What Libraries Can Learn From Kanye

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Hi, I'm Emily and I'm here to talk about what I think libraries can learn from Kanye West. There are three things I want to discuss today that I think Kanye West does really well. These are things that I think libraries and library workers should do more.

For those of you who don't know Kanye West, he's a grammy award winning American hip hop producer and rapper from Chicago. His mother was a professor and his father a photojournalist.
Kanye has been widely celebrated in pop culture. He single handedly brought back the sunglasses fad from the 80s', shutter shades. You can see these on the slide.

His twitter stream, of which I've provided some screenshot samples, has over 3 million followers. His tweets have been parodied in several venues.
They have been used as inspiration for captions to New Yorker cartoons. On the Jimmy Kimmel Live show, Oscar and Grammy award winning musician Josh Groban set Kanye West Tweets to piano music and dramatically and operatically sang them.

So what does this have to do with libraries?
Kanye West is a true collaborator. He has collaborated on projects with numerous and varied people. Jay-Z was one of the first artists he worked with. He's also worked with RZA from the Wu-Tang Clan, Janet Jackson, and others.

You might be thinking, well, libraries and library workers are already good collaborators. And they and we are.

But Kanye is better. Why?
Because he collaborates with people, groups, producers, and record labels. He works with individuals who aren't of the hip-hop ilk.

On his latest album there are collaborations with indie pop singer Bon Iver, Sir Elton John, numerous symphony musicians, producers, record labels.

While discussing his collaboration with Mr. West, Sir Elton John told a Rolling Stone that he thought Kanye was a "stone-cold genius."
Libraries are good at working with museums and educational institutions.

Here in Oregon we have numerous LSTA funded projects that are collaborative, L-net being one of them.

We have library consortia, library conferences, library professional associations, etc.

I maintain that while libraries collaborate very well with each other, we can think outside the box.

Who is our Elton John? Who is our Bon Iver?
Kanye West began his career in music as a producer. He was a behind the scenes person who worked with different musicians and record labels.

To me, this sounds a whole lot like being a librarian.

We oversee and manage information, getting people access to it, creating access points, answering questions, herding cats on projects, working with budgets and schedules, and negotiating with vendors.
Okay, so Kanye isn't a librarian and he probably never aimed to be one. But he is a producer.

But being a producer wasn't enough for Mr. West.

He expanded his role as a producer and became a content creator. His first solo record, The College Dropout, was released in 2004. Since that time he has gone on to release 5 additional albums.

His music making and collaboration on albums has been prolific.
If Kanye went from being a producer to becoming a content creator. Why can't libraries do the same?

Libraries already create digital content in the form of metadata and cataloging. Libraries should be creating systems, they should push further into the realm of open access publishing.

By becoming content creators libraries can continue to establish their value in a world when producing and delivering content is old hat.
Some of it is already happening.

For example, OSU has created Library A la Carte.

But how is content creation viable for small, resource poor libraries?

Consider taking the challenge posed to Oregon Librarians by Kathleen Cornett, the keynote speaker at OLA.

Create a civics education program and host it in your library.
This challenge actually leads me to the third thing I think that libraries can learn from Kanye. And it stems from his notoriety.

After hurricane Katrina and during a Concert for Hurricane Relief, Mr. West declared on live television "George Bush doesn't care about black people."

Previously that year, Mr. West was featured on MTV. During the special he spoke out calling for an end to homophobic insults in hip-hop music lyrics.
Mr. West has also been known to jump onto stage during awards ceremonies and contest award results.

While libraries and library workers may not want to completely follow this example, I think it IS necessary for library workers to speak up.

For example, libraries in Oregon can stand up to Newsbank, which recently acquired exclusive rights to *The Oregonian*'s archives and will cost libraries a lot more money to replace.
But it's not just about vendor relations.

It's in our communities. It's in our legislative system.

Write, e-mail, phone and physically visit your city council, county officials, state legislators, congressmen and representatives to tell them what is important to you and why libraries matter.
If libraries and library workers cannot make themselves heard, how will anyone know the value of what we do?

How will libraries continue to exist if we don't jump up on the stage, take the microphone, and declare, loudly and proudly what is important to us and our patrons?
So what can libraries learn from Kanye?

Libraries can learn to be the BEST collaborators.

Libraries and library workers can emulate his move from producing to content creation.

And finally, libraries and library workers can learn to put on their shutter shades and channel their inner Kanye.