USING MEMES TO ENGAGE YOUR PATRONS

Whether or not you know what a meme is, it's likely you come in contact with them almost daily through the Internet. However, the term was first used long before the information superhighway came barreling into our lives, coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976,. Dawkins used the term in his book, *The Selfish Gene*, to describe bits of culture that are transmitted from person to person. At that time Dawkins was referring to things like catch phrases, fashion, and even behavior, anything, as Dawkins noted, "that goes viral."

However, these days, memes are most likely to be videos or photos, often with attached catch phrases. They're used in social media posts, on signs, in presentations, any place where someone hopes to convey a message in a way which engages an audience through its use of popular culture. Thus, memes are ripe for library marketing efforts. One of the most popular memes used in library land is Grumpy Cat. Here at Albertsons Library, we've used Grumpy Cat in a slide which is part of our screensaver program on the computers in the library . St. Petersburg public library has a Pinterest page of library memes which include a number of examples of the use of Grumpy Cat https://www.pinterest.com/spblibrary/library-memes/.

While memes provide a handy way to tap into popular culture and get our messages across, they have to be used carefully. Like much on the internet, memes are ephemeral, moving in and out of the cultural zeitgeist quickly. Using a meme once it's started to fade in popularity marks its user as out of touch, so it's best to use memes immediately and for short periods of time. For example, Albertsons Library used the Feminist Ryan Gosling meme (https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/hey-girl-meme), in a promotion in early 2013. Because the meme had already been around for a while, the promotion was retired after only one month. The meme has since entered academia, becoming a subject for University of Saskatchewan study http://wapo.st/1JHQck1 so, while it may generate interest from scholars, our general audience would probably find it irrelevant.

Like any marketing tool, memes are only useful if they are relatable to your target audience. When several laptops were reported stolen at Albertsons Library, we used Y U No Guy as the image for a whiteboard announcement warning folks to be aware of their belongings. One staffer complained that she didn't understand why we used such a thing, but our core audience, the student users of the library, got the message and responded with laughter, comments, and (we hoped) more care with their valuables. The Know Your Meme website is a handy tool to be sure you understand the meme before you use it, helping evaluate its usefulness with your target audience. Here's their take on Y U No Guy (http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/y-u-no-guy).

Our most recent use of a meme was the Putin/Weasel/Woodpecker photo on a slide which we also posted on social media. It's enjoyed great popularity as measured by Facebook views, likes, and shares, but will probably be retired after this month as we move onto the next viral sensation. Memes are a useful part of a nimble, flexible marketing strategy and, at Albertsons Library, have helped us successfully engage library users with our resources and services.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Ramsey is currently an Assistant Professor/Reference and Instruction Librarian with responsibilities in outreach at Boise State University's Albertsons Library. In prior careers she taught English as a second language and was a graphic designer, pointing to her ongoing devotion to the collection, organization and presentation of information. Her research interests include cross-cultural awareness, non-traditional students, and innovation in library branding.