

# Tweet Treats

How one law library uses Twitter to educate  
and connect with patrons

By Marcia Dority Baker and Stefanie S. Pearlman

Tweet  
Tw  
Tweet

**A**s law librarians, we strive to reach out to our patrons, publicize our collections and services, and create welcoming environments in our libraries. One way our library integrates our goals with current technology is through the use of Twitter (<http://twitter.com>).

For those unfamiliar with Twitter, it is a microblogging tool that allows users to communicate what they are doing to others (their followers). Users set up free accounts and post messages of 140 characters or less. Followers can read these posts and respond to them. In spring 2009, the University of Nebraska Schmid Law Library decided to use Twitter to market our library and give our students treats during final examinations. In other words: a library treasure hunt!

## How It All Began

Our reference desk occasionally serves as an informal meeting place for librarian discussions and brainstorming. During one such meeting, we discussed the possibility of handing out snacks to students during spring final examinations and hit upon the idea of a treasure hunt. Our library director, Richard Leiter, had already started the “SchmidLibrary” Twitter account (<http://twitter.com/schmidlibrary>), but we were not consistently posting (“tweeting”) and so did not have many followers. We decided to experiment with Twitter as a venue to provide treats in the library while pursuing more followers through our Twitter posts. Further discussion and brainstorming produced the “Tweet Treats” experiment.

To move Tweet Treats from an idea to reality, we needed a few things: money to buy treats, clues to help students find the treats, and a scheme to hide the treats in the library without students seeing us in action. Three

members of the library donated money and one chocolate Easter bunny to start the program. Giddy with approximately \$15 in cash,

we moved to the next phase: creating tweets that would lead students to the treats. We created short and (hopefully) witty word plays to direct students to specific places in the library, a challenge that unleashed our creative and fun sides—after all, how would you explain a library resource or service in a minute, let alone 140 characters?

Since we wanted to keep our tweets thematic while connecting the treat with a library location or resource, we began by designing a tweet around the bunny and one of our electronic resources. Our tweet was: “Look for the Easter Bunny in LegalTrac. Find the Easter Bunny with

his article. Let us know when you find him.” A search of “Easter bunny” in LegalTrac leads to an article in the *Wayne Law Review*. We hid the chocolate bunny next to that particular volume in our print periodical collection.

After creating our tweets, we headed to a local store flush with our \$15 and list of treats corresponding to the tweets that we drafted. Here are two examples of our initial purchases and tweets: (1) A box of Dots served as the treat for the following tweet: “A blast from the past. Find the library’s card catalog and get a retro reward under ‘s’ for snack. Let us know when you find it”; (2) Since two tax professors had finals on the same day, and they both have names that are also the names of wild animals, we bought animal crackers for the tweet: “LYONS & tigers & LEPARD; Oh my! In honor of today’s tax finals, 2 will find treats in the tax library. Let us know when you find them!”

Since Marcia is responsible for opening the library during the week, we decided she should hide the treats before the library opened and post the initial tweet. Both of us would then tweet additional clues throughout the day. To monitor the progress of the treasure hunt, we kept track of where we hid each treat and periodically sent a library staff member to check on its status. It was hard to wait patiently after posting our clues. If our treats were not picked up relatively quickly, we posted additional tweets during the day with each post revealing more information about the location of our tweet treat.

## Results

Our experiment was a success. We had fun, promoted our collection and services, increased our number of Twitter followers, used Web 2.0 to reach our students, and shared treats with students during a stressful finals week.

We did have two unexpected results. First, we did not anticipate the utter lack of desire our law students had in interacting with other human beings during finals. We learned this by sacrificing a box of Little Debbie snack cakes. The Tweet Treat clue “You don’t have to feel ‘I.L.L.’ to visit with her. The first eight people to say hello will get a treat” was intended to introduce students to the law library’s inter-library loan (I.L.L.) staff member, Kris Lauber, who barely left her office all day while waiting to greet students. Unfortunately, nobody came. The Little Debbie cakes were instead passed out at the reference desk at the end of the day.

The other unexpected result became known as the “spiced nuts incident.” Our tweet was: “Rather be on the beach? Find the statutes from Hawaii & experience a sunset. Let us know when you see it - aloha.” We hid a can

of spiced nuts in the *Revised Statutes of Hawaii* and thought our clue was sufficient. We later found out from a circulation desk student worker that his friend asked for directions to the Hawaii statutes to hunt for the treat. The student worker told the friend to search Westlaw! We assumed students would know to search within the physical boundaries of the library, not the digital world. Either students did not know the library had a print set of the *Revised Statutes of Hawaii* or, frighteningly, they thought they could somehow magically retrieve a physical treat from the digital world. This incident reminded us to communicate better with students about the different formats of resources available within the library.

## Would It Work Again?

We decided to repeat Tweet Treats during the first week of classes. This served three major purposes: it brought students into our library, introduced our incoming first-year students to our Twitter presence, and provided an opportunity for upper class students to participate during a less stressful time of the year.

