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The BizLibratory: Collaborative Blogging for Professional Development and Networking

The beginnings

In March 2019, I (Nancy) met Angel Truesdale and Summer Krstevska at the spring workshop organized by the Business Librarians in North Carolina (BLINC) section of the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA). We had all recently started our positions at institutions in North Carolina. In the course of our conversation, we realized we shared similar job responsibilities as well as wanted a place to write about our work. Soon, the BizLibratory blog was born (BizLibratory: think "business reference laboratory").

The blog

We write from our perspectives of being newer to the world of academic business librarianship, covering topics such as: instruction, research strategies and resources, conferences and professional development, outreach, entrepreneurship, collections, and more. We originally planned to each publish one post per month, for a total of three new posts monthly. This schedule worked in the summer, but it became difficult to maintain the pace once the academic year began. In addition to our own writing, we invite guest posts by fellow early-career academic business librarians. To date, we've worked with 5 guest bloggers and additional guest posts are in the works!

Each post is reviewed by at least one blog founder before publishing, using Google Docs to suggest edits and make comments. This review process means that we have opportunities to learn about new ideas, and to receive and provide peer feedback on our professional practice. We are committed to providing a supportive environment for writing and learning in our comments and meetings, for ourselves and guest bloggers. We want to provide a platform for the voices of early career academic business librarians.

In terms of website maintenance and technology, we follow blogging, user experience, and search engine optimization (SEO) best practices. Images appear throughout the blog and include alt-text. We use a natural language tagging system for SEO, and to enable readers to find posts on similar topics. For branding purposes, our logo appears at the end of every post and on each webpage.

The impact

Summer
In the past year, the blog has been the main medium through which I have developed professional relationships and reflected on my experiences as a new faculty librarian. Of these experiences, having a regular reflective practice particularly benefited me while developing my first for-credit course. I had an outlet

and time set aside to encourage me to connect my thoughts and gain feedback from other professionals. Having already reflected on my work through blogging made it easy to write my contract renewal letter. I had already documented many aspects of my work through my posts, which made it convenient to compile my achievements for the year. I was even able to use the blog as an example of a publication using usage statistics to demonstrate the impact of my posts.

Nancy

Community building is central to my professional practice. I often joke that my job is to have coffee with people, but building relationships is the core of what I do. Co-founding and writing for the BizLibratory has been a catalyst for further developing my professional community beyond my campus and the Business Librarians in North Carolina (BLINC) group. Connecting with guest bloggers is especially rewarding; since we spend several days to weeks working with them to publish their posts, we really get to know and learn from each other. Another aspect of professional community that I appreciate is the sharing of resources and experiences. Using the blog to compile our professional experiences and resources is a way of contributing to the wider business librarian community.

Angel

The blog has been a gateway of opportunities. The amount of connections I have made and the opportunities to collaborate have been great. When we write our posts, we try to inspire interaction from our audience with simple prompts to conclude the posts. It's been motivating when I mention the blog in passing, and then receive a certain level of recognition from others. Being brand new to academic libraries and the business librarianship community, I have been intentional in seeking out meaningful connections at every turn. The blog allows me to connect on a deeper level. This is particularly true with the reflective practice that we have built into our publishing process. Not only are we reflecting on our own actions, we are collaborating as a unit of three to edit content, and then we are encouraging others in the community to reflect with us. We have built this cycle of engagement that nourishes our work and provides a voice to our profession for early career business librarians. Another opportunity that was not apparent when we first started was the use of technology services. Using a blog and website builder, incorporating alt text into pictures for accessibility, and even using web and graphic design to guide our look, has allowed me to build on previous skills and learn new techniques. Another great feature from our platform is the ability to see analytics and be able to share those metrics with everyone as well as helping to show our reach.

We have been surprised and excited at the reception of the BizLibratory blog. After less than a year since inception, at the time of this writing (April 8, 2020) the blog has gained 45 followers, 2,811 views and 1,120 unique visitors from over 30 countries.

The future

Going forward, we intend to keep writing! There is a never-ending supply of interesting questions to consider and research strategies to share. We want to keep publishing guest posts, too. If you are an earlier career academic business librarian and would like to write, please get in touch! You can reach us at Bizlibratory@gmail.com or on the BizLibratory Contact Us page.