

Against the Grain

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Crowd Control

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Send ideas by **July 31, 2009**, to any of the Conference Directors listed above.

Or to: **Katina Strauch**, MSC 98, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409
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Crowd Control

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Column Editor's Note: *Can the library crowd help me out? See the end of the column... — XA*

What do your customers think about you? Do you know? Libraries, vendors, and publishers all have a stake in pleasing their target audiences but have different methods and different success rates in asking these audiences what they think and what they would like to see. Are there new ways we can connect with customers that will bring in the opinions and ideas that we may be missing? **Jeff Howe**, a writer for *Wired*, invented the term “crowdsourcing” and defines it as “the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call.” Crowdsourcing is not just for jobs or tasks, however, but can also be for gathering ideas or feedback.

A few weeks ago, I attended the **Web 2.0 Expo** in San Francisco and caught an interesting presentation at the **Salesforce.com** exhibit booth. The presentation was about using **Facebook** and **Twitter** in conjunction with **Salesforce.com**. **Salesforce** is a large software company that makes Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

products. CRM software allows a company to track their customer accounts, respond to customer problems and suggestions, and follow up on leads for new customers. **Salesforce** is using **Facebook** and **Twitter** as ways for their corporate customers to gather feedback and ideas from users and push out solutions to users as needed.

The presenter first talked about their new partnership with **Facebook**. The idea is to have a page in **Facebook** where users can submit ideas for a product or a company. **Starbucks**, the example used in the presentation, has its own Website for this purpose, where customers send in ideas for new types of coffee drinks, or other improvements to the brand. Other users can vote on ideas and the company uses the input to guide development. While the Website has generated a fair amount of traffic on its own, moving the site to **Facebook** has some definite advantages. On **Facebook**, when a user adds content to a company page, such as an idea for **Starbucks**, this action is displayed to their friends as news. This means an application has a way to reach new users quickly. If you suggest through **Facebook** that **Starbucks** start serving pizza, your friends will see this suggestion, may have an opinion about your suggestion, and thus may be prompted to enter the **Starbucks** application and join the discussion. This is crowdsourcing

— bringing together opinions and ideas, sometimes anonymously, from a large group of people.

How can we use this? We don't necessarily need to bring together large numbers of suggestions in the same way as **Starbucks** but we do want to provide a place for dialogue about our services. A **Facebook** presence for a library or library-related company can be a less structured way to ask for feedback or to learn more about your users. When you have your users as “friends,” **Facebook** can also be a way to reach a wider group of potential customers as your friends interact with your **Facebook** page. Your posts and updates on **Facebook** reach your “friends,” but any time they comment on your updates or any time a new person becomes your friend, their wider group of friends is notified. This way your presence or your request for feedback can spread through your potential customer base.

The use of **Twitter** discussed in the **Salesforce** presentation was equally interesting. With **Twitter** use ramping up in the last few months, the site has become a place to find information, network, and comment on products. **Salesforce** has partnered with **Twitter** to pull comments (or “tweets”) about a company's products directly

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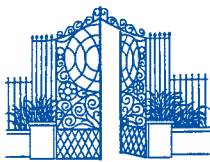
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Rumors

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Lots of us are trying to take vacation! It's the summer, after all, and that's when those of us employed by academe can usually take vacation. Anyway, was talking to Jack — the awesome — Montgomery <jack.montgomery@wku.edu> who was trying to take vacation last week when yours truly interrupted him! Sent Jack a fax which he went into the office to pick up and he ended up staying three hours. OOPS! Sound familiar?

Sad to report that the incredibly hard-working Sheila Seaman <Sheilaseaman@gmail.com>, Assistant Dean for Public Services at the College of Charleston has retired and her last day at Addlestone Library was Friday, June 5. She decided to retire quickly (a month ago) and didn't stick around for long, sort of like when Dean Smith, the famous coach of North Carolina's Tarheels basketball quit just like that! But there's a silver lining in this cloud, Sheila is going to be one of our Mentors at the 2009 Charleston Conference so she will still be around for us to hear about her adventures in retirement. Speaking of which, adventures in retirement would make a good ATG column, wouldn't it? Any retirees out there interested??

