



WEB 2.0

and Its Technologies for Collaborative Library Communication

This article will provide an introduction to Web 2.0 for libraries and will attempt to bring to light a few notable, free Web-based interactive communication tools that can help librarians and other educators seamlessly access, create, organize, and disseminate information for their library, themselves, colleagues, and friends.

A mystifying or vague buzzword to many, Web 2.0 was made fashionable in late 2004 by O'Reilly Media, the foremost publisher of computer technology books and a leader in cutting edge online technology conferences. Simply put, Web 2.0 is shorthand for a new generation of services—and older, remixed ones—on the Web that let all of us better communicate, interact, share, create, and publish information. Some call it the “participatory Web,” while others describe it as the “read/write Web.” Whatever you want to call it, blogs/RSS, wikis, and other social interactive software are igniting tremendous interest in libraries

and schools everywhere, as this excitement is not limited to just techies or the millennials/GenY crowd.

This article will provide an introduction to Web 2.0 for libraries and will also attempt to bring to light a few notable, free Web-based interactive communication tools that can help librarians and other educators seamlessly access, create, organize, and disseminate information for their library, themselves, colleagues, and friends. Within the directed scope and length given for this article, the resources mentioned and the references and recommended readings provided should bring

librarians up-to-speed on little-known and newer techniques, tools, and thinking on this crucial topic.

SOCIAL COLLABORATION ONLINE IS BIG—AND IT'S GROWING FAST!

Social collaboration on the Web has definitely been around for quite a while, but the big push toward Web 2.0 integration seems to be rapidly picking up speed. Many librarians are reading about this new attitude and the new tools and techniques that are emerging. I believe that Web 2.0 is opening up even more opportunities for us to better engage our library users, essentially making communication and online work easier and more productive. Isn't that what we all want? So, without arguing about the vague definitions of Web 2.0 out there, let's, instead, start small and discuss just four intriguing resource tools of particular interest to librarians now.

BLOGGING WITH BLOGGER

You have been reading about blogs, or Weblogs (frequent, chronological publishing of thought and comments on the Web). And now, you are thinking about *possibly* starting a blog yourself. Well, Blogger may be the tool for you. Blogger [<http://www.blogger.com>] was launched in San Francisco by Pyra Labs in 1999, and it was doing well enough in 2002 that Google bought them in 2003. Google still owns this user-friendly site for "creat[ing] a blog in 3 easy steps" for free, which can quickly get you started blogging and interacting with your colleagues and patrons. Certainly not the only free blog publishing tool/software, it is definitely one of the most visited, as it was ranked the world's 19th most-popular site this past September (Alexa Internet, Inc.).

Not sure that you want to start up a blog by yourself? Then try getting a few of your interested library

colleagues together and team up. What could be better than collaborating on a social tool to share information of interest? Library Garden [<http://librarygarden.blogspot.com>] is an example of a Blogger-born site where I am proud to be an original contributing member. Started by Peter Bromberg at South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative, with considerable prodding by Janie Herman at Princeton Public Library, Library Garden hit the scene shortly after the three of us introduced some Web 2.0 tools to the Central Jersey Regional Library Cooperative's executive board. Interestingly, it has become a just-right mixture of a librarian group-generated blog, "creating an ongoing conversation among librarians with differing perspectives (public, academic, school, consortial, youth), but [with] one shared goal: ensuring the health and relevance of libraries." Or maybe you want to start small by initiating a blog for staff communication—this is "a great first step" and "starting internally also gives a safe environment to plan, play, and learn" (Gordon & Stephens, *Computers in Libraries*, 2006). Blogger can easily help you do that.

