

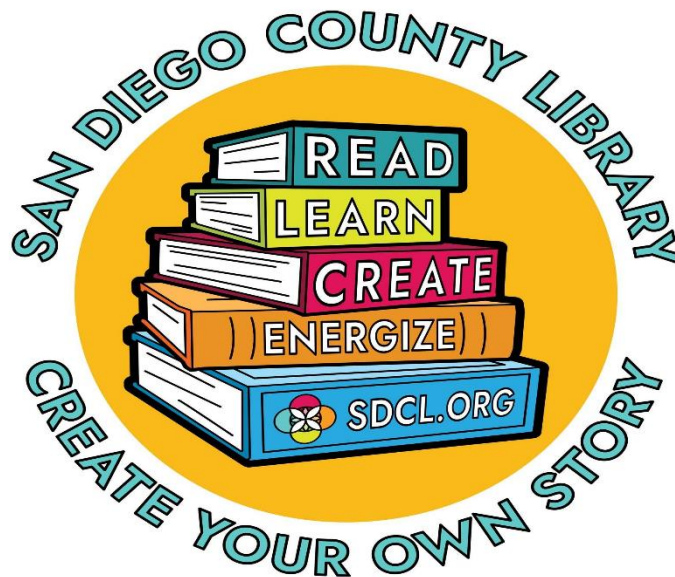
Instagram



An Insta Story: Launching Instagram and the “Book-stagrammers” at the Solana Beach Library.

Sarah Morse
INFO 287 - The Hyperlinked Library
Summer 2026

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Objective

To propose an Instagram-based social media strategy piloted at Solana Beach Library (with the potential to scale across the San Diego County Library system) emphasizing outreach to younger patrons and the development of a youth-driven social media team to produce content with staff and the community.

Executive Summary

Instagram is where many of our patrons, especially teens and young adults, already spend their time, so it's where the library needs to be too. Many libraries have already been using Instagram, not just to advertise events but to genuinely engage their communities, and Solana Beach Library (and ultimately other branches in San Diego County) can do the same. This report proposes taking an extra step by incorporating the "Book-stagrammers," a team of young volunteers who will help run Solana Beach Library's Instagram page, into our social media strategy. By having the team not only create engaging content of their own but also invite the community to contribute their own stories and photos, we will be creating an Instagram page built by our patrons themselves.

Introduction

Traditionally libraries have relied on their websites and word of mouth to bring people into their buildings. They hope people will naturally want to come to the library because it's a staple in the community. However, in these times, that is no longer enough to rely on. Too many people still hold the traditional view of a library: it's just a quiet place to check out books. Ultimately this view is harmful to libraries because it leads to the loss of potential patrons who might need us and just don't know it because they're not aware of the services and programs being provided. For instance, there are still so many people who do not know about the California State Park Pass program. Once customers do find out about it, they're usually excited and want to know more about other programs the library offers.

Currently one of the best ways to bring more people through the library doors is by utilizing social media. As Karen Schneider (2006) argues, we are a service, and we need to be meeting our users where they are. And where they are currently is on the Internet. They're scrolling through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok, and their algorithms are doing the work of informing them of events, products, and services they might need. Despite the stereotypes about social media, it's not just pranks and political discourse. It's information. And as information centers, libraries are perfectly poised to join the social media world and inform communities about everything we have to offer.

While some branches may already use Facebook sparingly to advertise events, perhaps one of the most beneficial platforms San Diego County Library should consider using is Instagram. As it is one of the top three social media sites with over 3 billion users (McCormick, 2026), Instagram is the perfect market to tap into. Though Facebook remains popular as well, we can reach a broader, and particularly younger audience. 80% of Instagram users are under 45, with a majority of users being 18-34 (West, 2026). This is one of our target demographics.

