

Meeting Report: RSS, Blogs and Wikis: tools for dissemination and collaboration

Workshop Leader: Karen Blakeman

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Report by Clare Allan

I really didn't know much of anything about these technologies: RSS, blogs and wikis. I had read blogs, so had a rough idea of what they were, but if someone had mentioned a "blogroll"⁶ to me I would have been stumped, and vaguely wondered whether this was a term that ought to be used in polite conversation.

This was a very useful workshop, and I think timely also. It was only in the last issue of eLucidate (Vol. 3 Issue 1, January/February 2006, pages 5-6) that Susan Miles reported on the paper by Brian Kelly at Internet Librarian, Email Must Die!, where Brian suggested that library users will soon be expecting communication via alternative methods, such as RSS, and so saying we'd be well advised to explore them now. I wasn't the only person thinking that I ought to be exploring further: there was an interestingly broad range of participants at this workshop, not only university librarians like myself, but also representatives from publishers and public bodies.

The day was a good blend of theory and practice, with a smooth transition from one to the other. Karen Blakeman spent time defining and explaining each of the technologies, in a simple, clear way, and then encouraged us to have a go ourselves. Before I knew it, I was creating a blog and sending out news in RSS! There was a wide range of experience within the group, from complete novices to fairly experienced users who already had blogs of their own up and running. I had thought this would pose quite a problem for our trainer, but actually the workshop was structured in such a way that it was flexible enough for people to pick and choose what they spent time on, with practical exercises that could be worked through for each topic, or those who wanted could jump ahead and work at their own pace. Occasionally there was a slightly esoteric question asked that perhaps left some of the group feeling lost, and towards the end of the day I, at least, was starting to feel a little overwhelmed with a sense of information overload, but in the main it was a happy mix.

One of the really enjoyable aspects of the workshop was the way that Karen gave an infectious feeling of the excitement that working with a fairly new, blossoming idea can bring. Having learnt what these tools are it would have been good to capitalise on this

⁶ Blogroll: A blogroll is a collection of links to other weblogs. [...] To UK bloggers 'blogroll' sounds like 'bog roll' — a slang term for toilet tissue — leading to speculation that the name derived from the long, list-like nature (and dubious quality) of some inter-blog link lists. (From Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blogroll>)

feeling and have a little more time within the day to discuss what suggestions people had for using them “back in the real world”. This is one of the challenges, and is probably another workshop in itself! However, there was plenty of documentation provided, and an excellent handout on further reading and resources, so you can imagine what I’ll be doing for the next wee while. Who knows, perhaps in the not too distant future you’ll be reading my blogroll.

Clare Allan is Information Officer at Stirling University Library.