Bawden, D. (2007). After the Amazoogle: Web 2.0 and information research. Journal of Documentation, 63(4), pp. 441-442.

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

EST 1894

City Research Online

Original citation: Bawden, D. (2007). After the Amazoogle: Web 2.0 and information research. Journal of Documentation, 63(4), pp. 441-442.

Permanent City Research Online URL: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/3140/

After the Amazoogle; Web 2.0 and information research

Summary: Considers the need for research to provide an evidence base for library/information professional practice, in light of the development of internet capabilities, particularly Web 2.0.

During March 2007, poster advertisements on the London Underground urged travellers to 'join the information revolution' and 'stop the information monopoly'. Follow up posters complained that '75% of online information goes through one company'. Similar messages were projected onto prominent buildings in London, and commuters were accosted by teams of advertisers urging them to join their purported revolution. Initially giving the impression of being some subversive guerrilla force, the advertisers turned out to be the operators of a rival internet search engine, which they hoped would challenge Google. Although various search engines have advertised to the public in the past, this is surely the first time that 'online information' has been advertised in this way as public commodity, to rival the other consumer goods and services featured in these forums.

A little earlier in the year, at the Bobcatsss conference in Prague, the municipal library director from a Central European capital gave a speech in which he suggested that, among other developments, that a simple Internet search was now able to give an immediate and satisfactory answer to the great majority of public reference queries. Although the value of Google and its ilk has been acknowledged for some while now, this is the first time I had heard their significance for library services stated in such a definitive way.

The influence of Google, Amazon and other internet services of their generation - sometimes termed the 'Amazoogle' or the 'Googlezon' (Bawden 2005) - have been debated and commented on a good deal in library/information circles [see, for example, Myhill 2007, Bawden and Vlilar (2006), Brabazon (2006), Brophy and Bawden (2005)]. The potential influence of the denizens of Web 2.0 (YouTube, Second Life, Flickr, delic.i.ous, MySpace, and the rest) is only just beginning to be appreciated. But, as the example above show, both public and professional awareness is increasing.

There a number of responses which may be made to this, on the part of the library/information profession. One is to ignore them, on the basis that these tools do not address the serious issues with which proper libraries deal; this seems an unwise approach, based on presumptions which are already demonstrably false. Another is to argue that these tools will indeed become ubiquitous, and that libraries should offer access to them, and support in their use. This also seem flawed; the whole point of these new tools is that they avoid the need for 'professional' support or assistance; and, while someone could certainly go to a library to use them, why would they do so ? A third, and arguably better approach is to consider how these new systems and functions will be used, and what the contributions and perspectives of the information professions may be to an information environment in which this sort of information access and use takes centre stage.

To do this will need an understanding of how these systems - and Web 2.0 will arguably be of greater significance than Google and its kind, will fit with, and in turn influence , the information behaviour of those people for whom they are ubiquitous tools; which, if the media hype is to be believed, will initially be everyone born in the developed world since 1990, and subsequently virtually all the world's population. Such understanding is largely lacking; instead those of previous generations seem be doomed to watch with amazement as new internet tools are taken up in quite unexpected ways, and with quite unanticipated enthusiasm.

The conventional answer is to call for more research, to provide an evidence-base for professional practice. Quite what form such research should take, is far from clear. Faced with

the rapid development and adoption of Web 2.0 tools in particular, conventional research programmes in information retrieval, in human information behaviour, and so on, seem very limited in scope and reach.

The Department of Information Science at City University London is carrying out a scoping study, LIS-RES-2030, during 2007, to try to reach a consensus as to what kind of library/information research programmes will be needed over the next twenyty-five years. Without pre-empting the results of this study, it seems likely that ways of researching the influence and significance of these kind of Google-like and Web 2.0 developments must feature strongly in them. Otherwise, we are likely to find the evidence-base for the information professions of the next decades so inadequate as to reduce their useful service to society to a series of random, or at best pragmatic, good ideas.

Bawden D., (2005), Zipf and the Amazoogle, *Journal of* Documentation, 61(4), 461-462

Bawden, D. and Vilar, P. (2006), Digital libraries: to meet or manage user expectations, *Aslib Proceedings*, 58(4), 346-354

Brabazon, T., (2006), The Google effect: Googling, blogging, wikis and the flattening of expertise, *Libri*, 56(3), 157-167

Brophy, J. and Bawden, D. (2005), Is Google enough ? Comparison of an internet search engine with academic library resources, *Aslib Proceedings*, 57(6), 498-512

Myhill, M. (2007), Canute rules the waves?: hope for e-library tools facing the challenge of the "Google generation", *Program*, 41(1), 5-19

David Bawden