

Meeting Report: Technology Trends: Spend management, reasons to be cheerful and ‘disruptive innovation’

Report of CIG meeting, 19 April 2006

The City Information Group hosted an interesting evening meeting on 19th April, which brought together three different aspects of new technological developments relevant to all information professionals. Web 2.0 and its family featured fairly strongly and it was good to see how it has been embraced by some of the more traditional information-related services. However the term Web 2.0 itself was not clearly understood by all of us present, and indeed the definition itself is the subject of debate, but for the purpose of this article I will call it the ‘participatory’ use of Web technology.

Effective journal subscription management has been taxing information professionals for some years now, and Gerard Kearns from Infocandy described an e-procurement service that they offer. This service takes over the responsibility for the day-to-day management of subscriptions and some impressive figures of cost savings were shown, which take into account the often hidden cost of in-house administration of subscriptions.

Dan Perry, from EPS (Electronic Publishing Services) gave a summary of the rise, fall and rise of interest in E-books. The resurgence of e-books has been influenced by rapid developments in technology, for instance hand held devices with better screens, and a renewed and active interest by some publishers. Interestingly there is some convergence of the technology with iPods and PDAs, which have changed the way people use hand-held devices. There is also a convergence of functions associated with book publishing, through Book 2.0. For instance, one publisher has begun to publish a book before it has been completed – inviting buyers to purchase a draft and then comment on it and add material. The value of the final publication is then in its collaborative nature. This is in fact not too dissimilar to Copernicus’ 1543 treatise *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Sphere – De Revolutionibus*, where the copy annotated by Galileo and others in the margin gives it additional value. Revolution indeed.

Paul Miller, a Technology Evangelist from Talis, a library management system, gave an entirely different view of the traditional LMS through, yes, Library 2.0. Paul has published a paper “Libraries 2.0: The Challenge of Disruptive Innovation”, and he explained that the use of Web 2.0 technology has revitalised the “trusted but by-passed” libraries. Far from large monolithic systems, users now have considerable freedom in tailoring the LMS to their needs. User comments, images and subject tags can be added to records of individual items, and disparate sources of information that relate to one publication can be identified. Thus, if your library does not hold a copy of your selected item, you can go straight through to the catalogue of a library that does – even if it is on the other side of the world.

Echoing (slightly) the example of Copernicus, images of the old card catalogue of Ann Arbor District Library including the readers’ or librarians’ hand written comments can be viewed on their online catalogue.

It was refreshing to see a traditional library system making use of Web 2.0 technology, but I can't help wondering if the participatory aspect of the content and subsequent need to filter the interesting from the irrelevant (and possibly wrong) content will jeopardise the 'trusted' characteristics of a library service.

Unfortunately there was little time to ask questions and to challenge the speakers, but the meeting provided plenty of food for thought and was a timely topic to cover.

Shaida Dorabjee, Committee Member, UKeiG (sdorabjee@sdis.demon.co.uk)