

A Quick Guide to Social Media



Social media has become popular over the last few years. People are **blogging** and **tweeting**, updating their **Facebook** status, watching each other on **youtube**, and sharing photos on **Flickr**.

For our patrons who are curious about these activities and technologies, but haven't tried them yet, here is a short guide.

Blogging

The word "blog" is a contraction of the term "web log". So it actually does mean something. A blog is simply a web site on which a person or organization can write daily, weekly, or even hourly articles. The articles might be about an important subject, what the person had for breakfast, or really anything. People use personal blogs to write about experiences like vacations, events, family gatherings, or more serious topics like their experiences with a particular disease.

Blogs typically show the writer's posts in chronological order, with the newest post at the top of the screen. Thus, it can be like reading someone's written journal from back to front.

The Plano Public Library System uses several blogs to communicate with our patrons and provide useful information. These are...

[Plano Reads](#) -- the blog of our Readers Advisory Group. PlanoReads contains short book reviews and recommendations written by your librarians here in Plano. Each of the book entries links directly to that item in our catalog, so patrons can click right through to get more information or place a hold on a book. PlanoReads is also the online home of the real-life book clubs that meet at the Plano libraries, containing their reading lists for the year.

[KidsBrain](#) – the blog of our Youth Services librarians is intended for young readers and their parents. The blog contains news of current library events intended for kids, reading lists for kids of various ages, literacy tips, links to homework help, and other helpful information.

[InfoLINKS](#) – this blog is run by our reference librarians, and contains links to excellent information resources by subject area. Each page includes links to helpful websites as well as links to databases available to our patrons through the library's paid subscription. Each resource is selected based on quality, as judged by a professional librarian.

[Genealogy, Local History, Texana, and Archives](#) blog – this site is run by our GLHTA department, and contains helpful information related to genealogical and historical research.

The Plano Public Library System runs these blogs on a free service called [Wordpress](#). Other popular and free blogging systems are [blogger.com](#), [tumblr](#), and [postit](#).

Twitter

[Twitter](#) is a social networking site and service, which allows users to write short messages – a maximum of 140 characters – which are then posted to their Twitter page. Other users may then subscribe to that user’s “Twitter feed”, and see that person’s updates on their own Twitter page, or even have the message show up on their cell phone or other mobile device as text messages.

While this might not see extremely useful at first glance, it actually can be quite helpful. Like most internet trends, marketers have been quick to jump on the Twitter bandwagon.

One example of an excellent use of Twitter is the Plano Parks & Recreation Department’s feed: <http://twitter.com/PlanoParksRec> . By subscribing to this feed, a resident can get messages about the goings-on in the Parks and Rec. Department. Likewise, the Plano Public Library System uses Twitter to communicate with our patrons: <http://twitter.com/planoliberaly>

Flickr

[Flickr](#), a service owned by [Yahoo.com](#), allows you to upload and share digital images. Once you are registered, the basic service is free and allows you to upload a fairly large number of images per month. For an additional fee, you can get a “Pro” account, giving you unlimited monthly uploads.

The Plano Public Library System shares photos of its event using [our Flickr Account](#). As you can see on the account, the system allows you to arrange you images into collections and sets. Flickr can also be an excellent research tool, using its search function.

Like other social networking sites, Flickr allows users to become “Contacts” (friends) with each other, facilitating the sharing of images.

Youtube

Finally, no discussion of social networking would be complete without mentioning [Youtube](#), owned by [Google.com](#). Youtube is similar to Flickr, but it is a video sharing site. Users upload video content which can be shared across the world. Youtube users can subscribe to other users’ “channels”. Like Flickr, Youtube can be an excellent research

tool. Want to learn to change your bike tire or install a new sink? You will find plenty of help on Youtube, much of it very good.

Facebook

[Facebook](#) is easily the most popular social media site currently on the web, with many millions of users. Facebook users set up a profile page containing information about themselves. Be careful what you put on your Facebook profile. Depending on the privacy settings you select, the entire world may see your profile. (Privacy settings are easily controlled, but you have to know that they exist first).

Once on Facebook, users connect with others by “friending” them. These folks may be friends in real life, or simply “facebook friends”. Users post status updates, interesting news stories, links to videos, etc. Many businesses have a Facebook presence. Users can form groups related to common interests to share information.

Facebook is really very easy to use, which is why it has millions of users.

A few words about privacy

With all social networking sites, it is important to be careful what information about yourself you put on the internet. Obviously, you don’t want to post really critical personal information, but likewise you probably don’t want to discuss work-place specific issues or anything that might get you fired.

Likewise, it can be startling to get on Facebook and find out what your family members think about politics. People often feel more free to rant and rave about politics, religion, and other volatile topics online than they do in person. Keep that in mind when you use social networking sites. A future employer might not be amused by the political speech you post for the world to see on Youtube.