During first-year orientation, the law librarians promoted Twitter and told new students about the Tweet Treats program. Again, we collected money and went shopping for treats. We found a deal at a local store on movie-size candy—five boxes for five dollars—so we bought one box for each day. We deliberately made the Tweet Treats easy to find at the beginning of the week, so our new students would be able to locate them. Once again, Marcia hid the treats before the library opened and sent out an initial tweet to let our followers know about the promotion. This time, she also attached a note to the treat, asking students to let us know when the treat was found. We tried shelving the movie-size candy boxes between the volumes, as one shelves a book, but determined that they would be too difficult to spot when walking down a row. As such, we decided to make them more visible by placing them either on top of or next to a row of books.

Our first tweet asked students to locate the reference librarians’ offices to find the treat. Since we pointed these offices out during library tours, we felt this was an easy way to start. Sure enough, a first-year student found the treat that afternoon. The second tweet provided a stack number so students could become familiar with the organization of our library. A second-year student located this treat.

The third tweet was a little more complex, asking students to find dog law in our catalog to find a treat in that area of the library. We provided a link to our online catalog to introduce it to the first-year students. We were delighted

weet  
t



when a first-year student approached the reference desk asking if she could have help with the tweet, being careful to say that if that was cheating, she didn't want to do it. Stefanie informed her that the purpose of the program was to help students discover the library and would be happy to help. The student was able to find the dog law materials in the catalog, but did not know how the library organized the materials. Stefanie then pointed out that the stacks are labeled with call numbers, and these materials are on the first floor of the library. That was all the help the student needed. She came back to the desk a few minutes later triumphantly displaying her box of Mike & Ike's candy, exclaiming this was the best idea ever and that it encouraged her to come in and find things in the library. The final two tweets promoted our space law and reference collections.

### Should You Use Twitter in Your Law Library?

Yes, of course you should. It is a lot of fun for both the librarians and the students. More importantly, it introduces library services and resources to patrons. We do, however, have a few suggestions and recommendations for anyone thinking about implementing a Tweet Treats program.

First, clear the experiment with the head of your library before beginning.

For a list of law schools and academic law libraries using Twitter along with links, visit the AALL Computing Services wiki at <http://aallcssis.pbworks.com/law-libraries-and-librarians-on-twitter>.



This was not a problem in our library since our director is very tech savvy and interested in exploring Web 2.0 as a method of communication with our patrons. It is, however, conceivable that some directors may find the method of communication too informal or unacceptable for a particular library.



A box of Dots waits for a library user to follow the Twitter clue to "S" for snacks. Staff at the University of Nebraska College of Law Schmid Law Library effectively use the social networking tool to promote library resources.

Second, tweet responsibly. If you advertise that you are going to conduct a program for a week, do so. Also, be wary of using potentially offensive humor and comments, as each tweet reflects upon the library. It can be difficult translating humor in 140 characters or less, so we recommend having another person review tweets before posting to make sure your tweets are clear and unlikely to cause unintended controversy. Remember, this is supposed to be fun for everyone.

Third, as we realized once we started the Tweet Treats program, guidelines are important. All librarians who post on Twitter use the same username and password for the Schmid Library Twitter account, so consistency is essential. Our guidelines include: referring to the library as plural (i.e., "we" not "I") when posting; deciding upon appropriate content for tweets; determining the number of tweets we want to post in a week; and selecting who should post to our account. You will also want to decide how or if you want to block followers if their Twitter accounts are created solely for advertising potentially illegal activities. Marcia noticed some of these followers on the SchmidLibrary account and we had to address the issue.

Fourth, tell everyone working in your library what you are doing. You want to make sure someone reshelving books does not throw away a box of candy "accidentally" left in the stacks. Other members of the library staff may also want to participate.

Finally, do not lose your audience after your Tweet Treats program ends. We try to post at least once a day during the workweek, maintaining a regular frequency. This works at our library since only a few people are posting, and we each represent different library responsibilities: circulation, reference, technology, and general public service.

### Maintaining Your Followers

Finishing the Tweet Treats program should not mean your followers desert you. Keep the communication lines

open and information relevant by using trivia questions or "did you know" statements to maintain interest and increase awareness of what your library has to offer. Some suggested topics for tweets include: new acquisitions, hour changes, events at the library, and links to major legal news stories. Several other academic and special libraries are using Twitter—you can review their Twitter accounts and posts for ideas.

Twitter is an opportunity to market your library Web 2.0-style. It lets your followers know what makes your library great. When we started the Tweet Treats experiment, SchmidLibrary had fewer than 150 followers; now we have more than 450. Based on our experience, we encourage you to try a Tweet Treat program in your library. After all, where else can you introduce yourselves, encourage patrons to come into your library, promote your resources, and have so much fun for so little money? ■

*Marcia Dority Baker* ([mdority\\_baker2@unl.edu](mailto:mdority_baker2@unl.edu)) is assistant professor of law library/access service librarian at the University of Nebraska College of Law Schmid Law Library in Omaha. *Stefanie S. Pearlman* ([spearlman2@unl.edu](mailto:spearlman2@unl.edu)) is associate professor of law library/reference librarian, also at the Schmid Law Library.