

Feature Article

The Bibliosan 2.0 project: online tools for librarians, researchers and health professionals*

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Abstract

This article describes the approach used by the Bibliosan 2.0 team (in a project funded by the Italian Ministry of Health) in developing the Bibliosan 2.0 website (<http://bibliosan20.wordpress.com/>) aimed at offering guidance and advice to our users for the use of Web 2.0 tools and technologies. To complement the website, we decided to deliver filtered information through Web 2.0 tools such as our blog, Twitter, Delicious and Zotero. To do so, we adopted a very targeted, strategic approach in selecting which tools to present, keeping in mind that our audience is made up of librarians, researchers and health professionals.

Key words: libraries, social media; Web 2.0.

Introduction

Social media and other Web 2.0 technologies offer the scientific community new tools that transform the way they collaborate and share their knowledge, but create potentially overwhelming flows of information. This is especially true since the growth of participation by scientists in these networks has been so rapid, even compared to what was expected just a few years ago [1]. As a consequence, the role of librarians has changed radically: they must be continuously abreast of new methods and techniques and keep informed regularly about new trends and approaches. This role can be especially important in situations where uptake of these new tools is slow, as has been the case in many sectors in Italy. In 2010 Bibliosan, a consortium made up of the main biomedical libraries in Italy and funded by the Ministry of Health, issued a prize in memory of the librarian Luigina Lazzari to fund projects related to the improvement of the resources and activities of its network. One of the winners was a project, called Bibliosan 2.0, aimed at the creation of a website to provide resources and tools of Web 2.0 to the personnel working in the institutions joining the Bibliosan network.

Development of the project started with the assumption that it is useful to aggregate in one place social media tools, both generic and targeted to the scientific community, offering a panoramic view of what is available and what use scientists already make of these resources. We identified librarians as the direct audience of

the website in the light of their task in connecting and informing library users. Alongside with their traditional job duties, librarians should be more active participants in the processes which are reshaping scholarly communication, not only providing information on demand but proactively alerting their users to the existence of relevant information and facilitating the effective use of resources, technologies and information retrieval tools [2].

Methods

The project was developed, and is presently being carried out, by two members of the staff of the Library of the Italian National Institute of Health and a trainee. The project began with a preparatory phase, in which the team conducted a survey of potential readers and gathered information on the tools and materials available, in order to develop a strategy for the design and operation of the Bibliosan 2.0 website (<http://bibliosan20.wordpress.com/>).

In order to select which tools to present, a very targeted, strategic approach was adopted, keeping in mind that our audience is made up of librarians, researchers and health professionals. In April 2012, we conducted, via SurveyMonkey, an online survey to determine the interests and informative needs of our target users and the obstacles that may prevent them from using these tools. The results supported the outlook with which we began the project: 60.9% of the respondents did not use 2.0 tools

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for their work, while 87% thought that such tools could be useful to improve their work as well as collaboration within the Bibliosan network. Answers to other survey questions showed that the respondents were interested in blogs, social network sites “to communicate and exchange information on different topics”, social bookmarking tools, podcasts or videos and, in general, in tools to encourage communication, training and updating.

Having investigated several possible platforms, we decided on Wordpress, the free and open source blogging tool, as the basis for the site. We chose Wordpress because it is a simple and adaptable tool that allows us to build and maintain a website and a blog on the basis of our competencies and needs.

We decided to create the website in the Italian language, based on the observation that a significant portion of our user base is not fully comfortable with materials in the English language, a fact which appears likely to play a role in the selective uptake of some social networking tools in Italy. Effective use of these tools requires not just awareness of their existence or basic technical instruction, but some understanding of the strategies which can be employed to make the most effective use of them, and a language barrier can be an especially important obstacle to finding this kind of information.

At the conclusion of the preparatory phase, the website went online in April 2013. In October 2013, we conducted, via SurveyMonkey, a second online survey in order to assess our activity. The survey also inquired further into the difficulties our users were experiencing accessing information via social networks, either due to their lack of knowledge of these tools, or to their institutions’ policies of blocking access to some social media from work computers.

