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Alessia Zanin-Yost

Western Carolina University, azaniny@email.wcu.edu

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Library 2.0: Blogs, Wikis, and RSS to Serve the Library

Alessia Zanin-Yost

Assistant Professor, Reference Librarian

Western Carolina University

Cullowhee, NC 28723

Introduction

This article was previously published with the title *Library 2.0. Blog, Wiki e RSS al servizio della biblioteca in AIB Notizie*, 21 (2009), n. 2, p. 26-27. The original article is available online at: <http://www.aib.it/aib/editoria/n21/0226.htm3>

“But if now there is Web 2.0, when we had Web 1.0?” This is a question that students and professors often ask me. Web 1.0 has existed ever since the Internet, but was mainly composed by textual material. With Web 1.0 the user was, in a way, limited to access and create information, since the publication of online information was limited to those who knew how to create Web pages, and had access to technologies that often were limited to the mass because of their high cost. Web 2.0 is made of written text but also by images, movies, music and sound, moving from textual information to one that is multimedial. With Web 2.0, the user is proactive and can create information, because of the availability of software that is easy to use and cheaper than in the past. Today, publishing online is not something exclusive of few and information can move freely, even if sometimes with negative effects. Neil Howe and Bill Strauss in *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (2002), noticed that people born between 1982 and the 2000, the so-called Generation Y, have been using computers and the Internet as the main resources of research and communication. Wikis, Blogs and RSS are examples of how this new generation, as well as the older ones, uses these technologies to give, receive, and create information. This article offers an overview of three technologies, Blogs, Wikis and RSS with examples of how they can be used within the scope of the library and proposes to reflect if it is worth or no to adopt these services in one’s library.

From Web 2.0 to Library 2.0

The most common definition of Web 2.0 is that of Tim O’Reilly. In his article O’Reilly (2005) explained that companies that survived the collapse of the technological sector during the 1990s had in common particular methods, concepts and technologies that allowed them to be cutting-edge compared to their competitors. These companies offered assessments of their products and services online, and customers used them to write personal comments and suggestions, thus creating a network of information that was then used by the same company to improve their products and services.

The request for new methods of communication online capable of satisfying the various needs of users have facilitated the development of Web 2.0 technologies like the *folksonomie*, keywords that are created by those who organizes the information available online; the AJAX, that allow an interactive and dynamic use of Web applications; and *feeds* that make interoperable content of different applications or platforms. Summarizing, Web 2.0 is an assortment of technologies that offer a distinct level of interaction with the user. The concept of allowing people to exchange information freely online is part of the dynamic of the Internet. This does not means that paper information should or will be eliminated, because the two sources of information are used for different purposes.

How did we move from Web 2.0 to the Library 2.0? The two terms have created confusion because it was not clear what they were. It was thought that Library 2.0, like Web 2.0, was a new type of technology, while it referred to the applications of Web 2.0 tools within the library field (Crawford, 2006). Library 2.0 can be defined as a set of innovative technologies and services that are integrate with the library, facilitating the use of library resources and services, allowing library user to participate and keeping the librarians updated in their field (Casey, 2006). It is my conviction that it is the technology that must adapt to our way of life and not vice versa.

Mirja Ryyänen (1998), of the Finnish Parliament, said that “Libraries are especially important now when the whole idea of education is stressing more and more independent learning and acting. All citizens must be able to find and use information. It is the key raw material – but it is a zero resource, if there are no access points to it and if documents are in chaotic order.” Library 2.0 offers all of this: many access points and organization for an easy access to information. The purpose of libraries is to preserve and disseminate information. Library 2.0 has the same purpose. Like many technologies, it is my opinion that Library 2.0 is part of a natural evolution of library services (Zanin-Yost, 2004).

Blogs, Wikis and RSS

These three technologies facilitate communication between library and users. If on one hand these tools save money in terms of development and installation, they do require an investment of time because the librarian will need to update a Blog or a Wiki constantly.

The term Blog is a contraction of *web-log*. This is an online program that allows creating automatically a Web page. A Blog can be compared to a personal diary. But, while a personal diary is kept locked in a drawer, the Blog can be read by everyone because it is published online. Each blog entry has a *thread* which allows the readers to write their comments. To alert that there are new entries on the Blog, the author – the *blogger* - can provide a subscription to a *feed*.

