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How the Web was Won…by Some

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The Internet's transition into Web 2.0 opened up a new frontier of possibilities of communicating, researching, working, collaborating and promoting ourselves and our interests. Post 2005 and O'Reilly Media's(1) popularisation of the 2.0 suffix has become not only synonymous with the Web but been tagged onto the library, researcher, product and brand. The Web develops at such a fast rate that even those with their ears closest to the technological ground risk being trampled every so by the latest batch of tools and websites.

It is a tough, yet exciting time for those at the cutting edge of libraries unearthing and employing the tools and technologies that Web 2.0 brought us. Yet back in 2005 William Gibson(1) of O'Reilly Media made the point that the future was here, just not evenly distributed yet. That astute observation is still the case in the library world. The librarian's experience of the Web 2.0 landscape has not been dissimilar to that of the exploration of a new world; at times not unlike the Wild West of America, where the opportunities and riches were for the taking (if you managed to stay alive that is). With the current economic climate taken into consideration, some libraries are fighting for their very existence, and the modern Web resources are potential riches to support their existence. Right now there is, on appearance, a slow but massive shift happening again in the Web. It is very much like a glacier in that the changes are not at first obvious, but nevertheless relentless, inevitable and will have a lasting effect on the landscape as a whole. As the step towards a mobile and Semantic Web gets ever more real, it becomes one that takes us deeper into the cloud and one that is full of more pitfalls than ever before whether through data security, information literacy or even as some have warned, the end of net neutrality.

Library 2.0 was Inevitable

Shortly after the popularisation of Web 2.0, it was inevitable that the library 2.0 label would appear. As Godwin (16) rightly points out, the Web 2.0 mantra is irreversible. Yet the problem with the numerical suffix is that if one organisation employs a 3.0 tag as should follow in the scheme of things, does it mean those that who are still 2.0, out of date and no longer relevant? The Web in its various incarnations 1,2 and 3.0 for librarians is not unlike the discovery of a new land on three separate occasions. With the role of the modern day librarian like that of the explorer, similar to the Europeans who landed in the Americas over 500 years ago, except this is a cyber continent. As with the first wave of settlers the Web was a curious land, one that was filled with uncertainty, unexplained discoveries and inhospitality, but an overwhelming sense of opportunity. Those that capitalised on the opportunities became information rich by learning how to guide others through the many databases, teaching information literacy and disseminating Web knowledge. Like the real adventurers of the New World, many early settlements collapsed and disappeared, either through bad management, lack of resources or just circumstances of the environment at that time. The Web today still contains these opportunities but also an increasing number of threats.

In the New World, pioneers had to learn how to survive quickly in a foreign land, they did this by employing new tools and engaging with the environment around them. On the cyber-continent librarians need to establish what tools can help sustain and reinforce their existence, the Web and Library 2.0 are resources to aid that. Yet unlike the real world adventurers who maintained total control, libraries to some extent must relinquish that control to conform to the Web 2.0 consensus of collaboration. Pin's (2) view of Library 2.0 is that of a New World Order, one where libraries must give up control and make use of collaborative tools and technologies and share information rather than just provide it.

Web 2.0 as a State of Mind

Many commentators and experts in recent years have moved to the idea that Web 2.0 is not a platform; that it does not exist, that Web 2.0 is nothing more than a state of mind. This is an idea that

is not as pseudo as it sounds, in that you have to reach some state of higher consciousness to engage with the new Web. In reality, to make the best use of the tools available, the librarian needs to occasionally think 'outside of the box', to see things differently from their original purpose. Blogs and wikis are often not seen beyond the idea of an on-line diary and Wikipedia, yet they are much, much more, they are opportunities to engage and create, formally and informally. Whilst Twitter is not only a way of letting users know about your latest events or books but a tool to capture an organisation consciousness and a way to collate what everyone else in your field of work is finding interesting right now as a trend spotter. Public tweets are now archived by the Library of Congress (3), they have become an artefact, and so, the landscape has changed again. Amongst the millions of videos of babies and cats, YouTube hosts a wealth of information from experts and organisations allowing users to create their own bespoke knowledge repositories. There is no reason why the peer review process that is applied to the written word cannot be applied to the visual one, a role that the librarian can help facilitate to help build quality resources. From creating video and podcasts to websites, managing references to managing workloads, from hosting PDFs to hosting meetings, Web 2.0 allows this.