Selection and organization of the resources

We decided to consider only free, reliable and regularly updated resources for inclusion in the website. To select and filter information for our users, some of the same tools that are being promoted to provide guidance to our audience were adopted: a blog, Twitter, RSS, Delicious to collect useful links, and Zotero to organize selected bibliographical references. Twitter is being used not only to convey information to our audience, but to a great extent also in order to remain up-to-date and find information to share and disseminate. The tools and information have been organized into two sections, “Risorse per l’aggiornamento” (resources for staying up-to-date) and “Risorse per la condivisione” (sharing resources), to help our audience in content retrieval.

The “Risorse per l’aggiornamento” section contains a link to our page on Delicious and our latest posts displayed through the Twitter timeline. The “Risorse per la condivisione” section is divided into four parts: reference management tools, research data repositories, collaborative editing sites, and professional social networks. Within each part, the resources are presented in a table to focus on their main features.



Fig. 1. *The Bibliosan 2.0 homepage*

In the “Strumenti di supporto” (help/tutorials) section, we provided a collection of tutorials related to the tools presented on the website, a glossary, and a bibliography which is regularly updated. (Figure 1). Initially, we decided to convey our information primarily through a static website and consequently to not place the blog on the home page. After examining the results of our second survey (88% of our users found our blog topics useful and interesting), we decided to move the blog onto the homepage of the site to increase its prominence.

Statistics

By mid November 2014, the website had been accessed 11,842 times. The most frequently accessed parts of the website, apart from the blog posts, were the pages listing reference management tools and professional social networks. The blog is usually updated weekly, and as of November 2014, 71 posts have been posted. The posts were also tagged to be easily searchable: at the moment there are 81 tags. The most frequent tags are: Open Access, Altmetrics, e-science, peer review, research impact, e-research, Open Data (Figure 2). The most viewed topics have been medical apps, altmetrics, e-science and news related to the Bibliosan network. Although the website is written entirely in Italian, it was accessed from 31 countries from all over the world. After Italy with 11,081 views, the next highest traffic levels were from the United States and the United Kingdom with respectively 117 and 73 views. (Figure 3)



Fig. 2. Tag cloud



Fig. 3. Views by country

Discussion

As new technologies develop, librarians should adapt, not only using those technology themselves but developing new teaching roles to help users to learn how to use these new tools.

We started the Biblosan 2.0 project to address the present relative lack of knowledge of Web 2.0 tools in Italy, and to involve biomedical librarians in the promotion of their use to their patrons. As of today, the results are encouraging even if a lot is still to be done. We are registering a growing interest on the part of our users but we still encounter a widespread prejudice that Web 2.0 tools are merely recreational, as awareness of their potential in terms of information dissemination and retrieval is not widespread. To challenge this attitude, we have already organised training sessions on Web 2.0 and scientific research tailored to the users of our Library. The next step will be the organization of

References

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training sessions to educate librarians at other Biblosan branches regarding Web 2.0 tools. With this perspective in mind, we have already placed a question regarding the interest on a possible course on Biblosan 2.0 in our second survey. This received a favorable response, with 80% of the respondents expressing interest.

Our website is in a state of continuous development, as we rely on our users' feedback to select new tools and features. In selecting topics for posts, we try to be constantly aware of the main trends of scientific communication discussed online in order to determine which ones can be relevant to our users. As mentioned above, based on the results of our second survey, we decided to give more visibility to our blog also because, unlike Facebook or Twitter which are limited to small pieces of information, blogging allows us to discuss and disseminate more detailed content.

As part of our information dissemination efforts, we decided to introduce the Twitter timeline on our website homepage with the intent of promoting it to our audience. Much of our audience is unaware of Twitter or unable to connect to it from their workstations (as our second survey confirmed), and we believe that Twitter is an extremely effective vehicle for communicating up-to-the-minute news. We hope that in the near future all the institutions joining the Biblosan Network will recognize the value of Twitter for professional activities, rather than viewing it only as a waste of time. We think also that our presence on Twitter is one of the reasons why our blog is followed by a significant number of people from foreign countries even though the site is written in Italian.

Conclusions

As librarians, we must always be aware of new information trends in order to be a reference point for our users on these issues. These are crucial years for our profession as we are in the middle of a transition from traditional duties to new challenges related to the ever changing nature of the information world. Our role is evolving and we must help our patrons at the point of need, in many cases anticipating which means of contact will be the most suitable to supporting them. We hope, through our website and blog, to give our audience some points to reflect on as a starting point for a deeper understanding.

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