts. However, your library is probably already spending similar amounts printing posters and ordering souvenirs - how is spending on social media advertising any different?

Moreover, there is tremendous potential for SNS advertising to turbocharge user engagement with your library's social media efforts. For online community building to be effective, your followers need to see and interact with your posts. While paid advertising can never substitute for compelling content, it is a tool that libraries should consider deploying to ensure their social media efforts receive the attention from their community that they deserve. Most of the social media platforms libraries are likely to engage with offer paid advertising, but our focus in this chapter will be on Facebook. This is mainly due to our experience being exclusively with Facebook advertising, and also because Facebook is the dominant social media platform. There are currently no signs that it will relinquish the top spot anytime soon - at the end of 2016 it boasted over 1.1 billion daily active users globally¹. We have also found Facebook's advertising toolkit to be robust and user-friendly. Most importantly, Facebook allows for highly specific targeting based on the data users have provided about themselves. The options available in this regard are more plentiful than even competing social networks such as Twitter, partly because there is an expectation on Facebook that users present their real identity. This is vital for libraries that cannot afford to waste limited funding on ads that fail to reach their specific community members with a high degree of accuracy.

In what follows, we will share our experiences with advertising on Facebook at our institutions, Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) and City University of Hong Kong (CityU). We begin with a beginner's guide to creating and managing adverts on Facebook, including tips for maximizing the effectiveness of your advertising campaigns. We then present the quantitative results of recent adverts run at both institutions, contrasting the experience of a library with years of SNS advertising experience with a library running its very first campaign. Finally, we

consider whether students feel that it is appropriate for libraries to be advertising in this way, and present evidence from a survey conducted at the authors' institutions.

Both authors are at academic libraries, but we believe that the techniques and observations described here will be broadly applicable to different library types.

Facebook Advertising: A Beginner's Guide

As discussed by Young and Rossmann², the existing body of research about library Facebook usage suggests that many libraries are using Facebook as an announcement portal, and are yet to explore the full benefits of Facebook's capacity for community building. With this in mind, paid Facebook advertising provides an opportunity to engage audiences with content that goes beyond messages about opening hours and new acquisitions. Facebook advertising also provides greater reassurance that your messages are reaching your existing audience, as well as people who aren't already fans of your page - and perhaps more valuably - aren't active users of your library.

A step-by-step account of using Facebook's advertising platform will quickly become obsolete as the interface is frequently updated and new features are being introduced all the time. Instead, we will focus on the core concepts that will remain constant: **goals, audience, and budget and schedule.**

<begin textbox>

Pro Tip! You can explore the entire Facebook advertising platform without having to commit to paying for advertising. The simplest way to begin is to access the 'Create Ad' option under the small arrow menu on your Facebook Page (as shown in Figure 5.1)

Figure 5.1. How to access the ‘Create Ads’ interface (as of December 2016)

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Part One: Define Your Goals

The goals that you set will determine the **type of advertisement** you choose in Facebook’s Ads Manager (see Figure 5.2). The ability to publically “like” something is the defining feature of Facebook, and the number of likes that your page has received is a straightforward measure to help judge how well you are doing³. To increase your Page Likes, you can choose the **‘Promote your Page’** advertisement. This tends to be a more costly approach, but once connected to your page, your ‘fans’ are much more likely to see your Facebook content organically (i.e. naturally in the course of interacting with the social network). Furthermore, based on the News Feed algorithm, their connection with your page and any subsequent interactions with your content may be made visible to their Facebook friends⁴. Their friends may also be people that you want to attract as part of your community building efforts. To ensure your messages about specific events or services are reaching your community, you can choose to promote one of your regular posts through what Facebook calls ‘Boosted posts’. This allows you to promote a single post on your Page to help it reach both your existing fans and people who have not ‘Liked’ your Page. This tends to be a very cost effective option, and is a much smaller monetary commitment. Concrete examples of both approaches are provided in the discussion of our recent adverts.

Figure 5.2. ‘What’s your marketing objective’: Facebook’s options for creating paid advertisements. Facebook has many options for creating advertisements, such as driving traffic to a website or getting installs of an app. These may be worth considering depending on your goals.

