

MODULE 23

**ESTABLISHING
ARCHIVAL
CONNECTIONS
THROUGH ONLINE
ENGAGEMENT**

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**SOCIETY OF
American
Archivists**

Appendix B: Case Studies

Changing Social Media Platforms and the Archives: Reaching Out to Our College Members

By Noraleen A. Young, CA, Staff Archivist, and Lauren M. Palmer, Digital Media Manager, Kappa Alpha Theta Fraternity

Kappa Alpha Theta Fraternity is a women's social organization with more than 240,000 members in 143 active college chapters across the United States and Canada. The fraternity has a strong sense of its history, and the archives, established in 1899, not only contains organizational records but also images and artifacts documenting the lives of college-educated women since the fraternity's founding in 1870.

Theta's social media strategy for promoting the fraternity's history ranges from heritage content on its website to postings on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and until recently, Snapchat. The fraternity follows a centralized social media process with most content provided by the marketing/communication team. The strategy has adapted to changes in how individuals use social media as well as how those social media platforms evolve. For Theta, the changes in how a social media platform like Snapchat operates can affect outreach.

Snapchat is the preferred social media channel for college students, with more than 60 percent of people under the age of twenty-five maintaining a Snapchat account. Theta's membership includes approximately 20,000 active, college-aged members each year. To tap this channel, in September 2016, Lauren Palmer, the fraternity's digital media manager, reached out to Noraleen A. Young, staff archivist, about the potential of compiling a weekly Snapchat Story from the archives to engage college members and highlight the wealth of compelling stories waiting to be told through Theta artifacts. In 2018, due to changes in the Snapchat algorithm that deprioritized content from brands, Theta retired the Snapchat channel and transitioned archival content to Instagram Story, which offers a similar format with a much larger reach.

Young, with Palmer's assistance, broadcasted archives-focused stories almost every Thursday. Topics ranged from specifics about fraternity history and notable alumnae to highlighting certain artifacts from the archives' collections (e.g., jewelry boxes or textiles). Many

posts tied to specific events, such as Theta's founding or other important dates in the fraternity's history. National events and holidays also served as sources for posts. On the anniversary of the United States' entry into World War I, the archives highlighted war effort participation by Thetas both at home and abroad. On the fiftieth anniversary of the moon landing, the archives used an Instagram Story to highlight notable members involved in NASA, as well as pop culture effects on fraternity activities in the 1960s and early 1970s. These events provided the opportunity to demonstrate Theta's relevance and deepen members' connection to the organization, while offering timely and informational insight about important historical events.

Snapchat's casual format lent itself to a lighter approach to subject matter. The archives used special "days" as a jumping-off point to highlight materials and content in collections. For #AskAnArchivist Day in October, Young and Palmer filmed an introduction to the archives in the morning and then responded to "snaps" with specific archives questions throughout the day. They also created "Read Aloud Day/Dr. Seuss's Birthday" to highlight Theta authors, reading a book written by a Theta alumna aloud to staff members while wearing a Dr. Seuss hat. In recognizing "National Girls and Women in Sports Day," the team used historic images of members in middy blouses and bloomers, as well as an image of a recent Olympic Games participant, to discuss issues related to women and sports.

Over the months, Young and Palmer established a process to capture the energy and excitement of a particular topic and increase engagement. Young decides on the topic and pulls related materials, and Palmer helps to storyboard and guide the content to produce an engaging final product. Palmer films Young on a Thursday (often referred to as "Throwback Thursday" in the social media world) as she talks about or shows an object or image. Even though video clips can be longer than ten seconds, Palmer and Young try not to exceed that length so they can create an intimate and energized feel. Each Story begins with a clip welcoming the viewers back to the archives and introducing the archivist, usually on a first-name basis. Additional snaps include the archivist talking, close-ups of images or artifacts, and teasers for the following week. Typically, fifteen to twenty-five clips are filmed, with a final running length of two to four minutes. For most Stories, three to five images and two to four artifacts are used, and

the archivist spends time sharing stories and building rapport with the audience. For most weeks, the clips are filmed live and immediately shared. From time to time, due to scheduling conflicts, clips are filmed the day before they are posted.

The regular Snapchat/Instagram Story feature, “Live from the Theta Archives,” was a great success. Despite the intrinsic challenge of determining Snapchat viewers, Palmer tracked an average of 2,000 to 3,500 viewers per week. College chapter members, when visiting Theta’s headquarters, recognized and connected with the archivist. One member tweeted, “Nothing gets me as hyped about being a Theta as watching Noraleen talk about @BettieLocke on Snapchat.” Several reports also noted that other chapter members are looking at their own archives to discover their history, encouraged by what they have experienced through the social media content. At Theta’s biannual convention in June 2018, the staff archivist was recognized by many college members and alumnae. Contact moved quickly from “It’s Noraleen!” to questions about the fraternity’s history or their own chapter’s history.