Instagram is a versatile platform, allowing us to take advantage of features like Stories, Reels, Carousels, and Feeds. Many other library systems have successfully incorporated Instagram as part of their marketing strategy, but I am proposing we go a step further: invite the community in as participants and build a social media team (the “Book-stagrammers”) to help run the account. In this way, we would be living San Diego County Library’s mission, as we help our communities write their own story, in this case, the Library’s story.

Background on Instagram

Instagram was released into the world in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. Within hours of its launch, over ten thousand users downloaded the app. By the end of 2010, that number grew to over a million (Cooper, 2023). Instagram’s user base has been growing at an incredible rate ever since. Initially created purely as a photo-sharing app, Instagram (a combination of “instant” and “telegram”) has gone through quite a few developments over the years. One of those developments includes its acquisition by the Meta company (then known as Facebook) in April 2012. Other developments include the addition of features like picture filters, Stories, and Reels. Later additions, like Reels, compete against platforms like TikTok which tend to focus on the short video format style.

Instagram Terminology

Term	Definition
Carousels	Multi-image posts that can be scrolled through
Grid (Feed posts)	Permanent posts (both pictures and videos) on an Instagram account, which the viewer sees first after clicking on a profile
Reels	Short videos (maximum 90 seconds long) which tend to be shared widely on the platform. Can take on a more humorous tone. Many reels are taken directly from TikTok
Stories	15 second videos (a longer video will be broken up into chunks of 15 seconds) which are accessed when clicking on an account’s profile picture. These only last up to 24 hours unless the account’s owner decides to pin them to the account so they can continue to be accessed. Can use stories to interact with viewers via Q&A and polls

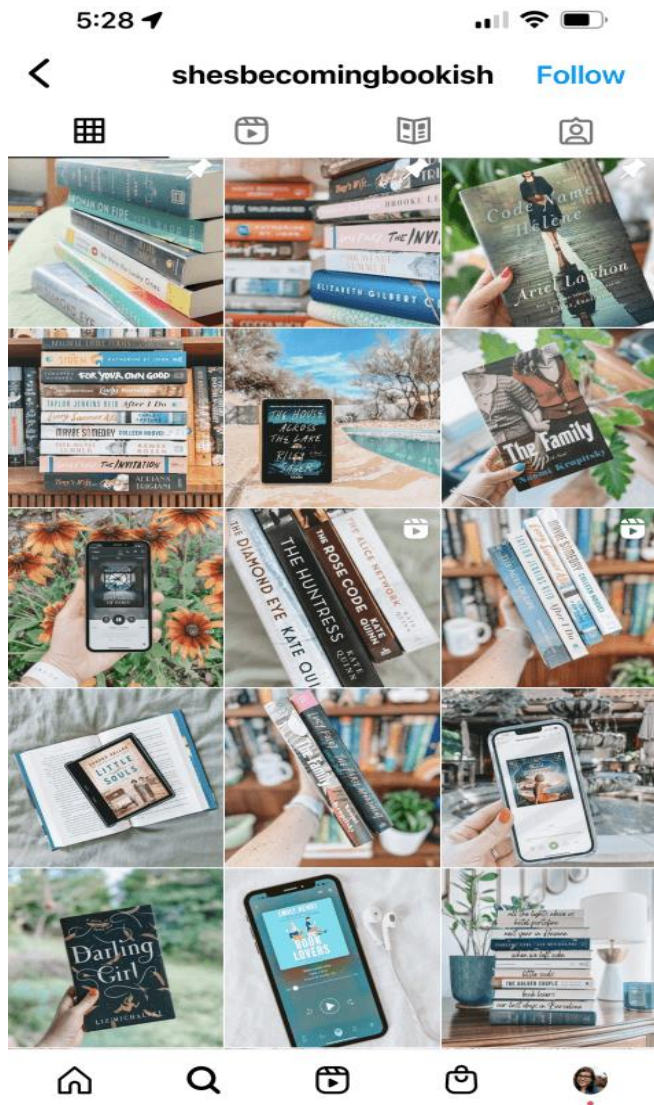


Figure 2 Source: <https://shesbecomingbookish.com/tips-for-starting-a-bookstagram-account/>