Part Two: Define Your Audience

Facebook’s advert targeting provides the greatest potential for building community, allowing you to tap into specific demographics to whom to deliver tailored content. For university libraries, targeting an audience is relatively straightforward (you can simply specify that Facebook show your advertisement to people who have self-identified as students at your institution). Libraries with a target audience defined by geographic region rather than institutional affiliation might explore some of the more detailed demographic information, creating complex audiences based on the messages they wish to share. The basic audience targeting options are geographic location, age, gender and language. Beyond this, users can be targeted based on profession, political affiliation, interests (for example, ‘reading’ or ‘science fiction movies’), even whether they have experienced a particular ‘Life event’ recently such as getting married or moving away from home. Building on this, targeting facets can be combined to create a very narrow audiences, such as “parents of teens who live within twenty kilometres of your library”. See Figure 5.3 for the interface used for choosing targeting options.

Figure 5.3. Define your audience: options to target your Facebook advertising.

There are of course some limitations. Targeting students at a particular institution relies on students providing that information to Facebook, and users may opt not to share such information. Additionally, targeting students aged 17-22 may neglect mature age students, but a broader bracket such as 17-30 may include alumni, who may not be eligible for the same level of

service that is promoted to current students. However, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the fact that Facebook supports at least *some* level of targeted advertising is a feature that other “traditional” advertising methods lack.

Understandably, the use of personal data in this way may leave many library and information professionals feeling uncomfortable. To try and address this, we conducted two focus groups and a survey to explore student attitudes towards targeted Facebook advertising. We found that while a majority of students expressed some level of discomfort with the use of targeted advertising *in general*, they were much more comfortable with the *library* promoting messages on Facebook. A more fulsome discussion of these results are shared in the last section of this chapter.

Part Three: Define Your Budget and Schedule

The timing of your advertisements must also be considered in order to maximize their community-building potential. As found in research by Young et al.⁵ and Chan⁶, Facebook advertising is subject to diminishing returns. In Facebook advertising carried out between 2011-2016 at HKBU Library, it has been found that the optimal timeframe for a Page Promotion is two to four weeks, while a Boosted Post performs best over one to seven days. Furthermore, just as with more traditional forms of library marketing, it makes sense for online advertisements to coincide with certain times of the year that your library is already more ‘visible’, such as during orientation week.

In terms of budgeting for your advertisement, you have two options: a ‘daily’ budget or a ‘lifetime’ budget. A daily budget means you specify how much you want to spend each day, and once you reach that amount, your ad will stop being shown for that day. A lifetime budget means your ad will continue being shown in your specified time frame until your maximum amount is

reached. You will notice that as you change the budget, the 'Potential Reach' also changes: a higher budget means a greater Potential Reach. Facebook has a number of Advanced Options you can use to specify how your ad is delivered (placement, time of day etc). However, for beginners it is recommended you use Facebook's default settings - in general they will optimise your ad based on their own algorithms. See Figure 5.4 for an example of the 'Budget & Schedule' interface.

Figure 5.4. Defining your budget and schedule

The monetary budget for Facebook advertising will of course vary at each individual institution, but understanding this basic structure of pricing will help you get an idea of how much you want to spend.⁷

Some Practical Considerations for Your First Campaign

- Facebook's Ad Manager is tied to a personal Facebook profile - not a Facebook Page. You can delegate others to allow them access, either as an Advertiser (who can create and edit adverts) or as an Analyst (who can only view statistics about advert performance).⁸ These options are useful if a team of colleagues is involved in managing your Facebook page.
- Facebook has a 'billing threshold' which means you are billed when your ad spending reaches certain amounts. This means you may be billed in several smaller transactions rather than a single transaction. Payment methods, billing thresholds and payment timing varies from country to country.⁹

Advertising Results - Choose Your Metric

The Ads Manager will provide a huge amount of data both during and after your campaign that are useful for evaluating how your efforts were received by your community. The metric for a Page Promotion is simple: the number of Page likes your campaign attracted. Measuring the success of a Boosted Post is less straightforward, as there are three relevant metrics:

- **Likes, Reactions, or Engagements:** the number of people who ‘Liked’ your Page, ‘reacted’ to your post (i.e, ‘Liked’, ‘Loved’, ‘Sad’, ‘Angry’), or clicked a link in your post.
- **Total Reach:** the number of people your advertisement was delivered to (typically much higher than Likes and Reactions).
- **Cost per Like/Reaction/Engagement:** Your total spend divided by the number of Likes, Reactions or engagements.