One of the challenges of social media platforms is that changes occur without warning and what had once been a tool that reached many may no longer have the same reach thereafter. In the spring of 2018, Snapchat changed its algorithms to focus more on individual contacts, and Palmer and Young witnessed a dramatic decrease in the number of views each week; instead of the 2,000 to 3,500 they had been seeing, the archives’ posts were lucky to get 300 to 400 views. In response to the changes, Palmer made the decision to move the weekly “Live from the Theta Archives” to Instagram Stories. Viewers followed, and the views increased over the previous Snapchat views. On average, the Stories receive between 3,500 and 4,000 views each week.

Whether on Snapchat or Instagram Stories, Young and Palmer have learned the following:

- **Filming proceeds more quickly as you get more comfortable with the process.** At the beginning, each talking point/snap was written out. While not memorized, the script did give the archivist a frame of reference while filming. The earliest filming took well over an hour as the archivist grew comfortable with timing and with keeping the clips to ten seconds. The person capturing content then incorporated graphics and text in the snaps to clarify the archivist’s points and add context

and interest. Recent Stories have taken a half hour as the process has become more familiar.

- **Use various locations for the filming.** While most Stories are filmed in the archives, Palmer and Young have also used locations at Theta headquarters and even filmed a Story from a remote location. When a video about Theta's sesquicentennial was being filmed, the archives' snap provided a "behind-the-scenes" look at the filming process. Snaps from the stacks and other behind-the-scenes locations add to interest. In a Story filmed around Thanksgiving, Palmer and Young used tableware and cookbooks from the collection to set up a dining room-like setting, and the archivist made recipes from several of the historical cookbooks. Anyone up for a mid-century classic such as "avocado mousse" made with lime Jell-O?
- **Include others in the filming.** Young and Palmer have decided that if a staff member or visitor is present during the shooting of the clips, they should somehow be included in the filming. Each year, the fraternity sends a group of recent graduates around the country to provide support to chapters. When the archivist learned that these women would be visiting headquarters for their last meeting of the school year, she reached out ahead of time to ask if they had a favorite item from the archives or a question about archives that they would like to feature in a social media video. Those who were interested were filmed during their visit. During filming, these women introduced themselves and asked their question or mentioned their item, and then the archivist answered the question or provided a close-up of the item.
- **Create a list of topics and dates to use as potential subject matter for a Story.** Dates special to the organization, national holidays and events, and fun "national days," such as "Pretend to Be a Time Traveler Day," can serve as inspiration for potential Stories. Young maintains a spreadsheet with possible events and tracks shared topics to minimize repeats. But don't worry too much about repetitive topics: in Theta's case, the fraternity always has new members, so there will always be new viewers.

- **Use props.** While artifacts and images from archival collections are the focus, white gloves used when handling certain materials and an “Archivist”-embroidered baseball cap have become signals that something special is about to happen.
- **Remember that if you mess up, you can delete and refile the take.** Sometimes, the archivist’s tongue can get tied trying to communicate interesting yet accurate information in only ten seconds. These slipups become less frequent with more practice!
- **Have fun!** First and foremost, engaging with the archives is supposed to be fun, so use stickers, drawings, and other content to help make that connection for viewers. For a Story on dance cards, the archivist danced her way off the screen in the final clip.

The archives plans to continue with the weekly feature. Because Theta has roughly 5,000 new members each year, several of the topics already covered can be repeated with fresh material from the collection and tie-ins to new fraternity programs. Instagram Stories can be downloaded and saved, and sometimes that content can even be republished on networks like YouTube to give it additional longevity. A regular social media presence has proven to help young members connect to the fraternity’s social media channel and establish a stronger connection with the fraternity’s history and archives. The possibilities for future content are truly endless!

Seeing Glass in a New Light on Wikipedia

By Rebecca Hopman, Outreach Librarian, The Corning Museum of Glass

Background

The Corning Museum of Glass’s mission is to “inspire people to see glass in a new light.” Located in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, the Museum has an annual visitation of nearly half a million guests, and many more use the website and follow us on social media. The Rakow Research Library, a branch of the Museum, offers services and programming that highlight our unique collections.

Our institution reaches many people worldwide, but there are many more who will never encounter us. When these people have a question about glass, they probably search for an answer online, and