The easiest way to create a blog is to use an online platform like [Blogger](#). This service is free and allows the inclusion of images and links. Sites that have images available to download for free as for example [image * After pixel Perfect Digital](#) and [Everystockphoto](#), while [Highfonts](#) and [Boorp](#) are sites that offer a wide range of characters.

The Blog is a type of technology that can be used in a myriad of ways. Librarians do not have to worry about creating a site because the format is fixed by a *template*, thus allowing the person to focus on the content. Examples of how a Blog can be used in a library are as follow:

To offer information on services, new purchases, and events. For example, the Ross-Blakley Law Library Blog at the University of Arizona allows customers to search for news by categories (University of Arizona).

- A Blog can be use to provide specialized information. For example, the public library of Allen County in Indiana has a blog dedicated just for young people (Allen County).
- To reach out to patrons, especially if the blog is offered in other languages. An example is the Sacramento Public Library which offers the blog both in English and Spanish (Sacramento Public Library).
- The Blog allows customers to have a voice, like in the case of the Blog at Cornell University where questions about the library can be answered by anyone (Cornell University).

An example of how the Blog is used in library that must be mentioned is that of the Ann Arbor District Library (AADL). Throughout the literature, the AADL has been mentioned as the best examples of adoption of the Blog in a library setting. While many libraries are using the blogs as a supplement, the AADL has integrated the blog into its home page (Ann Arbor District Library). Through the blog, information is regularly posted. Responses are written informally, in the first person, with minimum

information and supplemented by links. Something interesting - and much appreciated by the users - is that this Blog allow to read other's comments, an unexpected function compared to other library's Blogs. Through the free use of the Blog, the AADL shows that it is possible to create a virtual environment where all comments are respected, appreciated, and taken into consideration.

A Wiki is a website where one can collaborate with others. It is different from the Blog because a person, besides adding information, can also change what has already been published. The Wiki can be accessed free or via a password. The easiest way to create a Wiki is through an online platform like [WikiSpaces](#), [WetPaint](#) or [Netcopia](#).

Like the Blog, a Wiki can be used to inform about library products and services. The main difference between a Wiki and a Blog is that with the first one, the information is subject to changes. According to Fichter (2005), a Wiki "works best in an organization where there is a high level of confidence." For example, the Web site of the St. Joseph County public library is structured in the form of a Wiki and only the librarians can change the information, contrary to Wikipedia where anyone may change it (St. Joseph County Public Library).

In the library a Wiki is useful:

To work on a project. The engineering and science libraries at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have created a Wiki where they can discuss what type of services to offer to their patrons (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). To create a space where the librarians can easily update their research guides, like in the case of the Wiki created for the college of business of the University of Ohio (University of Ohio).

- To communicate internally. The Wiki provides a place where the entire library personnel can stay informed of what is happening, or to update manuals and documents for library use.

RSS is an abbreviation of *ReallySimple Syndication* or *Rich Site Summary* and is one of the tools used for the distribution of information online with cell phones, handhelds, database, etc. The information that is published through an RSS is supplied all the same way, no matter what type of technology is used. Therefore, a messages sent from a cell phone can be received from a Blog and sent automatically to an email. The ability of the RSS is to funnel through many types of technology and present the information into an easy-to-read format.

The benefits of having an RSS are:

- They save time. The receiver is in charge of the type of information to be accepted.
- One can inform others of purchases, exhibitions, or other events of the library like in the case of the library of Marin County (Marin County).
- It is possible to select which links can be distributed, saving time to the costumers and reinforcing the credibility of the information. For example, at MIT new acquisitions are divided into subjects' categories (MIT), while the public library of Kansas City offers guides by topics (Kansas City Public Library).

Conclusion

If the needs of our users have changed, do we must try to go meeting these changes? Of course, otherwise patrons will look at libraries as obsolete resources and will be less utilized. But modernization does not mean to use indiscriminately any type of technology, but to offer services that facilitate the use of the library as a place and resource. In my opinion, technology should be used only in relation to the real needs of the library and its users. The purpose of the three technologies illustrated in this article are examples of how Library 2.0 can make visible the library in cyberspace, create curiosity, but, most of all,

to provide a place for the exchange of information between patrons and librarians to create a service that will grow in relation to the various needs of those who uses it.

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