Although the ‘Like’ is sometimes viewed as the ultimate Facebook metric, the ‘Total Reach’ or ‘Link Clicks’ oftentimes gives a more realistic idea of the value of the campaign. People can be interested in your message without explicitly ‘reacting’ to it. Facebook itself emphasises the overall cost per like/reaction/engagement, which breaks down how many times Facebook users interacted with sponsored content. However, some engagements can be considered more valuable than others. Link clicks, for example, might be more desirable than reactions as they show that the user has been interested enough in the content to go and check it out for themselves. Ultimately, the most appropriate measure to use will be determined by the purpose for which the advert was placed - real world examples will be given in the next section.

Depending on your goals and how you defined your audience, you might also explore how particular groups reacted to your advertisement. For example, you could see which age brackets or people from which region were engaging most with your content.

TIP: Facebook’s free ‘Adverts’ app has a much more user friendly interface for exploring your advertising results (see Figure 5.5).

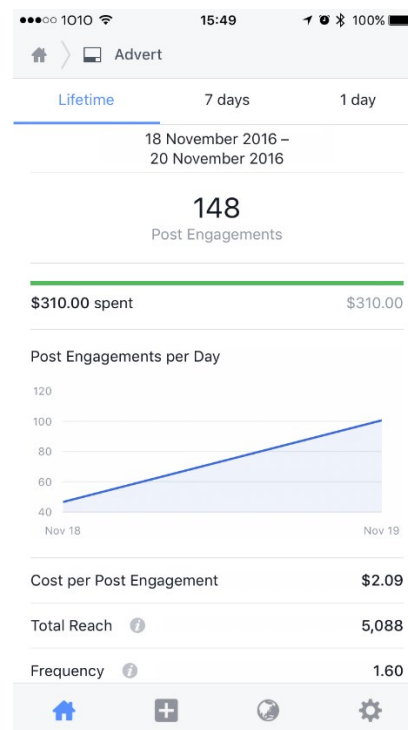


Figure 5.5. It can be easier to find useful information on the performance of your adverts via Facebook’s Adverts app

Facebook Advertising for Community Building: Some Ideas

Just as librarians get creative with the content they share on Facebook, a Facebook advertising strategy can also be creative - again, they don’t all have to be “broadcast” messages. A Facebook advertising strategy can serve as a complementary component of a library’s broader strategy for building community using social media (See Chapter 2 for a full discussion of

building a social media strategy). As observed by Young et al. (2014), posts about library events and library staff often have high engagement (pp. 427-428). Identifying what content is engaging to the users you are already reaching is a great way to identify the type of content that will be meaningful to the broader community. Libraries wanting to experiment with Facebook advertising for community building might also explore some of the following suggestions:

- Promote community-building events within your Library and your community, such as student support programs at examination period, or ‘fines for food’ campaigns.
- Share ‘Behind-the-scenes at the Library’ content, such as pictures from a party recognising a long-standing staff member, or some images of hidden gems in your storage collection.
- Include user-generated content, such as your asking your community to share their book recommendations for the year, or run a competition for people to submit creative entries.
- Share content from or features on ‘influencers’ or well known people within your campus or library community.

In the following sections, we share the results of Facebook advertising campaigns undertaken at their institutions during 2016 that show Facebook advertising can be very effective in sharing library messages with broad but targeted community audiences.

Facebook Advert Examples

To illustrate some of the concepts and ideas discussed above, in this section we examine in detail some recent adverts conducted at our institutions, both of which are in Hong Kong. HKBU Library has used paid Facebook advertising since 2011. In contrast, CityU Library ran its very first campaign in October 2016. This provided an opportunity to compare the performance of adverts from an institution with relatively greater advertising experience to a first-timer.

Page Promotion

As described in the preceding section, promoting your page can be selected as a goal for your Facebook advert. You can then designate a short piece of text and a selection of images for the promotional piece. These will be displayed in various places - in your target audience's newsfeed (both desktop and mobile), and in the space for adverts in the right-hand column of the desktop version. Adverts Manager will provide data for each image separately - experiment with different ones to see what gets the best result. Figure 5.6 presents examples of the page post adverts produced by HKBU and CityU for this campaign.



Figure 5.6. Examples of Page Promotion adverts. We chose images that were easily recognized as being our libraries.

We were interested in comparing the results of our respective institutions, and so we decided to make our campaigns as similar as possible. Although it was not possible to run the campaigns at

exactly the same time, other elements such as the target audience (undergraduate students), campaign length, total budget, number of advert creatives, etc., were identical. Refer to Table 5.1 for the results.