One of the most popular trends which has arisen from Instagram specifically is Bookstagram. This is an online reader community that utilizes the platform to talk about and promote books. You can find their posts by searching up the hashtag #bookstagram, which, as of late 2023, was associated with over 97 million posts (Beougher, 2023). The content usually is associated with visually pleasing aesthetics like organized bookshelves or a book with summer vibes arranged with shells on a beach towel. Incredibly, Bookstagram has had an enormous impact on book sales. In 2024, New Book Recommendation's survey revealed that 55% of customers reported buying a book because they'd seen it on Instagram (Verma, 2025). BookTok, TikTok's equivalent of the Bookstagram community might be more well-known, especially as large bookstores like Barnes & Noble create BookTok displays to cater to those young readers, but the power of Instagram cannot be understated, and it is something that libraries can and do harness, not just to promote books, but library services as well.

How Libraries are Incorporating Instagram

A 2025 Super Library Marketing survey found that a vast majority (93%) of libraries post to Instagram, making it the second-most-used social media platform for library marketing, just behind Facebook (Hursh, 2025). However, when marketing, some libraries treat Instagram like it's Facebook, and while the two social media apps are owned by the same company, they are different entities. Instagram really should be more engaging for viewers, especially since it is geared towards younger audiences. Therefore, libraries should be sharing more on their pages than just flyers for their events. Emily Bradshaw, the Content Coordinator at Plum Library in Lombard, Illinois, explained that if she is trying to promote something for the library, she tries to make it as engaging as possible, so she focuses more on a video concept rather than trying to make something that comes across as an advertisement because "no one likes being advertised to" (Hursh, 2025)

Usually when libraries make videos for content, they tend to follow social media trends. For instance, one trend that has been popular lately is “If Netflix Made a Documentary About...” where people would act like they were being interviewed in a Netflix-style documentary, usually complete with cinematic background tracks. Recently Northwest Library released a reel titled “If Netflix made a documentary about children’s librarians” which tells of a humorous theoretical experience a children’s librarian had at story time with her puppets. The Northwest Library has also made videos referencing TV shows and movies, such as *Obsession*, *The Devil Wears Prada*, and *The Pitt*.



Figure 3 Screenshot: @northwestlibrary



Figure 4 Screenshot: Milwaukee Public Library

Another successful library is the Milwaukee Public Library. One of their most popular video series features a library worker dressed as children’s literature icon Amelia Bedelia, who, like the book character, is asked to do certain tasks but takes the requests literally, causing inevitable chaos.

These reel examples are more than just humorous. They serve a purpose, namely that they show a side of librarians and other library staff that most people do not get to see. It destroys the image of the typical librarian whose sole purpose seems to be to shush people and instead showcases that we are human and like to have fun too. Ultimately this shows a more personable side to the library, which is exciting and engaging and makes people want to see what that library is all about.

But while reels are probably the number one thing that is most likely to entice someone to check out a library's Instagram page, it certainly is not the only one. The feed posts on the Grid are essential too. Potter (2022) explains that photos of interesting things such as the library interior or exterior do particularly well, as do pictures of rare finds from special collections. Libraries might also take advantage of the Carousel format to advertise booklists or staff picks. For example, the St. Charles City-County Library recently posted book recommendations for Jimothy, a raccoon who has become an Internet celebrity thanks to his small, rounded shape. Each slide on the book recommendation list features a book with raccoons and other critters. This is one way libraries can take advantage of Internet trends while also promoting library materials.