By the way, if you are still unsure what the difference between a blog and a listserv is, one of my favorite descriptions comes from Bromberg's SJRLC Blog: "The blog will be more informal than the listserv, which is not to say it will be unprofessional. The listserv is business wear, the blog is casual Fridays." And if you are interested in reading more about blogs in libraries, the following are articles on this topic. I recommend Laura Cohen's article in *Choice* this summer. It is well-written and provides excellent references for using, finding, and starting blogs. And authors Jeffrey Pomerantz and Frederic Stutzman published an enlightening article on collaborative

reference work using blogs earlier this year in *Reference Services Quarterly*.

READING RSS FEEDS WITH BLOGLINES

After reading the above subtitle, the first thing you might be asking is, "What are RSS feeds?" In a very recent presentation, blogger extraordinaire Sophie Brookover at Camden County Library in New Jersey described RSS as "one-stop shopping for information people want and need, the way they want it," and "the glue holding Web 2.0 together." Basically, RSS, which now stands for Really Simple Syndication, provides a way for all of us to have news of interest constantly fed to us, instead of us searching databases or Web sites for it. To read these items of interest (the RSS feeds), we must have a reader in place (an aggregator) to view the messages, and one of the more celebrated, straightforward aggregators is Bloglines.

Owned by Ask.com since early 2005, Bloglines [<http://www.bloglines.com>] began in 2003. It is marketed as "a FREE online service for searching, subscribing, creating, and sharing news feeds, blogs, and rich Web content [where] you can make your own personalized news page tailored to your unique interests...." I have found Bloglines to be an easy place to start subscribing to feeds from favorite blogs and general news sites—so much so, that I also started my own personal blog with it, just to see how easy that would be. Whenever I want to add or subscribe to another feed, I find Bloglines' single-click subscription bookmarklets to be extremely useful. They also provide daily lists of very popular blogs and hot topics. My favorite article on Bloglines and RSS is by DocuTicker's editor, Shirley Kennedy, in 2006 in *Information Today*. I used

her article and Joy Moll's site—"Bloglines for Librarians in Three (and a half) Easy Steps" [<http://joy.mollprojects.com/myprojects/rss/quickrss.html>], which was mentioned in Kennedy's article—to easily set up my own account.

Finally, I want to mention that Bloglines allows you to create your own clip blog. Essentially, a clip blog is a collection of your favorite bookmarks that can be easily categorized, searched, shared, and viewed from any browser or computer—and people can comment on your clip if you make these public. If you choose to privatize your clip blog, you can still use it to store your favorites, accessible from any computer. This leads me to the topic of social bookmarking.

SOCIAL BOOKMARKING WITH DEL.ICIO.US

As librarians, our jobs require us to discover new information on topics of interest to our students/patrons. Fortunately, with many information-finding tools now freely available on or via the Web, we can uncover a lot of useful material. Unfortunately, keeping track of what we find useful—and being able to search for and find that useful saved material when we need it—has become more difficult, especially since most of us have saved enormous numbers of links to our "favorites" or "bookmarked" sections of our browsers, right? Well, enter social bookmarking tools. An interesting article on the topic was published this summer by Laura Gordon-Murnane in *Searcher*. In her article, she mentions that these tools "allow users to tag Web sites and links and to share their finds with other communities of users." The article also defines social bookmarking, tagging, and other related items, while offering a brief description of some of these tools and

their features. I recommend reading this for more detailed information than can easily be included in this section of my article.

Bloglines' clip blogs, briefly discussed earlier, help you store, search, and share your favorite bookmarks. However, Yahoo!-owned del.icio.us [<http://del.icio.us>] does that and more, and it has become extremely popular since its introduction in 2003 (although Yahoo! did not acquire it until 2005). Again, the reason for del.icio.us's popularity is the fact that it is so easy to set up and use, not to mention that you are no longer tied to a particular computer. In addition to assisting you in organizing and updating your bookmarks, it lets you make annotations, which can be shared with others or made private for your use only.