Institution	Campaign dates	Total Spent	Total Page Likes	Cost per like
HKBU	31 Aug - 18 Sep 2016	HK\$2,000	230	HK\$8.70
CityU	17 Oct - 7 Nov 2016	HK\$2,000	415	HK\$4.82

Table 5.1. The results of two Page Promotion adverts at HKBU and CityU Libraries

The difference in performance between the two universities is immediately obvious. The cost per like achieved by HKBU in its most recent campaign is much higher than in some of its earlier campaigns, where the cost per like fell to as little as HK\$1.91¹⁰. It is possible that having conducted several such campaigns over the years, the pool of potentially interested students at HKBU is smaller. CityU's better performance might be explained by the fact that this is the first time its audience has been targeted.

CityU Library was pleased with the results of their first campaign and is committed to run similar Page Promotion campaigns at the beginning of the two 2017 semesters. HKBU Library is somewhat concerned about the high cost per like compared to its previous campaigns. While it is still not too high, the cost per like will be closely monitored to ensure that value for money is maintained. It is possible that after running adverts for several years, a saturation point may have been reached.

Boosted Posts

A boosted post will appear in the newsfeed of your targeted audience in the same way as stories that appear organically. The only difference will be that the word “Sponsored” will be displayed near the top of the post (see Figure 5.7 below). One interesting point to note is that this type of advertisement is eligible to appear on Instagram, the photo-sharing app purchased by Facebook in 2012, giving your post additional exposure.¹¹



Figure 5.7. Examples of post boosting. To your audience these look identical to any other post in their newsfeed, apart from the word “Sponsored” under the page title

Campaign	Target audience	Reach		Engagements			Cost per Engagement
		Organic	Paid	Reactions	Link clicks	Page Likes	
CityU - Mendeley/Refworks Workshop 2-4 Nov 2016	All CityU students and staff	310	1,877	52	6	2	HK\$1.5
CityU - Copyright Seminar 4-7 Nov 2016	CityU Staff	148	945	8	13	7	HK\$4.76
HKBU - New UL blog post 18-20 November 2016	All HKBU students and staff	1,516	5,088	82	42	4	HK\$2.09
HKBU - Bookface competition 2-4 September 2016	HKBU Undergraduates	243	4,451	29	50	0	HK\$2.74

Table 5.2. The results for a selection of posts that were promoted at our institutions in the Fall of 2016

As explained in the previous section, the context in which the advert was placed will determine which metrics you focus on when evaluating the success of your promoted posts. For those advertising events such as seminars and workshops, clicks through to the registration link will be more important than reactions. Conversely, for posts raising awareness of certain initiatives

(such as the HKBU adverts for its blog and bookface competition) reach and reactions are of greater use in measuring success.

For CityU Library, Boosted Posts have been very valuable, due to the high reach. However, the click through rate has not been as high as they would like. Therefore, they will try to ensure future Boosted Posts are crafted in such a way to encourage link clicks and sharing. Further, targeting staff members was an experiment to see if such an approach would be suitable for promoting a one-off event. The reach was much smaller due to the smaller audience size, but the click through rate was relatively high. Depending on future needs, CityU Library may adopt this approach again, but will mainly focus on targeting students.

HKBU Library has been selectively boosting posts for a number of years, and will continue to do so. As the numbers from the latest boosts show, it is possible to generate significant awareness and engagement at a relatively low cost. A great deal of effort goes into community engagement efforts like the blog and the bookface competition (which was a freshman orientation activity), and boosting these through social media channels helps to ensure that they get a commensurate level of attention.

Although all of the statistics described above provide direct and tangible evidence of engagement, they cannot provide answers to some important questions. Does our community find Facebook advertising intrusive, or have they come to accept adverts as a matter of course for social networks? Or perhaps they accept advertising by businesses and corporations, but find it odd when their university's library promotes in this way. We also felt it important to address the privacy and personal information concerns alluded to earlier in the chapter. To this end, we conducted a small qualitative study of our students, making use of focus groups and an online survey.