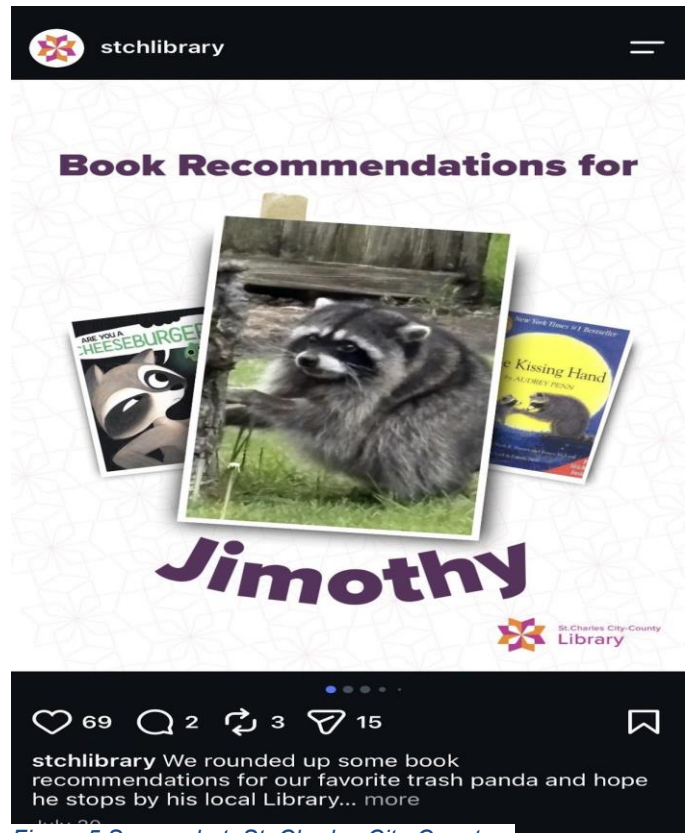


Figure 5 Screenshot: St. Charles City-County Library

But while Instagram is usually employed by libraries to market themselves, one library utilized Instagram to create an online participatory service. When NC State's James B. Hunt Jr. Library first opened, they created the "My #HuntLibrary" project to encourage the community to document their library experience. This resulted in floods of photos submitted of the library's interior and exterior, reflecting the beauty patrons saw in the new library. Ultimately the library belongs to the community, and this project reflected that. This is perhaps one of the best examples of Instagram use by a library, as it most closely aligns with the spirit of this proposal.

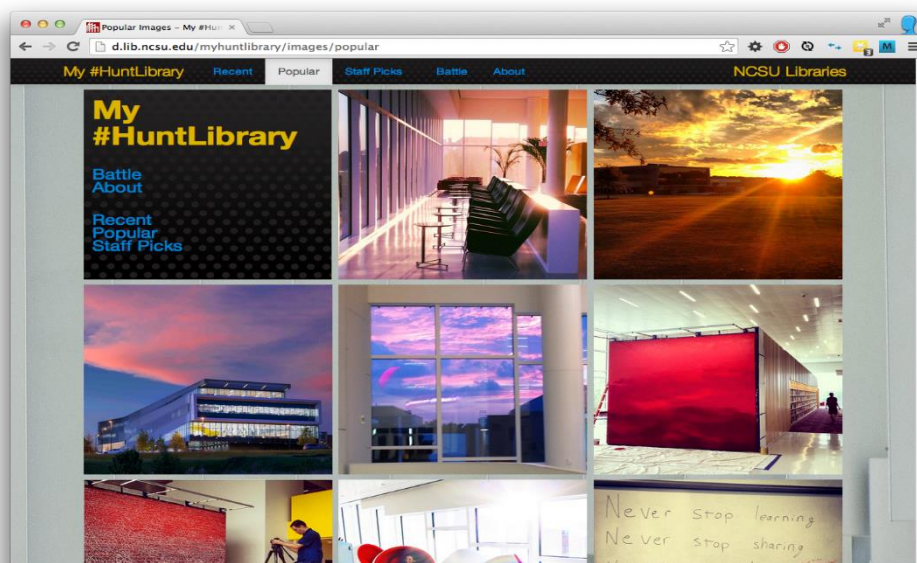


Figure 6Source: <https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/projects/my-huntlibrary>

Building a Content Team: The Bookstagrammers

At the center of this proposal is the “Book-stagrammers”, a team of young media-savvy individuals who would essentially lead the efforts to curate an Instagram page that reflects the interests of the local community. We would conduct a pilot program with the “Book-stagrammers” at Solana Beach Library, but if the program is successful, more teams can be launched at other branches.