Melissa Rethlefsen, in her recent *Library Journal* article, states that for librarians, del.icio.us "is also fabulous for keeping up-to-date on topics of interest, trend-spotting, and connecting and sharing with others. Some libraries already use it to store Web bibliographies and push them to library patrons via the library Web site or blog." The first real social bookmarking site, del.icio.us is probably the most widely used social bookmarking tool by librarians, and it was ranked by Alexa as the 154th most popular site in the world in September 2006.

BUILDING WIKIS WITH PBWIKI.COM

Currently ranked as the 16th most-popular site in the world by Alexa, Wikipedia, the free collaborative encyclopedia on the Web, is known to just about everyone. A great article about Wikipedia was published this September by Marshall Poe in *The Atlantic Monthly*. However, Wikipedia is not the only wiki site on the Web. Librarians

have actually been building their own wikis, or Web sites that "allow visitors to easily add, remove, or otherwise edit and change some available content," for some time now. Because of its "ease of interaction and operation, ... a wiki is an effective tool for collaborative authoring" (Wiki 2006).

A celebrated library wiki is Meredith Farkas' Library Success: A Best Practices Wiki, "created to be a one-stop-shop for great ideas and information for all types of librarians." By the way, Wikipedia and Library Success both use the MediaWiki software, so the pages on both sites look similar. I have also constructed and edited many wikis in the past using Wikispaces.com, but a fun wiki-generating site that has definitely caught my attention lately is PBwiki.

PBwiki [<http://pbwiki.com>], aka PeanutButterWiki, markets itself as "the easiest wiki," touting that "it's as easy as making a peanut butter sandwich. Just sign up and start using your wiki in about 10 seconds." It hosts the sites, and the basic version is free to use, although the premium version is inexpensive. PBwiki was introduced last summer, and it is definitely gaining a following as more people begin to appreciate the ability to create a free, password-protected collaborative, user-friendly, easily editable Web site—public or private. I am definitely a fan of PBwiki, but unlike Wikipedia, it is still a relatively unknown tool, as it just began last year. My guess, though, is that, soon, you will be very comfortable with wiki software, and I hope you then decide to contribute to a section of the Library Success wiki or build one of your own with PBwiki, sharing items of interest or Web 2.0 success stories from within your library or organization with us all—because that's what it's all about!

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CONCLUSION

I know—"Web 2.0," "social, participatory Web," "user-initiated Web," "live Web"—they can be interpreted in so many diverse ways and mean different things to different people. The definitions are many, and this can be distracting. But if, instead, you look at all of this as a new opportunity, a possible way to better communicate, interact, share, create, and publish information online—to *connect* with those we are already serving and to those we wish to serve in the near future—then it gets exciting! Librarians and other educators everywhere are now using these Web 2.0 technologies in practical and worthwhile applications. Don't you want to as well?

Remember, nobody is saying that you have to change everything you do, or jump into every technology or public relations idea that comes your way. However, we all know that we need to continue to reach out to our students and patrons and get them interested in

what amazing things we can do for them. So, do yourself a favor and browse the listed references and recommended readings. Try setting up a library blog with Blogger, or start receiving library- or special topic-related RSS feeds via Bloglines. Build a subject-guide wiki with PBwiki, or start bookmarking, tagging, and sharing with del.icio.us. I think that if librarians everywhere would just get up-to-speed on some of these little-known and newer techniques, tools, and thinking on the crucial topic of Web 2.0 within libraries, they (and this includes you) will find that many other libraries and librarians are already using social software tools and offering best practices suggestions for all of us—then, you will get excited as well and become a denizen of Web 2.0 sites!

Again, due to the size and scope of this article, some other popular tools were not covered, such as Flickr (photo management/sharing), Odeo (audio management/publishing/editing), and YouTube

(video management/sharing), instant-messaging tools, and more—all of interest to the library community and beyond. But don't let that limit you! Believe me: You, too, can enter (and survive) this move toward social collaboration online, and you will be glad you did. The opportunities to truly engage in and impact our own and others' learning and research really are limited only by our imaginations. The "live Web" ball is now in your court. Start playing with it!

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