To employ any new tool requires an element of risk taking, and librarians are not the sort to take risks, as are many of the clients they will deal with, especially in the academic and medical settings. Anderson (4) suggests that librarians need to start to mobilise their skills and deploy them in new directions – to be prepared to take risks. There has to be some acceptance to the idea that certain projects may fail and therefore time is potentially wasted. Many new tools that have been developed since 2005 can viewed as being in a perpetual beta, insomuch that they are constantly being developed and updated ready for download. It is interesting to note that this concept has also crept into the research world as McIntosh et al (5) experiment with the idea of using a live wiki to carry out a systematic review on patients with type 2 diabetes. Librarians have to adapt to a constant state in flux as identified by Carpenter and Green (6) which is to completely internalise the idea that change is the new stability. Added to this is the issue of time and speed in understanding and implementing these new tools as an obvious advantage to the librarian. Miranda et al (7) argue librarians have to show willingness, flexibility, and confidence in coping with rapid change. Cole and Graves (8) noted that

research is becoming very me-centric, with users growing less aware of the value of the library, and less aware of how the library can meet their needs, this needs to change. As witnessed with the (5) systematic review wiki Maness (9) adds the idea that rather than creating systems and services for patrons, librarians will enable users to create them for themselves.

The alternative for librarians who have the opportunity to engage with the new Web yet are reluctant to, is to continue doing what they have always done in the same way and yet perhaps expect different results as arguably attributed to Albert Einstein (10) as the definition of insanity. As Sodt and Summey noted about Library 2.0 (11), others see the concept as just something else that needs to be mastered and added to already hectic work schedules. Despite the simple message that librarians just need to get on with it, the reality is that change must happen for the modern library to adapt. For the most part it is no longer a place for just books and databases and users can be told this through the many new technologies. There are also those who are simply unable to engage with the many Web tools due to organisational culture and technical infrastructure. Such as those working in the NHS, who are heavily restricted to the content they can view due to using old versions of Internet Explorer, strict firewalls and the prohibition of Web based software. The warning from Abram (12) is that libraries that block access to the newest applications are positioning a poor technological presence, which is not a good position to take as a bridge in the digital divide for their communities.

Though engaging with all of these tools can also have a price. Employing social media tools such as Twitter and YouTube does require a lot of time investment time. The task for the librarian is to sift through the constantly evolving tools and figure out what works best. It requires an enthusiasm to make them work, and this usually means team work. Just watching the Twitter and RSS feeds in addition to useful sites such as Mashable.com and Phil Bradley's blog can be time consuming. In addition, if you employ the Social Web to engage with your users, you need to be prepared to respond to them through the new channels you open up, and that may involve in dealing with criticism. As for finding out how well your library is doing by utilising these tools, that is the 64 million Dollar question. There is evidence such as visits to your blog using analytic tools, comments on your social stream, and views on your YouTube channel, but certain strands of your on-line presence will be hard

to measure. Despite all of this, Bobish (13) makes the important note that new technologies should not be implemented just because they exist. A good approach is to find those knowledgeable in the Web community who are exploring the opportunities and follow, even engage with them. There is quite often little reward at the beginning as you Tweet away to a dozen or so followers or have just 10 views on your latest screencast. Nevertheless, just not participating because few will listen is poor reason not to at least try.

Nevertheless, there are other considerations. As with the more established tools it is unlikely that they could disappear overnight, yet for smaller tools there is still the worry, as with the likes of the screen-casting site, ScreenToaster which disappeared in 2011. In addition there was the period of uncertainty and technical instability for the portal creation site Pageflakes which led many users including Dublin City Public Library and Phil Bradley(14) to move over to rival Netvibes. As Arch (15) points out that libraries are building services that are dependent on new technology companies without planning for the possibility that these companies may be defunct within a few years. The important thing to remember with data, is if your content is that important, make a back up copy.

Conclusion

The advent of Web 2.0 and democratisation of the Internet has become a huge source of riches. Free resources that any librarian with an average level of ICT skills can master, there is no longer a need to know HTML for example. Some librarians and information professionals especially in the United States, have seen the possibilities and riches that blogs, wikis and social networks can bring to their services. Whilst others in either under-funded institutions such as public libraries or heavily policed ones such as the NHS are held back from exploring the new and exciting frontiers that are opening on a daily basis.

The third instalment of the Web will be no different from its previous incarnations in that people will still need guidance in making best use of it. It will be another landscape for librarians to explore and potentially lead the way. It will be one there the issues of privacy, governance, data protection, quality of information, authority are still as relevant as they have ever been. If your role entails supporting

students, academics, nurses and other professionals, they still need to know how to reference, store, move, protect, find information, what is authoritative? why is it authoritative? The legalities tied to sharing content. Whatever flavour of the Web or library 2.0 you want to employ, the resources are out there, if you know where to look, who to ask, have the courage to experiment, the freedom to explore and the willingness to make mistakes.

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