Student Attitudes Towards Library Use of Facebook Advertising

Understanding the reservations that information professionals might rightly have regarding the use of personal information to target students with adverts, we sought to ask our students directly what they thought. First, each institution organized a single focus group with a small number of students (CityU: 4 students, HKBU: 6 students). Each group worked through semi-structured questions that the authors had agreed upon beforehand. Our findings informed the development of an online survey. This was open to all undergraduates at both institutions, and it was promoted to this user group with targeted Facebook advertising. A total of 1,131 valid responses were received.¹²

Highlights of Survey Results

A complete analysis of the results of the survey are beyond the scope of this chapter, however the following observations are of particular relevance to libraries considering using Facebook advertising:

Most respondents indicated that their usage of FB had either stayed the same (56%) or increased (29%) in the past twelve months. Only 15% said their use of Facebook had declined. This alleviates concerns that Facebook is becoming less popular among students. Of course, the survey sample is biased to those that use Facebook already, but these results provide evidence that those who are active on the platform are likely to remain so for some time. The results confirmed anecdotal observations that mobile is by far the preferred platform for Facebook use, with 92% of respondents indicating that a mobile device was most often used to check Facebook. A majority of students (63%) expressed some level of discomfort at being targeted with advertising based on their personal information. Many students saw the use of their personal

information in this way as unacceptable, although a significant number stated that they did not have a problem with it or saw it as a necessary trade-off. This is further discussed below in our analysis of qualitative comments received.

Perhaps our most significant finding was that far fewer students (34%) expressed any level of discomfort with the Library targeting them with adverts, and less than 13% expressed moderate or extreme discomfort. As illustrated in Figure 5.8 below, this is a much lower level of discomfort compared to their feelings on targeted advertising in general. Possible explanations for this observation are that the library is seen as a trusted institution, or that students believe that their library will target them with messages relevant to them. Further investigation is needed to fully explain this result.

Figure 5.8. Student attitude towards targeted advertising in general versus Library use of targeted advertising

Analysis of Qualitative Comments

Apart from the quantitative survey questions, the survey also allowed respondents to optionally submit free text comments on personal data privacy and advertising/promotional messages on Facebook. We received 122 such comments, and our analysis showed that the comments fell into five broad categories. Twenty five comments showed **negative attitudes** towards advertising on Facebook, with one commenter even saying “Don't do that on facebook, it is awful.” Twenty one comments demonstrated a **neutral attitude** to Facebook advertising, such as “as long as my personal information is not sold to other unauthorized and illegal firms for illegal use, I'm ok with that.” Twenty one comments showed a **positive attitude**, indicating that Facebook advertising was useful: “Actually I can accept Facebook using my personal data to

filter the news or ads that is suitable for me. That helps me to save more time to search the related Facebook pages for myself.”

Most revealing were the final two categories we identified. We received twelve comments **expressing acceptance of the monetization of personal data** on a free platform with an advertising-dependent business model, such as:

“There's no free lunch in the world, Ads based on personal data would be reasonable costs for using free online services.”

“I am aware that Facebook uses my personal information. Although I don't like it very much, I won't stop using Facebook because of it.”

And finally, we received 46 comments about **personal data privacy and its importance**. Two representative examples:

“Users are not very clear about how facebook uses their private information”

“I feel that in this modern society where full of electronic devices and widely excess to the internet, it is impossible for us to have as much privacy as before if you choose to use any of the social media that are available. Hence, it a must for us to accept that some of our privacy is being "stolen", but what we actually have to do is that we must be more careful while surfing the internet and make sure that we are not giving too much details on our privacy such as e banking password and so on on the internet.”

Ultimately, the survey results give us confidence going forward in continuing with the use of Facebook advertisements. As in any diverse community, there will be some that oppose the practice. However, our findings here show that the majority of our users are comfortable with their library targeting them with paid promotions on Facebook.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how paid Facebook advertising can be part of an overall social media strategy that seeks to engage and connect with audiences online. The results of our recent institutional campaigns shows that Facebook advertising can be used to build significant awareness of and engagement with the library at a relatively low cost. The student survey showed that among respondents Facebook use is either remaining constant or increasing, and that students are on the whole not averse to the idea of libraries targeting them directly via Facebook advertising. Taken together, these factors underline the potential of targeted Facebook advertising for institutions who are comfortable with the platform, have invested resources in compelling social media content, and are ready to capitalize on their efforts through paid advertising. The wealth of literature about how libraries are using Facebook to interact with their communities, contrasted with the relative dearth of literature about paid Facebook advertising suggests that targeted paid advertising has yet to be widely explored. We hope that by sharing our experience with Facebook advertising and providing an overview of Facebook Ad Manager, librarians will feel equipped to explore the options available via Facebook advertising to truly make the most of their community building efforts on social media.

Notes

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