And our other new mentor at the 2009 Charleston Conference is Brenda Wright who just up and volunteered. Wonderful!

And Brenda's email is <Brenda.wright@fam.u.edu>. The mentors and emails are posted on the Charleston Conference Website so y'all can be in touch with Conference questions/issues.

www.katina.info/conference

Plus REGISTRATION FOR THE 2009 Charleston Conference (November 4-7) is now open! REGISTER NOW!

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And, it's goodbye to our first ever mentors — Pam Cenzler and Susan Campbell. Mentoring was their idea and it has been a wonderful addition to the Charleston Conference! Thanks, Pam and Susan, for all your enthusiasm and hard work! We will miss you!

Oh! Did you know that Sheila's sister is Linda Nainis (Acquisitions Librarian, Content Acquisitions Section, Library Technical Information Services, U.S. Government Printing Office) <lnainis@gpo.gov>. As you can see, Linda is also a librarian and comes to the Charleston Conference regularly! The family that librarians together, stays together, I always say.

What else? Let's see. Heard recently from the elegant Martin Marlow <martinmarlow@hotmail.com>. He has left Ingram Digital after being made redundant at the end of April following a re-structure of the company's activities. Right now Martin is just starting to look around for his next role. Meanwhile, he has set up a group of associates and is taking on short term contracts and consultancy projects.

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into their CRM for customer service response. So if you tweet that your Tivo stopped working, someone from Tivo will see this comment in their own customer database and can send a suggestion through Twitter on how to fix the problem.

How can we use this? We don't need CRM software to use Twitter to monitor customer satisfaction. Search.twitter.com gives you the option of searching a keyword and then creating an RSS feed to monitor new tweets that include this keyword. I searched "Stanford Library" to see how much I found related to my workplace, and, amid some general comments, found some specific complaints. One user mentions a problem with Internet connection in the main library, another wrote "Had to jump through weird hoops to get access to net at Stanford library. Can't register my machine, but can create myself a guest account." Can we use this as a feedback mechanism? Not everyone uses the suggestion box or Web forms that we provide for feedback, but they may speak their mind on Twitter. A Twitter account so we can respond and an RSS reader to pull together the relevant tweets is all that is needed to keep an eye on how we're doing and how we are seen in our community. There are also free applications like TweetBeep that will send you an alert when a keyword is mentioned.

Pulling together tweets on a company name could be even more helpful in a vendor or publisher setting. The commenters in these cases are most likely librarians, faculty, or students who are aware of the company and have reactions, complaints, or suggestions to share. They may not take the time to go to an official Website and look for a suggestion form.

Both Facebook and Twitter can be ways for a library, vendor, or publisher to push out information to those willing to follow their updates. Instead of just listening to customers, you can also send out information to your crowd. Wilfred Drew recently posted a Google spreadsheet (announced on the LITA listserv) that pulls together a list of library vendors using Twitter and Facebook. Some of them are just getting started, but others have mastered the new tools and are using them to provide information and news to their customers. Libraries are doing the same with updates on events and resources for patrons. Facebook and Twitter can also be integrated so one update can be used for both platforms, reducing the amount of time needed to update friends and followers on both sites.

It's easy to discount Facebook and Twitter as just a bunch of chatter. However, they can be powerful tools for finding out what your users think of you or what they want to see in your service or product. The central problem, unsurprisingly, is filtering out the noise. Both sites will bring you more information about other people than is useful or interesting. Spend a little time learning how the sites work and who is using them effectively. When you see ineffective or pointless communication, it will help you shape your message to be direct and relevant to those who are reading it.

My final word on crowdsourcing is a call for help. I don't have any idea what to name this new column, even after informally polling my friends and family. Their suggestions, along the lines of "Dewey Decimal Fun," only showed me that they have no idea what I do for a living. Can the library crowd do better?

Tweet your suggestions to @melonadu or send me a message on Facebook! 🐦