The program would start out with the staff of Solana Beach Library building an Instagram page and starting to create content, like promoting upcoming events and programs. Within the first couple months, we will put out a call for volunteers from the ages of 16-25. After passing a background check and participating in an onboarding orientation, the volunteers can proceed to use their expertise in trends and content creation to create posts, Reels, and Stories for the library. They will be able to work closely with the staff and can even ask staff to participate in videos if the staff are comfortable with being filmed.

Volunteers will be able to come in regularly, two or three times a week, depending on their schedules and on their needs, to record in the library and to plan and execute their ideas with staff. In addition they will be able to work directly with the community itself. Using the Instagram page’s Stories feature (or a suggestion box in the physical library building), they will be able to take suggestions from community members about what they want to see represented. Community members will also be able to submit their own content on a regular basis. Perhaps they can send pictures of their shelves or books at home, or pictures of themselves in the library. They might also submit stories of what they love about their library. Occasionally the “Book-stagrammers” will host brief sessions in the library where they will invite patrons to come in for photos or videos to be posted on the account. Ultimately this is a participatory service program, one which not only promotes the library but also reflects the community back to itself.

While the “Book-stagrammers” team should start out with volunteers, the program could continue to grow and perhaps allow offers of County employment for some of the team members. Also if there is enough engagement with the program and with the page (based on factors such as follower account, views, and reposts), there could be potential for occasionally partnering with more established content creators, which would bring in even more traffic to the library account.

Considerations Before Launching the Bookstagrammers

While this program could turn out quite beneficial overall for the library, there are a few factors to consider:

- **Staffing consistency:** An all-volunteer team runs the risk of consistency. They will have no legal obligation to continue to show up regularly to the library and create content. Team members also should be made aware that there is no guarantee they will be hired at the end of the pilot program, as such decisions will be up to the County, not to the branch.
- **Consent and privacy:** Everyone who is filmed and/or photographed will need to provide consent, but minors (both volunteers and participating patrons) are a special concern. They will need to be given consent from a parent/guardian before they can be in front of a camera.
- **Oversight:** There will need to be constant communication with staff and with the Marketing Team at HQ in regards to the content that will be posted.

- **Mental Health:** There have been studies performed about the risks of social media on young people's health. Especially because the Bookstagrammers will be filtering community content, it is important that social media work should be monitored and regulated for up to 3 hours a day.

Each of these concerns will be taken into account during the course of this program, as efforts will be made to ensure the experience is as professional and safe as possible.

Conclusion

Instagram can be more than just a marketing tool. As libraries like Northwest Library and Milwaukee Public Library have shown, it can also be a place where librarianship's more human, playful, and story-driven side shines through, while also acting as a genuine channel for connecting potential patrons to services and materials they might not otherwise discover on their own. The idea of the Bookstagrammers team builds on this potential by turning our library's Instagram page into something the community creates together rather than something they would just scroll past. This is participatory service at its best: rather than having staff decide on our own how we want to represent our library, we invite our local community to help tell that story themselves. By piloting this program at Solana Beach Library, a slower branch with virtually no social media presence already, we will have a low-risk way to test what works before possibly spreading the program out to the other branches within San Diego County. Some questions naturally remain regarding factors such as the retention of volunteers and the balance needed between giving the Bookstagrammers creative freedom while respecting County oversight, but these are questions worth exploring in order to bring more community-centered participatory service programming to the library.

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